

ATTITUDE TOWARDS 4-YEAR UNDERGRADUATE PROGRAM OF STUDENTS OF THE COLLEGE UNDER NEP 2020

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Abstract

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 has proposed a major transformation in the higher education system of India by introducing the Four-Year Undergraduate Programme (FYUGP) that aims to foster multidisciplinary education, flexibility in learning, skill development, research orientation, and increased employability. This study was conducted to understand the college students' attitude towards FYUGP and to study the difference in attitude based on the gender, locality and academic stream. A descriptive survey research design was employed for the study. A total of 800 undergraduate students were selected by random sampling from 40 constituent colleges of Lalit Narayan Mithila University, Darbhanga. A standardized attitude scale (developed by the researcher) was used to collect data. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics, percentage analysis, independent samples t-test and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA). The findings showed that a significant majority of the students had favourable attitude towards FYUGP showing the overall acceptance of the education reforms as outlined in NEP 2020. Results indicated that there were meaningful variations in attitudes for demographic factors and academic variables. Female students were more positive in attitude than males and urban students were significantly more favourable than rural students. Moreover, the students of the Science stream had the most positive attitudes, while the students of the Commerce and Arts streams had fewer positive attitudes. The findings indicate that the overall perception of students regarding the FYUGP is a positive and forward-looking initiative, which is beneficial for their academic and professional growth. The study finds that the successful implementation of the FYUGP needs to be sustained by ongoing awareness creation programmes, academic counselling, institutional support, and infrastructural readiness to allow for the consideration of concerns of the various groups of students.

Keywords: Attitude, 4-Year Undergraduate Programme, NEP 2020, College Students.

INTRODUCTION

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 has implemented a number of transformative changes in the Indian Higher Education system aimed to bring about an overall change in the learning environment from a conventional and traditional to all-round, multi-disciplinary, flexible and learner-centred (Ministry of Education [MoE], 2020). One of the most important structural changes proposed as a part of NEP 2020 is the 4-Year Undergraduate Programme (FYUGP), which would change the rigid undergraduate programme to a more flexible academic programme that would promote multidisciplinary learning, multiple entry and exit option, academic mobility, skill development and research orientation (University Grants Commission [UGC], 2022). This change is a testament to India's efforts to bring higher education in accordance to international standards and also to satisfy the multitude of educational and career choices that students have. Higher education is an important factor in developing the intellectual, social and professional lives of young people. In the knowledge economy of the twenty-first century, traditional undergraduate teaching and learning are often found wanting in terms of flexibility, disciplinary boundaries, lack of employability skill development and lack of opportunities for experiential learning and research-based learning (Altbach et al., 2019). The FYUGP aims to resolve these concerns through a curriculum focused on the student, which incorporates all learning experiences – both foundational and value-based – as well as disciplinary and multidisciplinary and vocational ones. It is hoped that the programme will instil creativity, critical thinking, innovation and life-long learning amongst the students through choice-based learning, internship, research projects and competence development (MoE, 2020).

The acceptance of and attitudes towards a policy are as important as the policy itself and its institutional readiness for a successful educational reform. Students as the direct beneficiaries of the education policies are one of the most important parts of the education policies, which are the key to evaluating the success of the education policies. Attitude is a learned tendency to react favourably or unfavourably towards something, such as an object, idea, policy or situation (Ajzen, 2001). In education, attitudes have an important role in the involvement and motivation of students in the learning process, as well as in their adaptability, participation, and acceptance of the innovation in the curriculum. (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2010). Positive attitude towards the FYUGP can lead to easier

implementation and higher participation in academics while negative attitudes towards the FYUGP can lead to resistance, uncertainty and dissatisfaction.

The implementation of the FYUGP have introduced significant structural and academic changes for undergraduate students such as: Extension of the programme, Interdisciplinary course selection, Course progression based on credit, Academic Bank of Credits (ABC), Multiple exit options, Internship, Skill Enhancement Courses, Research opportunity (UGC, 2022). Although these changes are designed to increase flexibility and employment opportunities for students, students' perceptions of the changes can vary depending on their awareness of the changes, academic preparation, socio-economic status, institutional support, and career expectations. For some students, the programme might be seen as progressive and beneficial for future prospects while for others, it might be seen as a challenge because of added burden to the academic load, financial burden because of the extended period of the programme, uncertainty because of how the programme is going to be implemented, and confusion because of how the programme is structured. Past studies have shown that students' attitudes towards educational changes have a great impact on their adaptation as well as academic performance. Students' attitudes towards changes in the curriculum, semester system, blended learning and policy changes have been found to impact their satisfaction, motivation and involvement (Kember, 2004; Richardson, 2005). But, being a new programme in the context of Indian education system, empirical research on students' attitudes towards this programme is limited, especially at college level. Hence, a systematic investigation is needed to understand the undergraduate students' perceptions of this important policy development.

Students' voices are particularly important, as the colleges are the main institutions to implement changes in undergraduate education. It is important to understand their attitudes as these may help in understanding the practical strengths, concerns and challenges related to the implementation of the FYUGP. Such understanding can help decision makers at the policy, university, curriculum and teaching levels to effectively implement the programme and improve it in a continuous manner. Hence, the present study is intended to study the attitude of the college students towards 4-Year Undergraduate Programme under NEP 2020. It is expected that the study will help to open the debate on reform in higher education in India with empirical evidence on students' perceptions, acceptance and readiness in the context of this transformative academic program.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Trowler (2010) studied the reaction of students when curriculum changes in Higher Education institutions in the UK. It found that attitude of the students towards academic changes was much influenced by relevance, institutional communication and perceived benefit in their career. Positive attitudes came about when reforms were well explained and congruent with the aspirations of the students.

Kember (2014) conducted research on the student's perception of the workload and curriculum change in Higher Education. Curriculum changes were found to be welcomed by the students if their learning needs were not too high and if their school work was relevant. Ambiguity, excessive workload and inadequate academic supports were related to negative attitudes.

Richardson (2015) done a study on approach to learning of students in a reformed context of higher education. The results indicated that attitude of the students towards curriculum innovations was identified as an important factor for academic involvement, motivation and achievement of the students. Supportive institutional contexts were identified, which fostered the positive attitude to academic change.

Fullan (2017) analyzed the implementation of educational reform and acceptance of education by stakeholders in the Higher Education level. The study highlighted the importance of students' attitude as one of the significant factors for the success of educational reform. Good communication, participative implementation, and easily seen academic results, were linked to positive perceptions.

Altbach et al. (2019) studied the global trends in higher education reform, such as restructuring curricula, learning in the multidisciplinary and education for employability. The research highlighted the importance of flexibility, readiness of institutions, cost of savings and benefits of academic change as factors affecting students' acceptance of academic change. The results give a comparative view point in the context of Indian.

Joshi and Ahirrao (2022) explored how the National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020) is being implemented in higher education institutions in India as per the perceptions of undergraduate students. The study revealed that the policy changes were overall accepted by the students, particularly in terms of the flexibility in designing the curriculum, opportunities for multi-disciplinary learning and skill education. However, there was a concern with regard to infrastructural readiness, clarity of implementation strategies, and faculty readiness. The results indicate that among the factors that affect the positive attitudes of the students are awareness and institutional support.

Mishra and Pandey (2021) explored the stakeholders' opinion on the changes happening on the higher education platform in the context of NEP 2020. It was found that the focus on multi-disciplinary education and vocational integration was welcomed by students whereas there was mixed reaction to the uncertainties related to implementation. The authors came to the conclusion that institutional readiness and communication is an important factor when it comes to the implementation of policies.

Kumar and Singh (2022) conducted a study to understand the awareness of the students and acceptance of NEP 2020 reforms in the colleges of Indian Universities. The findings indicated that the awareness level significantly affected students' attitude towards curriculum restructuring and credit-based learning system as students in high awareness group reported significantly more positive attitude towards restructuring of curriculum and credit-based

learning system. The researchers emphasized that orientation programmes must be conducted in order to increase the awareness of students on the new academic frame work.

Sharma and Gupta (2023) took up a study on the students' Perceptions of Four-Year Undergraduate Programme introduced under NEP-2020. The study revealed that attitudes of the students towards the programme in terms of employability enhancement, academic flexibility and research opportunities were positive. However, some respondents were concerned with the longer programme and potential extra costs of longer study.

Rani and Verma (2023) studied the attitudes of students towards academic reforms in the higher education of India after the implementation of NEP 2020. The findings indicated that majority of the students' attitudes were moderately positive towards the different reform practices such as multiple entry-exit, Academic Bank of Credits and the flexible curriculum structure. The study concluded that there is a need to have systematic student counselling and academic support system.

Rationale and Significance of the Study

The Four-Year Undergraduate Programme (FYUGP) is one of the major reforms in the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 in the Indian Higher education system. The policy aims to shift the traditional, rigid and subject-based undergraduate education system to a flexible, skill-oriented, research-oriented and employability-focused education system through a holistic and multi-disciplinary approach (Ministry of Education [MoE], 2020). The FYUGP offers several entry and exit points, interdisciplinary learning, vocational integration and exposure to research, and aims at fostering well-rounded students who can meet the requirements of the twenty-first century as per the MoE (2020) and UGC (2022). As the programme is for students and they are the main beneficiaries and stakeholders of the programme, their attitude for the programme is very much significant in order to make the programme successful and effective. Positive attitude of the students can help them to participate more, accept, engage in academic activities and make better use of the opportunities under the programme. On the other hand, if the perception is negative or there are misconceptions, it can be challenging to realize the desired outcomes of NEP 2020. Thus, it is vital to know students' attitudes towards the FYUGP, as it reveals students' awareness, acceptance, expectations, concerns, and how ready they are for education change (MoE, 2020).

The purpose of conducting the current study stems from the fact that FYUGP is a relatively new educational reform, which was being introduced in universities and colleges in India. Despite the programme offering more flexibility, multidisciplinary learning, credit transfer via Academic Bank of Credits and better research opportunities, there are some implementation issues reported in various institutions (UGC, 2022). Educational reforms are most successful when they are received positively and understood for the benefits they bring to students, and the other stakeholders involved. Hence, to assess the acceptance and effectiveness of the programme at grassroots level, it is important to explore students' attitudes towards the programme. In addition, colleges and universities are dedicating significant academic, administrative and financial resources to meet the requirements of NEP 2020. In such a context, empirical evidence of students' attitudes is needed to assess the level of understanding and acceptance of the policy objectives by learners. Results of such studies can give feedback to policy makers, administrators, curriculum planners and teachers on aspects that need to be improved, awareness creation, orientation programmes, and institutional enablers (MoE, 2020; UGC, 2022).

The relevance of the current study is that it can make a valuable contribution to the literature on the reform in higher education system of India. It will give insights into how students perceive the extent to which the curriculum is flexible, multidisciplinary, research oriented, employment oriented, assessment is reforming, and mobility of students in the academic world is possible under the FYUGP. The study will also enable to know the differences in attitudes in terms of demographic and academic variables which will help in evidence-based decision making for improving programme implementation at the institutional level. Furthermore, the study will help the university and the colleges to build up a good strategy for student orientation, academic counselling, curriculum planning and support system. The results can be useful for educational administrators to gain insight into students' needs and expectations about the FYUGP and to develop strategies on how to enhance the implementation process. The study might also be used as a reference for future studies to analyse the effect of NEP 2020 reform to the students, teachers, institutions, and the higher education system. Thus, the study is very significant academically, practically and in terms of policy in the present scenario of educational transformation in India (MoE, 2020; UGC, 2022).

Objectives of the Study

To study the attitude of college students towards the Four-Year Undergraduate Programme under NEP 2020.

To find out the significant difference in students' attitudes towards the Four-Year Undergraduate Programme with respect to gender.

To find out the significant difference in students' attitudes towards the Four-Year Undergraduate Programme with respect to locality (rural/urban).

To find out the significant difference in students' attitudes towards the Four-Year Undergraduate Programme with respect to academic stream (Arts, Science, and Commerce).

METHOD

The current study is an endeavour to comprehend the attitude of college students towards the Four-Year Undergraduate Programme (FYUGP) launched under the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. Because the study aimed to describe and analyse the attitudes of the students in the context as they are without manipulation of any variables, a descriptive survey research design was deemed to be suitable for the study.

Participants

The study was done from 40 government constituent college affiliated with Lalit Narayan Mithila University, Darbhanga among the students. Random sampling technique was used to select the respondents and to ensure representativeness of the sample. The students in the sample were 800 students (20 from each college) representing the students according to gender, locality and academic stream. The overall sample consisted of 800 respondents, offering a wide foundation to explore attitudes towards the 4-Year Undergraduate Programme under NEP 2020 and implementation factors.

Measures

Data were collected from selected undergraduate students studying in colleges through a standardized attitude scale developed by the researcher.

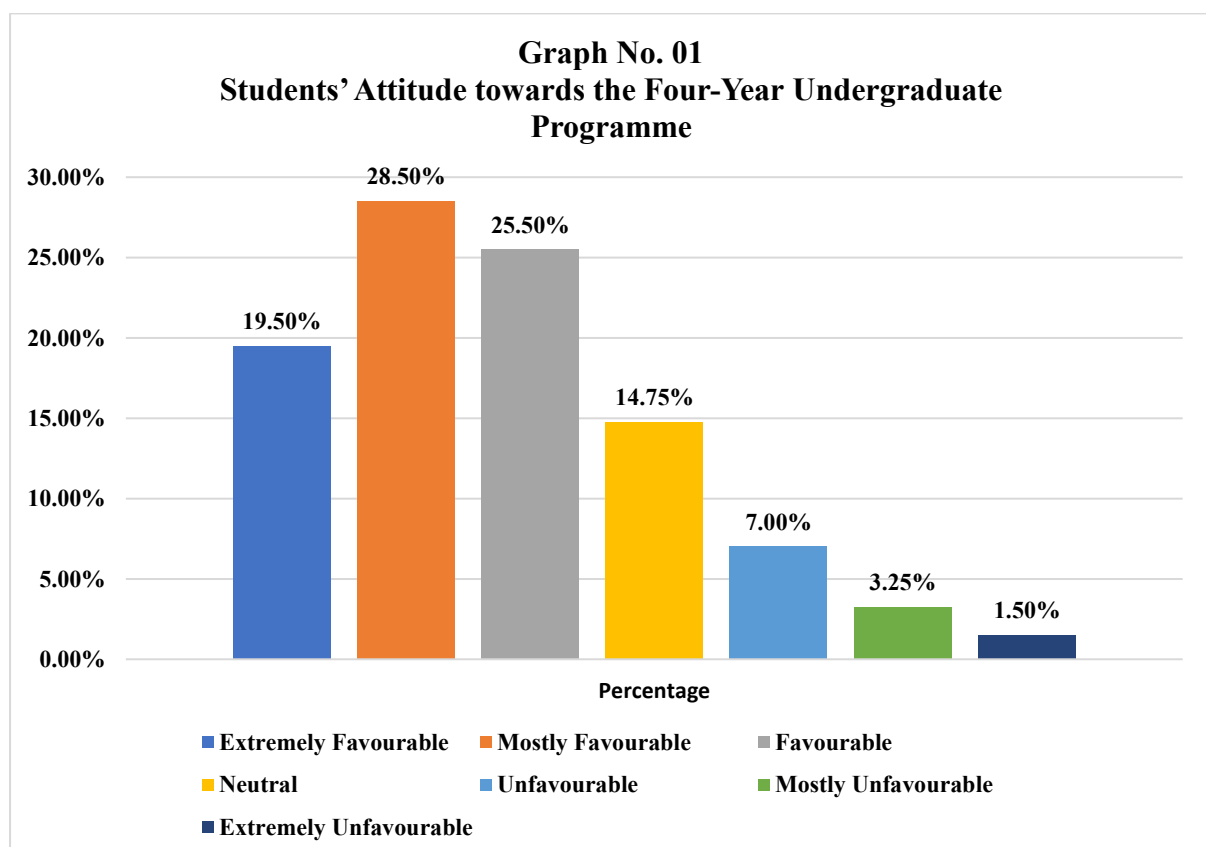
Statistical Analysis

The responses obtained were analyzed using appropriate descriptive and inferential statistical techniques, including mean, standard deviation, percentage, t-test, and analysis of variance (ANOVA), to examine the nature and extent of students' attitudes and to identify significant differences among various groups.

Analysis and Interpretation of the Data

Table No. 1. Students' Attitude towards the Four-Year Undergraduate Programme in accordance with NEP 2020

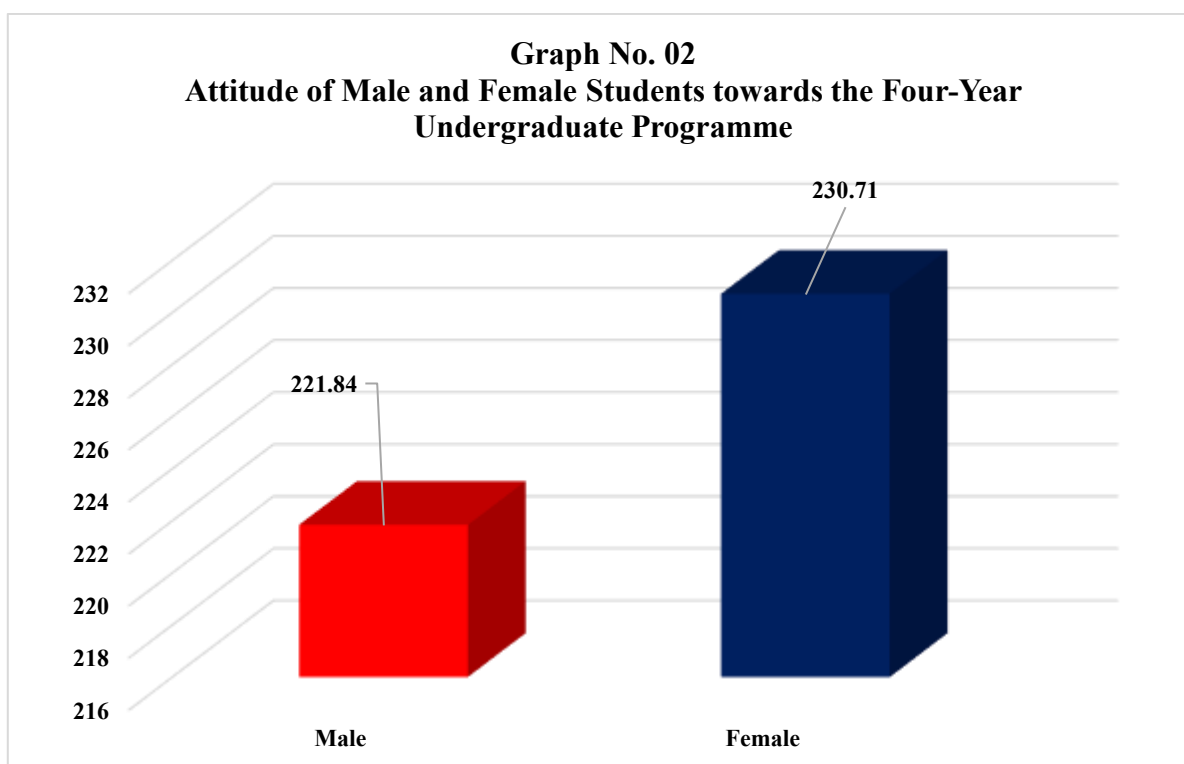
Sl. No.	Level of Attitude	Number of Students	Percentage
1.	Extremely Favourable	156	19.50%
2.	Mostly Favourable	228	28.50%
3.	Favourable	204	25.50%
4.	Neutral	118	14.75%
5.	Unfavourable	56	7.00%
6.	Mostly Unfavourable	26	3.25%
7.	Extremely Unfavourable	12	1.50%



Analysis and Interpretation: The level-wise representation of students' attitude towards the Four-Year Undergraduate Programme (FYUGP) under NEP 2020 shows that there are different levels of favourability. The results show that 19.50% of students' attitudes were in the Extremely Favourable category, 28.50% were in the Mostly Favourable category, and 25.50% were in the Favourable category. When combined, these categories represented 73.50% of the respondents showing that a significant number of students were positive about the programme. Furthermore, 14.75% of all students showed a Neutral attitude and only 11.75% of all students were in the Unfavourable, Mostly Unfavourable and Extremely Unfavourable groups. The overall majority in the Mostly Favourable and Favourable categories indicates that students have a positive view of the FYUGP and value its academic, multidisciplinary and career application benefits. A relatively small proportion of students were opposed to the programme, which may be attributable to lack of awareness and/or to uncertainty about implementation. The overall result shows that there is a moderately favourable attitude of students on Four-Year Undergraduate Programme introduced under NEP 2020.

Table No. 02. Attitude of Male and Female Students towards the Four-Year Undergraduate Programme in accordance with NEP 2020

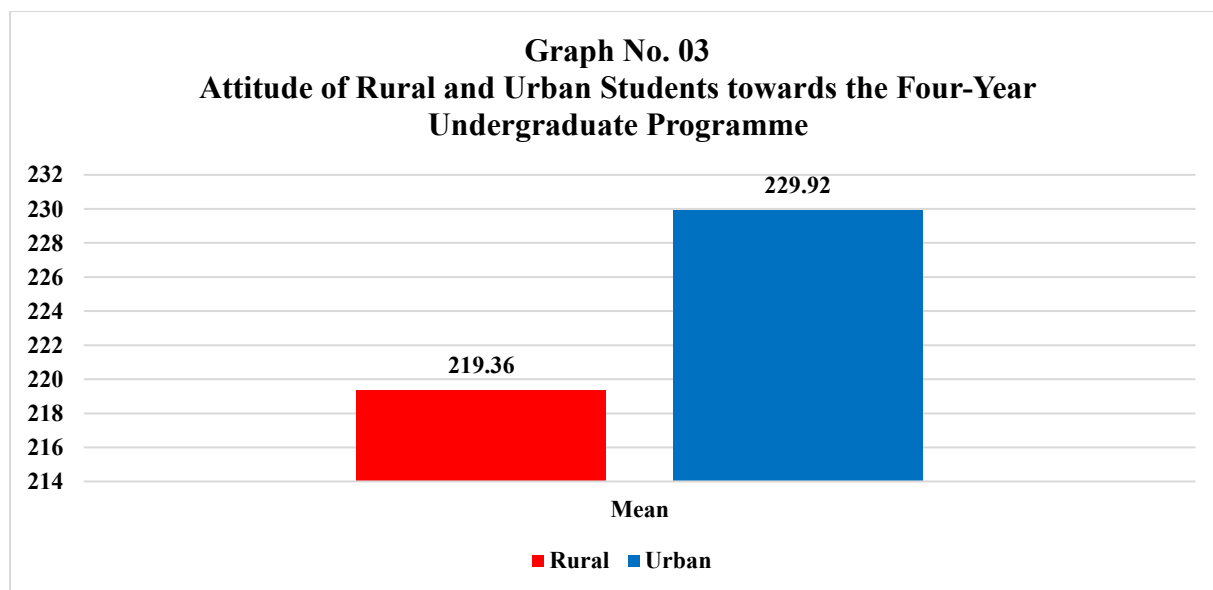
Variable	Gender	N	Mean	SD	t-value	p-value	Level of Significance
Attitude towards FYUGP	Male	400	221.84	27.96	4.46	0.000	Significant at 0.01
	Female	400	230.71	26.88			



Analysis and Interpretation: Using the comparison of attitudes towards the Four-Year Undergraduate Programme (FYUGP) under NEP 2020, a significant difference was found between students' attitudes across genders. The mean scores of the attitudes of female participants ($M = 230.71$, $SD = 26.88$) were higher than those of the male participants ($M = 221.84$, $SD = 27.96$), showing that female students had a more positive attitude towards the programme. Independent samples t-test showed t-value 4.46 and the P value was 0.000 which is significant at 0.01 level. The obtained p-values (less than 0.01) showed that the null hypothesis was rejected, indicating a significant difference between the males and the females. Results indicate that the FYUGP provides flexibility in academics, multidisciplinary learning opportunities and career-oriented features, and that female students are more receptive to these components of the program. It can be concluded that the attitude of female students towards the Four-Year Undergraduate Programme (NEP 2020) is significantly more positive than male students.

Table No. 03. Attitude of Rural and Urban Students towards the Four-Year Undergraduate Programme in accordance with NEP 2020

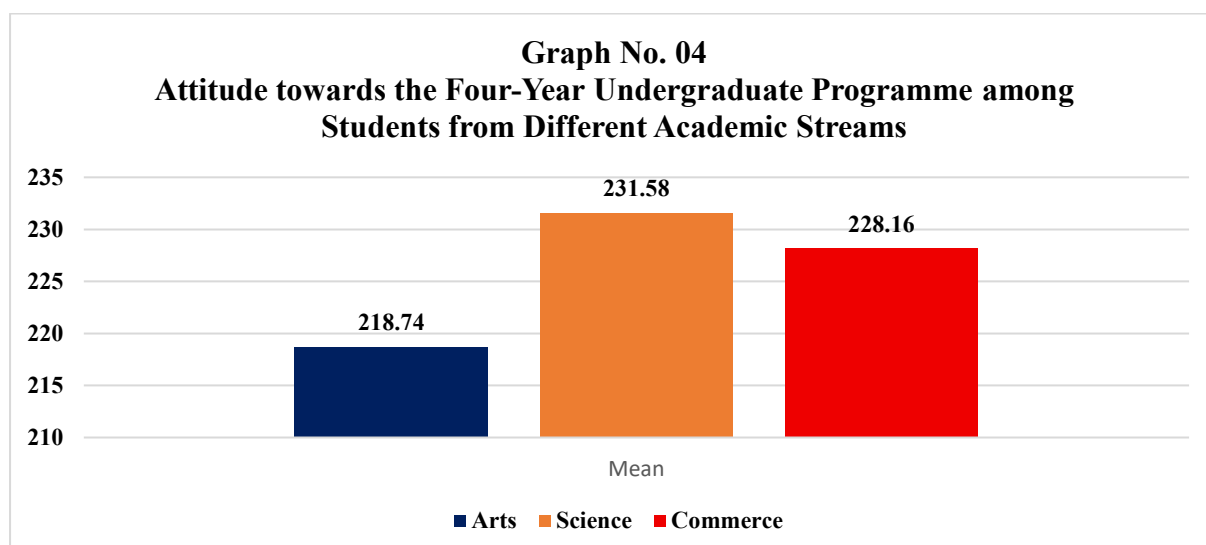
Variable	Locality	N	Mean	SD	t-value	p-value	Level of Significance
Attitude towards FYUGP	Rural	400	219.36	28.74	5.18	0.000	Significant at 0.01
	Urban	400	229.92	27.64			



Analysis and Interpretation: Comparing attitudes towards the Four-Year Undergraduate Programme (FYUGP) under NEP 2020, it was found that there was a significant difference between rural and urban students. Urban students ($M = 229.92$, $SD = 27.64$) had a higher mean score for attitude than the rural students ($M = 219.36$, $SD = 28.74$), meaning urban students had a more favourable attitude towards the programme. The t value obtained from independent samples t test was 5.18 and the p value was 0.000 indicating that the results were significant at the 0.01 level. The p value obtained was less than 0.01, so the null hypothesis was rejected, and it was concluded that there was a statistically significant difference between the rural and urban students. The results indicate that urban students have more positive attitudes towards the academic flexibility, diverse learning opportunities, digital integration and career-oriented features of the FYUGP. There are several reasons for this positive attitude: perhaps it is because of the more extensive educational materials, technological facilities, institutionalization, and awareness of educational reforms which urban pupils have. Thus, it can be inferred that the attitudes of urban students towards the Four-Year Undergraduate Programme under NEP 2020 is significantly higher than the attitudes of rural students.

Table No. 04. Difference between the Attitude of the Students with respect to Academic Streams towards the Four-Year Undergraduate Programme

Source of Variance	Sum of Squares (SS)	df	Mean Square (MS)	F-value	p-value	Level of Significance
Between Groups	24876.54	2	12438.27	16.82	0.000	Significant at 0.01
Within Groups	588962.46	797	738.98			
Total	613839.00	799				



Analysis and Interpretation: The comparison of the attitudes of the students towards the Four-Year Undergraduate Programme (FYUGP) under NEP 2020 in various academic streams is depicted in table No. 04 and is descriptive in nature. The results show that the Science students had the highest attitude mean score ($M = 231.58$, $SD = 26.84$), and had the most positive attitude towards the programme. The positive attitude was also

observed among students of Commerce ($M = 228.16$, $SD = 27.42$) and the lowest mean score was obtained by Arts students ($M = 218.74$, $SD = 28.62$), which was generally positive.

To check if there is any significant difference between the attitude of different academic streams of students towards the Four-Year Undergraduate Programme (FYUGP) under NEP 2020, a One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was conducted. When analysed, an F-value of 16.82 and a p-value of 0.000 was obtained, indicating significance at 0.01 level. So, it was concluded that the p-value obtained was less than 0.01 and the null hypothesis was rejected, which means that there is a significant difference in attitude of the Arts, Science and Commerce students. The results indicated that academic stream matters in the perception of students towards the FYUGP. The mean scores indicated that the students of science had the most positive attitude, followed by Commerce and Arts had the least positive attitude scores. The positive attitudes of the Science and Commerce students might be related to the focus of the programme on research, innovation, skill development, employability and multi-disciplinary learning. Overall, the findings support that the attitudes of students with respect to the Four-Year Undergraduate Programme vary widely depending on their academic stream, with the highest level of acceptance and support from science students for the changes under NEP 2020.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the study showed that generally, the college students had a positive attitude towards the Four-Year Undergraduate Programme (FYUGP) introduced under the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. Majority of the students had positive attitudes towards the programme and liked its focus on flexibility, multidisciplinary learning opportunities, acquiring skills, research orientation, and career preparation. The general trend of the responses indicates that the students are generally positive towards the educational reforms and consider it as a positive step towards their academic and career development. The overall attitude was determined as moderately favourable, while a small percentage of the students were neutral or had some reservations. The study also revealed that there was a significant difference in attitudes of the students towards the FYUGP on the basis of gender. The attitude of female students was found to be positive as compared to male students. This finding might be due to the fact that female students valued more the programme's holistic development, learning pathway flexibility and better opportunities for higher education and career progression. The outcome indicates that the reforms could be seen as empowering and supportive of future aspirations of female students. There were also significant differences with regard to locality. The attitude of the students from urban area was found to be more favourable than from the rural area. This difference can be attributed to varying access to educational facilities, technological facilities, educational guidance, and policy changes. Urban students are having more exposure to the innovative education practices and institutional supports, which may account for the higher acceptance rate of the programme. The study by academic streams showed that there was significant difference between the attitude of the students from different academic streams towards the FYUGP. Among the three disciplines, Science students expressed the highest level of acceptance and Commerce students expressed a relatively higher level of acceptance compared to the Arts students who expressed comparatively lower levels of favourability. This higher level of support might be linked to the focus that the programme places on research, innovation, practical learning, employability, entrepreneurship and interdisciplinary opportunities among the Science and Commerce students. Arts students, on the other hand, may need more awareness and clarification of the longer term academic and career advantages of the programme.

Overall, it can be seen that students have a positive attitude towards Four-Year Undergraduate Programme as a progressive and promising reform in higher education institutions. The programme's flexibility, multidisciplinary study, skill development and employability focus have been well received. The observed gap between the different groups of boys and girls, locality and academic stream of students further indicate the need for designing specific awareness programmes, academic counselling and institutional support for all the categories of students to ensure that they know and realise the objectives and provisions of NEP 2020.

CONCLUSION

From the above, it can be inferred that the students of the constituent colleges of Lalit Narayan Mithila University have an overall positive attitude towards the Four-Year Undergraduate Programme (FYUGP) as introduced in the NEP 2020. The results show that the programme is well-received by students who appreciate the opportunities it affords to increase their academic flexibility, multidisciplinary learning, skills, research orientation and career opportunities. This favourable impression is indicative of the acceptance of the reforms that are geared towards the transformation of higher education in India. The study also reveals that students' attitudes towards FYUGP differ in various categories of demographics and academics. The results showed that some significant differences were found between the genders, localities and academic streams, which indicated that the background and educational experiences of students can affect their perception of the programme. Attitude of the female students, urban students and Science stream students towards the FYUGP was found to be relatively more favourable as compared to their counterparts.

In overall, the results indicate that the Four-Year Undergraduate Programme can be successful in achieving the program objectives if it is implemented effectively and provided with sufficient infrastructure, academic guidance and awareness programmes are conducted to the students continuously. More work is needed to alleviate the

concerns and uncertainties of some groups of students, especially from the rural schools and some streams of learning in order to achieve the benefits of the programme equitably. Hence, the implementation of the FYUGP is not just a matter of policy measures but also requires ongoing institutional commitment, engagement with stakeholders and constant monitoring to encourage positive attitudes and productive involvement of students.

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