NEP-2020'S IMPACT ON TECHNOPRENEURSHIP READINESS IN RURAL B-SCHOOLS

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Abstract
Walk into most rural B-schools in India and ask the faculty what NEP-2020 means for their students. You will get two kinds of answers. The optimists will tell you it opens doors that were previously locked flexible curricula, incubation infrastructure, industry collaboration, recognition of prior learning. The realists will ask when the funding arrives. Both are right. NEP-2020 is, genuinely, the most significant shake-up of Indian higher education in a generation. Whether it translates into anything tangible at a management college in Nanded or Osmanabad or Sangamner is a separate question, and it is the one this paper tries to answer. The focus here is on technopreneurship readiness: the capacity of a B-school to produce graduates who do not just understand business but can build technology-driven ventures that solve real problems. Most of the policy commentary on NEP-2020 has been written about IIMs and IITs. This paper is not about those institutions. It is about the roughly 70% of management schools located outside major cities the ones that serve most India's MBA graduates, most of them first-generation, many from farming families, entering a labour market that is both opportunity-rich and deeply unequal. NEP-2020 gives rural B-schools more than they have had before in terms of policy permission to innovate. But permission is not the same as capacity. This paper maps the specific policy provisions that matter most for technopreneurship, assesses where rural B-schools stand today, and offers a phased roadmap not an idealistic one for how the gap between policy promise and institutional reality might be closed.

Keywords: *NEP-2020, Technopreneurship, Rural B-schools, Management Education, Startup Ecosystem, Innovation Readiness, Industry 5.0, Skill Development*

1. Introduction

India has more than 3,500 AICTE-approved MBA programmes. Nearly 3.7 lakh students enrol in them every year (AICTE, 2023). And roughly 70% of those programmes are not in Mumbai or Delhi or Bengaluru they are in Tier-2 cities, district headquarters, and semi-rural campuses across the country (UGC, 2022). The students who attend them are not, by and large, from families with business connections or startup exposure. They are the children of farmers, government employees, and small traders for whom an MBA represents a significant family investment and a genuine bet on the future.

The concept of the 'technopreneur' someone who builds scalable, technology-driven ventures has become something of an aspiration in Indian higher education policy. Startup India, the Atal Innovation Mission, Digital India: the government has been pushing this direction for a decade (UNCTAD, 2019). And rightly so. A rural Agri-tech startup founded by someone who grew up farming could do things that a venture-backed city startup simply cannot. But that startup does not materialise without an educational environment that builds the right skills, the right confidence, and the right connections.

NEP-2020 arrived in this context with real ambition. Multidisciplinary curricula. Technology and Innovation Hubs. Academic Bank of Credits. Recognition of Prior Learning. Industry partnerships. Institutional autonomy for high-performing colleges. On paper, these provisions form a reasonably coherent architecture for technopreneurship education. In practice, rural B-schools face obstacles financial, infrastructural, cultural, regulatory that the policy framework alone does not resolve.

This paper works through that gap carefully. Section 2 reviews what technopreneurship means and what the literature says about rural management education. Section 3 introduces the RTRE Model, a conceptual framework developed for this analysis. Section 4 maps NEP-2020's provisions against technopreneurship readiness dimensions. Section 5 gives an honest assessment of where rural B-schools currently stand. Section 6 names the challenges that matter most. Section 7 offers a practical three-phase roadmap. Section 8 closes with specific policy recommendations.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Technopreneurship: What It Actually Means

The word 'technopreneur' showed up in the management literature in the 1990s (Bhave, 1994), and it has since accumulated more definitions than it probably needs. For this paper, the core idea is simple: a technopreneur uses technology not as a tool but as the primary source of value. The

technology is the innovation, the competitive edge, the thing that makes the venture scalable in a way that a conventional small business is not (Byers et al., 2011). That distinction matters. A rural entrepreneur who sells vegetables through WhatsApp is doing something valuable but a technopreneur who builds the platform that helps fifty farmers sell vegetables through a single digital marketplace is doing something different in kind, not just degree.

Researchers like Linan and Chen (2009) and Krueger et al. (2000) have mapped technopreneurship readiness as a multi-part construct: self-efficacy (do I believe I can do this?), digital competence (do I have the technical skills?), design thinking capacity (can I solve problems creatively?), tolerance for risk, and access to the ecosystems mentors, funding, networks that turn an idea into a venture. All of these are buildable. None of them are automatic.

India's startup boom has been real, but it has been concentrated. Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Pune, Mumbai, Delhi that is where the ecosystem is. Rural youth, despite representing most young Indians, are significantly underrepresented in technology entrepreneurship (Nair & Pandey, 2020). The reasons are structural: weaker education, limited mentorship, poor digital infrastructure, no access to risk capital, and family and social cultures that treat entrepreneurship as financially dangerous. Management education can work on some of these. Not all. But some.

2.2 What NEP-2020 Is Actually Trying to Do

NEP-2020 is, at its core, an attempt to shift Indian higher education from a model organised around examinations and compliance toward one organised around learning and capability. The policy's language about 'holistic and well-rounded individuals' and the '4Cs' (critical thinking, creativity, communication, collaboration) can sound aspirational to the point of vagueness. But several of its specific provisions have concrete relevance for technopreneurship (Ministry of Education, 2020).

Vocational integration is one. The push to bring practical skill development into mainstream academic programmes including the Recognition of Prior Learning mechanism that could formally credit what rural students already know from farming, trade, and craft directly supports the kind of grounded technopreneurship education that rural B-schools should be offering. The Academic Bank of Credits is another: if it works, it lets students mix management with engineering or agriculture, which is exactly the kind of multidisciplinary formation that rural technopreneurship requires. And the Technology and Innovation Hubs, if funded and built, provide the physical infrastructure maker spaces, prototyping labs, mentoring rooms that currently does not exist at most rural management campuses.

2.3 Rural Management Education: The Literature Gap

The honest assessment of the existing literature on rural management education in India is that it is thin. Most research focuses on the IIMs and a handful of well-known autonomous institutes. The hundreds of smaller B-schools in rural and semi-urban settings which collectively educate most Indian management graduates are largely absent from the scholarly record. What research does exist paints a familiar picture: faculty shortages, limited industry links, curriculum that lags industry needs, compliance burdens that crowd out institutional energy (Agarwal, 2009; Powar, 2011).

More recent work has begun to argue that these constraints, real as they are, obscure genuine institutional assets: proximity to rural communities and markets, student bodies with direct agricultural and vocational experience, and institutional missions that were often explicitly development-oriented from the start (Kumar & Singh, 2018). The intersection of NEP-2020 and rural B-schools is one of the most understudied areas in Indian higher education research. The FICCI Higher Education Summit's 2022 report noted that rural institutions are largely aware of NEP-2020 but struggle with implementation due to resource gaps and regulatory confusion. This paper tries to give that challenge more structured treatment than it has received so far.

3. The RTRE Model: A Framework for Thinking About Readiness

To analyse where rural B-schools stand on technopreneurship readiness, this paper uses the Rural Technopreneurship Readiness Ecosystem (RTRE) Model a framework built around four dimensions that we argue jointly determine whether a rural management institution can produce technopreneurs, not just talk about producing them.

1. Curricular Readiness. Does the curriculum treat entrepreneurship, technology, design thinking, and innovation management as core subjects things every MBA student engages with or as electives that a minority choose? The difference is not cosmetic. An entrepreneurship module buried in a second-year elective slot sends a clear signal about institutional priorities.
2. Ecosystem Readiness. Does the institution have the supporting infrastructure that turning a student idea into a real venture requires?

Incubation space, mentors with real startup experience, seed funding mechanisms, connections to industry, alumni networks of working entrepreneurs? Most rural B-schools score poorly here. That is the honest starting point.

3. Faculty Readiness. Can the faculty teach entrepreneurship and innovation in ways that work experientially, through real projects, through mentoring rather than through lecture-and-examination formats that produce students who can describe Schumpeter but cannot build a minimum viable product? And do faculty have enough industry experience themselves to be credible to students who are making real career bets?
4. Regulatory and Institutional Readiness. Does the governance environment AICTE approvals, NAAC criteria, affiliating university regulations help or get in the way? Institutions with higher NAAC grades have more room to experiment. But even for them, the regulatory landscape often rewards compliance over innovation.

The RTRE Model draws on Ajzen's (1991) Theory of Planned Behaviour which shows that entrepreneurial intention is shaped not just by individual attitude but by perceived feasibility and on Isenberg's (2011) ecosystem framework, which makes the systemic point that technopreneurs do not emerge from individual talent alone but from the right combination of institutional and cultural conditions. Both frameworks suggest the same practical implication: you cannot fix technopreneurship readiness by improving one dimension. It must be a system-level effort.

4. NEP-2020 and the Four Readiness Dimensions

4.1 Curriculum: Breaking Down the Discipline Silos

The most significant structural provision of NEP-2020 for rural B-school curricula is multidisciplinary. In the old model, an MBA student studied management. Full stop. NEP-2020 says that same student should be able to earn credits from engineering, agricultural science, or social sciences building the technical foundation that technology-driven entrepreneurship requires. For a student at a rural management college who grew up around precision farming or cottage industry, the ability to combine business management with agricultural technology or design is not abstract. It is directly relevant to the kind of venture they might build.

The Academic Bank of Credits system underpins this. If implemented properly, it turns interdisciplinary education from a policy aspiration into a practical pathway. A management student could take a computer science module from a nearby engineering college, earn transferable credits, and return to their MBA without losing time. Whether the implementation infrastructure exists to make this work across rural campuses and affiliating universities is a different question and the honest answer is not yet uniformly. But the policy architecture is in place.

4.2 Skill Development: Crediting What Rural Students Already Know

Here is something the literature on technopreneurship education rarely acknowledges: many rural B-school students already have substantive vocational skills. They have grown up farming, running small businesses, managing household finances in complex informal economies. NEP-2020's Recognition of Prior Learning mechanism creates the formal possibility of crediting these competencies turning lived experience into academic currency and building technopreneurship programmes on foundations that are genuinely grounded in what students know.

The policy's call for mandatory internships with 'local industries, businesses, artists, craftspersons is also worth taking seriously. For rural B-schools, this provision could be structured as community-embedded innovation projects where student teams work with farmer producer organisations, cooperative enterprises, or local manufacturers to identify technology solutions to problems the communities themselves have named. That is not just pedagogically effective. It is the exact model of embedded technopreneurship that rural India needs.

4.3 Research and Innovation Infrastructure

Technology and Innovation Hubs the physical spaces where ideas get prototyped, tested, and mentored toward commercial viability are the most tangible infrastructure commitment in NEP-2020. The policy envisions them at every higher education institution, linked to the National Research Foundation and co-funded by government and industry. For rural B-schools, a well-designed TIH could be transformative: a place where students with Agri-tech or health-tech ideas can build and test prototypes, meet mentors from the private sector, and connect with the small-business ecosystem of their district.

The IP creation and research commercialisation emphasis in NEP-2020 matters here too. Rural B-schools that establish IP cells even modest ones are sending a signal: student innovations have value that can be protected and commercialised. That signal reshapes institutional culture in ways that no single curriculum change can match. It tells

students that what they build matters beyond their grade.

4.4 Institutional Autonomy: Room to Do Something Different

NEP-2020's 'light but tight' regulatory vision more autonomy for institutions that earn it through accreditation performance, tighter accountability on outcomes creates real space for well-performing rural B-schools to break from conventional programme design. AIMBA's 'A' Grade NAAC accreditation places it in the category of institutions that, under NEP-2020's framework, have the policy justification to build non-conventional technopreneurship tracks, industry co-designed programmes, and community innovation projects that AICTE's traditional regulatory categories do not neatly accommodate.

The industry-academia partnership provisions are also directly relevant. Rural B-schools that build working relationships with Agri-tech companies, rural fintech platforms, and social enterprises in their districts can develop joint programmes where students are doing real project work, not simulations. The distinction matters enormously for entrepreneurial confidence: students who have built something real, for a real client, under real constraints, leave with a fundamentally different self-conception than students who have only done case studies.

5. Where Rural B-Schools Actually Stand Today

5.1 Curriculum: Still Catching Up

If you review the curriculum documents and NAAC reports of a representative sample of rural B-schools, a pattern emerges quickly: entrepreneurship content exists, but it is thin and peripheral. Where entrepreneurship courses are offered, they tend to be lecture-based theory of entrepreneurship, entrepreneurship models, case studies of successful founders. Design thinking, innovation management, lean startup methodology, technology commercialisation: these appear occasionally as elective modules, rarely as core requirements (AICTE Survey, 2022).

Digital skills are the other glaring gap. The COVID-19 pandemic forced every rural B-school to adopt digital learning platforms at speed. Some of that adoption has stuck. But there is a significant difference between using digital tools to deliver existing content and building a curriculum that teaches students to create, deploy, and monetise digital technologies. The former happened. The latter largely has not. NEP-2020 mandates digital literacy as a core graduate competency. Translating that mandate into actual curriculum change requires faculty who can teach it and infrastructure that supports it neither of which is uniformly available.

5.2 Ecosystem: Nascent, With Pockets of Innovation

The technopreneurship ecosystem at most rural B-schools is, to put it plainly, early-stage. Formal incubation centres are rare. Angel investor networks essentially do not exist at the rural level. Mentorship programmes where they exist typically connect students with HR managers at large companies, not with working entrepreneurs who can speak credibly about building a startup from scratch. Alumni networks, which are among the most powerful ecosystem resources at premier institutions, have rarely been activated as entrepreneurial communities at rural B-schools.

That said, there are genuine pockets of innovation worth acknowledging. Some rural B-schools have built working partnerships with NABARD's incubation programmes, SIDBI's startup support schemes, and district-level MSME centres. The Atal Incubation Centre programme has reached several rural higher education institutions, providing a replicable model. These are not dominant stories yet, but they are proof-of-concept that rural incubation is possible, not just aspirational.

5.3 Faculty: The Hardest Constraint to Fix

Faculty readiness is where the gap between what rural B-schools need and what they have is widest. Most faculty at these institutions have PhDs and MBAs. Very few have started companies, consulted for startups, or worked in technology ventures. And entrepreneurship education, the research is clear on this, is most effective when taught by people who have done it not just studied it (Fayolle & Gailly, 2008). The lived texture of starting a business, making payroll in a bad month, pivoting when the original idea fails that cannot be adequately conveyed through a textbook, however well written.

NEP-2020's provision allowing industry professionals to serve as adjunct or part-time faculty is the most direct policy response to this gap. But using it effectively is harder than it looks. Attracting experienced practitioners to rural campuses requires pay that most rural B-schools cannot offer, scheduling flexibility that management education's semester structure does not naturally provide, and institutional cultures that value and reward practice-oriented teaching rather than treating it as a lesser form of academic contribution.

5.4 Readiness Assessment briefly

Table 1: RTRE Model Current Technopreneurship Readiness in Rural B-Schools

RTRE Dimension	What NEP-2020 Offers	Where Rural B-Schools Stand Now	Readiness Level
Curricular Readiness	Flexible curricula, ABC, multidisciplinary modules, RPL	Largely traditional; entrepreneurship electives only; weak digital skills integration	**Low-Medium**
Ecosystem Readiness	TIHs, NRF funding, industry-academia partnership provisions	Nascent; limited incubation; no formal investor networks; mentors rare	**Low**
Faculty Readiness	Industry adjunct faculty provisions, FDP mandates	Academically oriented; few practitioners; entrepreneurship taught theoretically	**Low-Medium**
Regulatory Readiness	Institutional autonomy for NAAC A-grade institutions	Improving; NAAC accreditation driving governance reform; autonomy underused	**Medium**

6. The Challenges That Actually Matter

6.1 Infrastructure: The Gap Is Real and Specific

A maker spaces. A prototyping lab. Reliable high-speed internet. Collaborative workspaces that are not classrooms with the desks rearranged. This is the physical infrastructure that technopreneurship education requires, and it is largely absent at rural B-schools. NEP-2020's Technology and Innovation Hubs are meant to address this. The investment pace so far has been uneven, with urban institutions benefiting first and rural campuses waiting.

The digital divide deserves special mention. Bharat Net has genuinely improved rural internet connectivity at the village level. But 'improved' is not the same as 'adequate for cloud-based design tools and virtual collaboration with mentors in Bengaluru.' Many rural campuses still work with internet connectivity that cannot reliably support the digital learning environments that technopreneurship education demands. This is a solvable infrastructure problem, but it requires investment, not just policy intent.

6.2 Regulatory Overload: NEP-2020's Unintended Side Effect

There is an irony baked into NEP-2020's implementation. The policy is explicitly designed to create space for innovation. But the compliance requirements that accompany its rollout LOCF compliance, outcome-based accreditation documentation, expanded reporting frameworks have added to the administrative burden of institutions that already had limited administrative capacity. Faculty at rural B-schools routinely report that they spend more time on compliance documentation than on the teaching improvements the documentation is supposed to reflect.

This is not an argument against accountability. It is an argument for proportionality. A rural B-school with forty faculty and one overworked administrator should face a compliance architecture calibrated to its capacity, not a scaled-down version of what an IIM manages with a hundred administrative staff. The intent of NEP-2020's regulatory reforms is right. The implementation has not yet been adequately differentiated for institutional context.

6.3 The Cultural Barrier: Harder Than Any Infrastructure Problem

Ask a first-generation management student at a rural B-school what their family expects from their MBA. The honest answer, most of the time, is a government job or a placement at a stable private company. Entrepreneurship especially technology-driven entrepreneurship, which requires absorbing failure as a normal part of the process sits outside the risk tolerance of families who have made real sacrifices to fund a degree.

This is not irrationality. It is rational risk management under economic pressure. And no curriculum reform changes it directly. What changes it, slowly, is exposure to role models who look like the students rural technopreneurs who came from similar backgrounds, faced similar family pressures, and built something real anyway. Alumni entrepreneurship networks matter here. So do startup fairs that feature founders from the same

region, not from Bengaluru's startup scene. So does an institutional culture that treats a student's failed venture attempt as a credential rather than a setback.

7. A Practical Roadmap Three Phases, Realistic Timelines

7.1 Phase 1: Lay the Foundation (Years 1–2)

Before anything else, rural B-schools need an honest baseline. That means running the RTRE assessment genuinely, not as a formality to understand where the institution stands across all four readiness dimensions. Without that, any reform effort is guesswork.

- Revise the MBA curriculum to make entrepreneurship, design thinking, and digital technology core requirements rather than electives. This does not require new resources it requires institutional will and a curriculum committee willing to make difficult trade-offs about what gets cut.
- Launch a Faculty Development Programme on technopreneurship pedagogy, drawing on IIM and NIT partnerships that SPPU's QIP programme can help broker.
- Start conversations with NABARD, SIDBI, the district administration, and at least two or three local businesses or Agri-tech firms. Not to sign MoUs to understand what they need from a partner institution, and whether there is genuine alignment.
- Identify your institution's two or three most entrepreneurially inclined alumni and bring them formally into the programme as guest faculty, mentors, or case study subjects. This costs almost nothing. The signal it sends to current students is disproportionately valuable.

7.2 Phase 2: Build the Ecosystem (Years 3–4)

With the curricular foundation in place, the focus shifts to the ecosystem infrastructure that turns individual entrepreneurial intention into supported venture creation.

- Establish a rural incubation cell even a small one, a dedicated room with good internet and a part-time coordinator with a seed funding mechanism drawing on ASPIRE, Atal Innovation Mission, and CSR contributions from local industry partners.
- Launch community innovation projects: semester-length engagements where student teams work with local FPOs, SHGs, or district enterprises on real technology problems. Structure these as graded curriculum components, not extracurricular activities.
- Recruit at least two practitioner faculty members founders, Agri-tech professionals, or rural fintech practitioners as adjunct lecturers or visiting mentors. Offer flexible engagement models: a day a month is enough to make a difference.
- Pursue NAAC accreditation upgrades, framing the technopreneurship infrastructure investments as evidence for Criterion III (Research and Innovation) and Criterion VI (Governance). The NAAC process, done seriously, funds its own reform momentum.

7.3 Phase 3: Become the Regional Innovation Anchor (Year 5 Onwards)

In the longer arc, the ambition should be for the rural B-school to become the institutional home of the regional innovation ecosystem not just a participant in it.

- Apply for a Technology and Innovation Hub linked to the National Research Foundation. By this stage, the institution's track record in community innovation projects and incubation should make a credible case for the investment.
- Build an alumni startup investment collective a structured network of successful graduates who invest small amounts in current-student ventures. This is not venturing capital. It is community-funded micro-investment, and it has worked at several rural entrepreneurship programmes internationally.
- Position the institution explicitly as a Rural Innovation Hub: a convening point for district government, industry, civil society, and community organisations engaged in technology-driven development. Host events, publish research, make the institution visible as a development actor, not just an educational one.
- Start publishing. Applied research on rural technopreneurship, community innovation outcomes, and local startup ecosystem development belongs in peer-reviewed journals, not just internal reports. The research profile builds the institution's credibility for the next funding cycle.

8. Recommendations Who Needs to Do What

For AICTE and UGC:

1. Develop a 'Rural Technopreneurship Readiness' rating system modelled on the Innovation Ranking framework but calibrated for non-metropolitan institutions that publicly recognises B-schools for ecosystem investment, not just academic compliance metrics.
2. Create a dedicated National Research Foundation funding stream for applied innovation research at rural management institutions, with a specific focus on agri-tech, rural fintech, and social enterprise.

3. Incorporate explicit technopreneurship ecosystem criteria into the NAAC accreditation framework for management institutions, making incubation infrastructure and entrepreneurship pedagogy assessable dimensions rather than optional best practices.

For Rural B-School Leadership:

1. Create a Technopreneur Development Cell with a real budget, senior faculty leadership, and a direct reporting line to the Director or Principal. Not a committee that meets twice a year a functioning unit with a mandate.
2. Run curriculum reform as a genuinely participatory process: bring students, alumni entrepreneurs, industry partners, and community members into the room when the MBA curriculum is being redesigned. Their knowledge of what skills rural technopreneurship requires is not available from curriculum theory alone.
3. Map and activate district-level entrepreneurship support infrastructure DICs, MSME facilitation centres, Krishi Vigyan Kendra's as institutional partners. These organisations have resources and mandates that align with technopreneurship development. The connection rarely exists today because nobody has built it.

For NABARD, SIDBI, and State Development Finance Institutions:

1. Develop a formal 'Rural B-School Innovation Partnership' programme: co-funding, mentoring networks, and market access support for student startups emerging from affiliated B-school incubation cells in rural districts.
2. Require state governments to include rural B-schools as named institutional partners in district-level MSME and startup development plans, not as peripheral service providers but as core ecosystem actors with defined roles and resource allocations.

9. Conclusion

NEP-2020 is a real opportunity for rural B-schools. Not a guaranteed transformation an opportunity. The distinction matters. Policy documents do not build incubation cells or hire practitioner faculty or change family cultures around risk. Institutions do those things, or they do not. NEP-2020 provides the clearest policy mandate in a generation for rural B-schools to stop defining themselves primarily by their placement statistics and start building something more ambitious: genuine ecosystems of rural technopreneurship.

The structural barriers are real and should not be minimised. Resource constraints, faculty shortages, digital infrastructure gaps, regulatory overload, and the deep socio-cultural preference for employment security over entrepreneurial risk these are not obstacles that dissolve with the right vision statement. They require sustained, specific, well-resourced institutional work over years, not semesters.

But the argument for that work is not just educational. It is developmental. India's farm distress, rural unemployment, and the stubborn gap between urban digital economies and rural economic realities are not going to be closed by urban startups building rural solutions from air-conditioned offices in Bengaluru. They will be closed, if they are closed, by people who grew up in those communities, understand them from the inside, and have been given the skills, the confidence, and the institutional support to build ventures that fit.

Rural B-schools the ones in Sangamner and Shrirampur and Nanded and Osmanabad, the ones that the rankings ignore, and the funding agencies routinely overlook are where those people are being educated right now. NEP-2020 has, for the first time, given those institutions the policy space to do something extraordinary with that opportunity. Whether they seize it is the question that the next decade will answer.

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