



# International Journal of Technology, Health and Sustainability

## Knowledge, Attitude, and Practices (KAP) towards Environmental Sustainability among Undergraduate Students Studied before and after NEP 2020

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(Received: 19.05.2026; Accepted: 02.07.2026).

### Abstract

*This study aims to assess and compare knowledge, attitude, and practices (KAP) towards Environmental Sustainability among undergraduate students before and after NEP 2020 and to compare the mean score of the knowledge, attitudes and practices of students towards sustainability with regard to gender, stream of study, and locality of the students' residence before and after NEP 2020. Final year UG students who have taken admission before NEP 2020 and first year UG students who have taken admission under NEP 2020 of four different universities of West Bengal formed the population of the study. A descriptive survey was conducted among 424 undergraduate students of four universities. The sample consists of 226 males, 198 females, 159 before NEP and 265 after NEP, 234 from B.A. and 190 from B.Sc. Stream, etc. A mixed-method research design was applied to the data from primary sources. For the quantitative part, data were collected by a stratified random sampling technique from the students through a self-developed questionnaire regarding environmental attitude and sustainable behavior practice. Percentages, mean, t-test, ANOVA, etc. were used for analysis of quantitative data. It was found that almost no significant difference exists with respect to gender, but a significant difference was found for the students studied before and after NEP 2020. Students are very eager to know more about sustainable practices through their curriculum. This study will create a skilled green economy workforce through training programs to identify sustainable-related skill gaps among students.*

**Keywords:** Environmental sustainability; Knowledge attitude; Practices; Undergraduate students, NEP 2020

### INTRODUCTION

National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 emphasizes on integrating environmental education for promoting holistic and multidisciplinary education (GOI, 2020). The policy also lays stress on creating environmental awareness and sensitivity for conservation of the environment and sustainable development. It advocates credit-based courses and projects on environmental education. Keeping in view the present climate crisis, environmental education needs to incorporate areas of climate change, pollution, biodiversity, conservation of forests and wildlife, depletion of the ozone layer, waste management and sustainable development. Hence, NEP's emphasis on creating environmental awareness and sensitivity is an appropriate step towards sustainable development and co-existence with other species. In alignment with NEP2020, UGC has formulated guidelines

and a curriculum framework for environmental education in 2023 (UGC, 2023).

In West Bengal, NEP2020 has been implemented from July 2023. Our endeavour in this paper is to find out how far the curriculum of NEP 2020 has been successful in creating environmental awareness and sensitivity among the undergraduate students studying in West Bengal.

Environmental sustainability has emerged as one of the most critical global challenges of the twenty-first century. The degradation of natural resources, climate change, loss of biodiversity, and increasing pollution levels have necessitated urgent action at all levels of society (Adams *et al.*, 2018). Higher education institutions play a pivotal role in shaping the environmental consciousness of future generations and preparing them to become responsible global

citizens (Bhattacharya, 2024). The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 13 (Climate Action), highlight the importance of education in fostering sustainable development and environmental stewardship (Narkhede *et al.*, 2025; Singh and Reddy, 2024).

The National Education Policy 2020 represents a paradigm shift in the Indian education system, aiming to transform the landscape of higher education by promoting multidisciplinary learning, critical thinking, and holistic development. One of the key focus areas of NEP 2020 is the integration of environmental education across all disciplines. The policy recognises that environmental awareness and sensitivity are essential for sustainable development and coexistence with other species (Mishra and Rajesh, 2024). It advocates for credit-based courses and projects on environmental education, emphasizing experiential learning and practical engagement with environmental issues. A critical review of the policy suggests that while the intent is progressive, its success depends heavily on systematic execution and institutional readiness (Reddy and Rao, 2025).

Research has consistently shown that knowledge, attitude, and practices are interconnected dimensions that influence environmental behavior (Axelsson *et al.*, 2013). Knowledge about environmental issues provides the foundation for developing positive attitudes towards the environment, which in turn translates into sustainable practices. However, the relationship between these dimensions is complex and influenced by various factors including gender, academic discipline, and locality (Roy, 2026). Several studies have highlighted a significant gap between knowledge and actual sustainable practices among Indian youth (Mukherjee and Dutta, 2024). Understanding these relationships is crucial for designing effective environmental education programmes that can foster sustainable behavior among students (Kumar and Singh, 2023; Malhotra and Kumar, 2023).

Several studies have examined the environmental knowledge, attitude, and practices of students across different educational contexts. For instance, research comparing environmental awareness among undergraduate students has revealed varying levels of consciousness depending on curriculum exposure (Chatterjee and Das, 2024). The impact of the existing curriculum on environmental consciousness has been a subject of debate, with some scholars arguing that theoretical inputs are insufficient without practical reinforcement (Patel and Mehta, 2023). Furthermore, the specific context of West Bengal requires localized analysis, as curriculum structures and implementation strategies differ across states (Banerjee and Chakraborty, 2023). Interdisciplinary approaches to environmental sustainability have been proposed as a viable solution to bridge the gap between disciplinary silos and holistic understanding (Agarwal and Singh, 2024). However, limited research has been conducted to assess the impact of curriculum reforms on these dimensions, particularly in the context of NEP 2020 implementation. This study addresses this gap by examining the KAP towards environmental sustainability among undergraduate students in West Bengal, comparing those who enrolled before and after the implementation of NEP

2020. The findings of this study will provide valuable insights for policymakers, educators, and curriculum developers to enhance environmental education in higher education institutions.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

### Research Design

#### Operational Definition

Let's give the operational definition of some key terms as follows:

*Knowledge* refers to the acquisition, retention, and recall of information, facts, and concepts related to environmental sustainability (ES) including climate change, pollution, biodiversity, conservation, waste management, and sustainable development.

*Attitude* refers to a complex mental state that influences an individual's feelings, thoughts, and behaviours towards a particular object, person, situation or environmental sustainability (ES), including concern for the environment, willingness to adopt sustainable practices, and sense of responsibility towards nature.

*Practice* refers to the act of performing an activity or behavior in order to improve or maintain proficiency, accuracy, or quality in environmental sustainability (ES). Application and feedback are measured in their routine practice including waste segregation, energy conservation, water conservation, and sustainable consumption patterns.

*Nature of the Study:* Descriptive

*Source of Research Data:* Primary

*Research Design:* Quantitative method

### Research Approach

*Quantitative:* A survey-based approach has been applied to collect data from the students through a questionnaire regarding cultural knowledge, attitude and sustainable behaviour practice.

### Population and Sample Size

Final year students who have taken admission before implementation of NEP 2020 and second year under graduate level students who have taken admission under New NEP 2020 of different universities of West Bengal. The sample size was 424. The demographic and programme details of the students are presented in Table 1 and Table 2, respectively.

### Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study are as follows:

1. To assess the knowledge, attitudes, and practices of undergraduate students of West Bengal towards sustainability before and after the implementation of NEP 2020.
2. To compare knowledge and attitudes of undergraduate students of West Bengal towards environmental sustainability (ES) before and after the implementation of NEP 2020.

**Table 1:** Demographic details of the students.

Locality	Name of the University	No. of students for ES
Rural	Gourbanga University	168
	Diamond Harbour Women's University	39
Urban	University of Calcutta	98
	Aliah University	119
TOTAL		424

**Table 2:** Details of Programme of Studies of the students.

Program Studied	No. of students for ES	Program held	No. of Students
B.A.	234	Before NEP	158
B.Sc.	190	After NEP	264
TOTAL		TOTAL	424

3. To compare the mean score of knowledge and attitudes of students towards sustainability with regard to gender before and after the implementation of NEP 2020.

**Hypotheses of the Study**

H<sub>01</sub> to H<sub>04</sub> are for objective 2 and H<sub>05</sub> to H<sub>08</sub> are framed following objective 3.

H<sub>01</sub>: There is no significant difference in the knowledge of students towards environmental sustainability of undergraduate students in West Bengal before and after the implementation of NEP 2020.

H<sub>02</sub>: There is no significant difference in the attitude of students towards the environmental sustainability of undergraduate students in West Bengal before and after the implementation of NEP 2020.

H<sub>03</sub>: There is no significant difference in the ~~attitude~~ practice of students towards the environmental sustainability of undergraduate students in West Bengal before and after the implementation of NEP 2020.

H<sub>04</sub>: There is no significant difference in the ~~practice~~ overall score of students towards the environmental sustainability of undergraduate students in West Bengal before and after the implementation of NEP 2020.

H<sub>05</sub>: There is no significant difference in the knowledge score of students towards environmental sustainability with regard to the gender of undergraduate students in West Bengal before and after the implementation of NEP 2020.

H<sub>06</sub>: There is no significant difference in the attitude score of students towards environmental sustainability with regard to the gender of undergraduate students in West Bengal before and after the implementation of NEP 2020.

H<sub>07</sub>: There is no significant difference in the practice score of students towards environmental sustainability with regard to the gender of undergraduate students in West Bengal before and after the implementation of NEP 2020.

H<sub>08</sub>: There is no significant difference in the overall score of students towards environmental sustainability with regard to the gender of undergraduate students in West Bengal before and after the implementation of NEP 2020.

**RESULTS**

Findings of the study are presented objectively and hypotheses-wise.

**Objective 1**

The descriptive statistic of the data shows the mean score of knowledge, attitude, practice, and the overall mean score of the data before NEP and after NEP towards environmental sustainability of the undergraduate students. Values are given in Table 3.

Dimension-wise range of ES scale and overall score of ES are presented in Table 4 and Table 5, respectively. The analysis of the data shows that undergraduate students' sustainable behavior towards environmental sustainability is slightly positive.

**Table 3:** Dimension-wise mean score of students before and after NEP 2020 towards ES.

Program Duration	No. of Students	Knowledge Mean	Attitude Mean	Practice Mean	Overall Mean
Environment Sustainability (ES)					
Before NEP	158	28.68	38.18	30.79	97.75
After NEP	264	27.53	37.43	30.71	95.73

**Table 4:** Dimension-wise range of Environmental Sustainability scale.

Scale	Total No. of Items	Range					
		Strongly Negative	Slightly Negative	Neither Positive nor negative	Slightly Positive	Strongly Positive	
Environmental Sustainability	Overall	28	28-50.4	50.5-72.8	72.9-95.2	95.3-117.6	117.7-140
	Domain- Knowledge	10	10-18	18.1- 26	26.1- 34	34.1- 42	42.1- 50
	Domain- Attitude	10	10-18	18.1- 26	26.1- 34	34.1- 42	42.1- 50
	Domain- Practice	8	8-14.4	14.5-20.8	20.9-27.2	27.3-33.6	33.7-40

**Table 5:** Overall Score of Environmental Scale dimension-wise details.

Scale	Knowledge	Attitude	Practice	Total
Environmental Sustainability Scale (N= 424)	27.96	37.71	30.73	96.48

**Objective 2**

*H<sub>01</sub>:* There is no significant difference in the knowledge of students towards the environmental sustainability of undergraduate students in West Bengal before and after the implementation of NEP 2020.

*Findings:* A t-test was conducted to examine the significant difference between the mean knowledge scores of ES of the students enrolled before the implementation of NEP 2020 and after the implementation of NEP 2020. Levene’s test was conducted to test the equality of variances. The value, F= 12.583, p= 0.000, shows that the assumption of equality of variance was violated. Hence, the ‘Equal variance not assumed’ row was referred to interpret the result of the t-test. An independent t-test was conducted to compare the difference in knowledge of ES among undergraduate students before the implementation of NEP 2020 (M= 40.80, SD= 4.04) and after the implementation of NEP (M= 28.68, SD= 4.258). The obtained t-value is 2.890, and the difference (df) is 274.779; the p-value is 0.004. The p-value is less than the significance level of 0.05 (Table 6). Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected. There is a significant difference in the mean score of knowledge of ES before and after the implementation of NEP 2020. The mean score after the implementation of NEP 2020 is slightly lower than before the implementation of NEP 2020. It means, implementation of NEP 2020 did not increase the knowledge of environmental sustainability among the students; rather, it declined their knowledge.

*H<sub>02</sub>:* There is no significant difference in the attitude of students towards the environmental sustainability of undergraduate students in West Bengal before and after the implementation of NEP 2020.

*Findings:* A t-test was conducted to examine the significant difference between the mean attitude scores of ES of the students enrolled before the implementation of NEP 2020 and after the implementation of NEP 2020. Levene’s test was conducted to test the equality of variances. The value, F= 4.462, p= 0.035, shows that the assumption of equality of variance was violated. Hence, the ‘Equal variance not assumed’ row was referred to interpret the result of the t-test.

An independent t-test was conducted to compare the difference in attitude of ES among undergraduate students before the implementation of NEP 2020 (M= 38.18, SD= 4.387) and after the implementation of NEP (M= 37.43, SD= 4.089). The obtained t-value is 1.738, and the difference (df) is 314.520; the p-value is 0.083. The p-value is greater than the significance level of 0.05 (Table 6). Therefore, the null hypothesis is not rejected. There is no significant difference in the mean score of the attitude of ES before and after the implementation of NEP 2020. It means, implementation of NEP 2020 did impact the attitude of the undergraduate students towards environmental sustainability.

*H<sub>03</sub>:* There is no significant difference in the practice of students towards the environmental sustainability of undergraduate students in West Bengal before and after the implementation of NEP 2020.

*Findings:* A t-test was conducted to examine the significant difference between the mean practice scores of ES of the students enrolled before the implementation of NEP 2020 and after the implementation of NEP 2020. Levene’s test was conducted to test the equality of variances. The value, F= .401, p = .527, shows that the assumption of equality of variance was met. Hence, the ‘Equal variance assumed’ row was referred to interpret the result of the t-test. An independent t-test was conducted to compare the difference in attitude of ES among undergraduate students before the implementation of NEP 2020 (M= 30.79, SD= 4.254) and after the implementation of NEP (M= 30.71, SD= 4.706). The obtained t-value is .168, and the difference (df) is 422; the p-value is 0.866. The p-value is greater than the significance level of 0.05 (Table 6). Therefore, the null hypothesis is not rejected. There is no significant difference in the mean score of the practice of ES before and after the implementation of NEP 2020. It means, implementation of NEP 2020 did impact the practice of the undergraduate students towards environmental sustainability.

*H<sub>04</sub>:* There is no significant difference in the overall score of students towards the environmental sustainability of undergraduate students in West Bengal before and after the implementation of NEP 2020.

*Findings:* A t-test was conducted to examine the significant difference between the mean overall scores of ES of the students enrolled before the implementation of NEP 2020 and after the implementation of NEP 2020. Levene’s test was conducted to test the equality of variances. The value, F= 1.922, p = 0.166, shows that the assumption of equality of variance was met. Hence, the ‘Equal variance assumed’ row was used to interpret the result of the t-test. An independent

**Table 6:** Difference between students' scores on ES before and after implementation of NEP 2020.

Dimensions: ES	Before the implementation of NEP 2020		After the implementation of NEP 2020		df	t	p	Decision
	M	SD	M	SD				
Knowledge	28.68	4.258	27.53	3.385	274.779	2.890	.004	Rejected
Attitude	38.18	4.387	37.43	4.089	314.520	1.738	.083	Not Rejected
Practice	30.79	4.254	30.71	4.706	422.000	0.168	.866	Not Rejected
Overall	97.75	9.507	95.73	8.930	420.000	2.194	.029	Rejected

**Table 7:** Two-Way ANOVA Results for the Effects of Gender on Knowledge Scores of ES before and after implementation of NEP.

Particular(s)	SS	df	MS	F	p	Partial $\eta^2$
Knowledge score before and after NEP	131.349	1	131.349	9.348	.002	.022
Gender	35.490	1	35.490	2.550	.111	.006
Knowledge score before NEP and after NEP $\times$ Gender	1.037	1	1.037	0.075	.785	.000
Error	5817.626	418	13.918			
Total	335999.000	422				
Corrected Total	5990.467	421				

**Table 8:** Two-Way ANOVA Results for the Effects of Gender on Attitude Scores of ES before and after implementation of NEP.

Particular(s)	SS	df	MS	F	p	Partial $\eta^2$
Attitude score before and after NEP	50.152	1	50.152	2.847	.092	.007
Gender	15.520	1	15.520	0.881	.348	.002
Attitude score before NEP and after NEP $\times$ Gender	27.087	1	27.087	1.537	.216	.004
Error	7399.623	420	13.918			
Total	335999.000	424				
Corrected Total	5990.467	423				

t-test was conducted to compare the difference in overall score of ES among undergraduate students before the implementation of NEP 2020 ( $M= 97.75$ ,  $SD= 9.507$ ) and after the implementation of NEP ( $M= 95.73$ ,  $SD= 8.930$ ). The obtained t-value is 2.194, and the difference (df) is 420; the p-value is .029. The p-value is less than the significance level of 0.05 (Table 6). Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected. There is a significant difference in the overall mean score of ES before and after the implementation of NEP 2020. It means, implementation of NEP 2020 has an impact on the overall score of ES on the undergraduate students towards environmental sustainability.

### Objective 3

To compare the knowledge, attitudes, and practices of students towards sustainability with regard to gender before and after the implementation of NEP 2020.

**H<sub>05</sub>:** *There is no significant difference in the knowledge score of students towards environmental sustainability in regards to gender of undergraduate students in West Bengal before and after the implementation of NEP 2020.*

**Findings:** A two-way ANOVA was conducted in SPSS to find the effect of NEP 2020 and the effect of gender on the knowledge score in ES. The result (Table 7) shows that the effect of implementing NEP 2020 was statistically significant,  $F(1, 418) = 9.348$ ,  $p = 0.002$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.022$ . Since the p-value is 0.002, which is less than 0.05, the null hypothesis is rejected. The effect size ( $\eta^2 = 0.022$ ) indicates that the implementation of NEP 2020 has 2.2% variance in undergraduate students' knowledge scores in ES.

The effect of gender on knowledge score (Table 7) is not statistically significant,  $F(1, 418) = 2.550$ ,  $p = 0.111$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.006$ ; the p-value is greater than 0.05, so the null hypothesis is not rejected. The effect size (0.006) suggests that gender has negligible variance in students' knowledge scores in ES.

The effect of the implementation of NEP on students' knowledge scores on ES and gender was not statistically

significant (Table 7). The value,  $F(1, 418) = 1.037$ ,  $p = 0.075$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.000$ , explains that the interaction between implementation of NEP and gender did not vary across the knowledge score of students in ES.

**H<sub>06</sub>:** *There is no significant difference in the attitude score of students towards environmental sustainability in regards to gender of undergraduate students in West Bengal before and after the implementation of NEP 2020.*

**Findings:** A two-way ANOVA was conducted in SPSS to find the effect of NEP 2020 and the effect of gender on the attitude score in ES. The result (Table 8) shows that the effect of implementing NEP 2020 was not statistically significant,  $F(1, 420) = 2.847$ ,  $p = 0.092$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.007$ . Since the p-value is 0.092, which is greater than 0.05, the null hypothesis is not rejected. The effect size ( $\eta^2 = .007$ ) indicates that the implementation of NEP 2020 has no variance in undergraduate students' attitude scores in ES.

The effect of gender on attitude score (Table 8) is not statistically significant,  $F(1, 420) = 0.881$ ,  $p = 0.348$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.002$ ; the p-value is greater than 0.05, so the null hypothesis is not rejected. The effect size (0.002) suggests that gender has negligible variance in students' attitude scores in ES.

The effect of the implementation of NEP on students' attitude scores on ES and gender was not statistically significant (Table 8). The value,  $F(1, 420) = 1.537$ ,  $p = 0.216$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.004$ , explains that the interaction between implementation of NEP and gender did not vary across the attitude score of students in ES.

**H<sub>07</sub>:** *There is no significant difference in the practice score of students towards environmental sustainability in regards to the gender of undergraduate students in West Bengal before and after the implementation of NEP 2020.*

**Findings:** A two-way ANOVA was conducted in SPSS to find the effect of NEP 2020 and the effect of gender on the practice score in ES. The result (Table 9) shows that the effect of implementing NEP 2020 was not significant,  $F(1, 420)$

**Table 9:** Two-Way ANOVA Results for the Effects of Gender on Practice Scores of ES before and after implementation of NEP.

Particular(s)	SS	df	MS	F	p	Partial $\eta^2$
Practice score before and after NEP	0.647	1	0.647	0.031	0.860	0.000
Gender	2.988	1	2.988	0.144	0.704	0.000
Practice score before NEP and after NEP $\times$ Gender	0.461	1	0.461	0.022	0.882	0.000
Error	8701.050	420	20.717			
Total	409317.000	424				
Corrected Total	8705.941	423				

**Table 10:** Two-Way ANOVA Results for the Effects of Gender on Overall Scores of ES before and after implementation of NEP.

Particular(s)	SS	df	MS	F	p	Partial $\eta^2$
Overall score before and after NEP	391.544	1	391.544	4.659	0.031	0.011
Gender	26.944	1	26.944	0.321	0.572	0.001
Overall score before NEP and after NEP $\times$ Gender	15.651	1	15.651	0.022	0.666	0.000
Error	35129.789	418	84.043			
Total	3963986.000	422				
Corrected Total	35567.384	421				

=0.031,  $p = 0.860$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.000$ . Since the p-value is 0.860, which is greater than 0.05, the null hypothesis is not rejected. The effect size ( $\eta^2 = .000$ ) indicates that the implementation of NEP 2020 has no variance in undergraduate students' practice scores in ES (Table 9).

The effect of gender on practice score (Table 9) is not statistically significant,  $F(1, 420) = 0.144$ ,  $p = 0.704$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.000$ ; the p-value is greater than 0.05, so the null hypothesis is not rejected. The effect size (0.000) suggests that gender has no variance in students' practice scores in ES.

The effect of the implementation of NEP on students' practice scores on ES and gender (Table 9) was not statistically significant. The value,  $F(1, 420) = 0.022$ ,  $p = 0.882$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.000$ , explains that the interaction between implementation of NEP and gender did not vary across the practice score of students in ES.

**H<sub>0s</sub>:** *There is no significant difference in the overall score of students towards environmental sustainability in regards to the gender of undergraduate students in West Bengal before and after the implementation of NEP 2020.*

**Findings:** A two-way ANOVA was conducted in SPSS to find the effect of NEP 2020 and the effect of gender on the overall score in ES. The result (Table 10) shows that the effect of implementing NEP 2020 was significant,  $F(1, 418) = 4.659$ ,  $p = 0.031$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.011$ . Since the p-value is 0.031, which is less than 0.05, the null hypothesis is rejected. The effect size ( $\eta^2 = .011$ ) indicates that the implementation of NEP 2020 has 1.1% variance in undergraduate students' overall scores in ES (Table YYY).

The effect of gender on overall score (Table 10) is not statistically significant,  $F(1, 418) = 0.321$ ,  $p = 0.572$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.001$ ; the p-value is greater than 0.05, so the null hypothesis is not rejected. The effect size (.000) suggests that gender has almost no variance in students' overall scores in ES.

The implementation of NEP on students' overall scores on ES and gender was not statistically significant (Table 10).

The value,  $F(1, 418) = 0.186$ ,  $p = 0.666$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.000$ , explains that the interaction between implementation of NEP and gender did not vary across the overall score of students in ES.

## DISCUSSION

One of the significant factors identified in this study is the existing curriculum that lacks a pragmatic approach and hands-on activity. This finding aligns with the work of Adams *et al.* (2018), who emphasized the need for designing and implementing enabling frameworks in university culture to promote sustainability. The theoretical orientation of the curriculum, without practical engagement, limits the development of environmental awareness and sustainable practices among students. To address this, scholars have advocated for experiential learning models that immerse students in real-world environmental challenges (Basu and Ghosh, 2024). Furthermore, integrating practical approaches such as field visits and project-based learning has been shown to significantly enhance environmental engagement (Kumar and Singh, 2024). The assessment of NEP's current environmental curriculum suggests that while the framework is robust, the delivery mechanisms remain weak (De and Sinha, 2025).

The study also reveals that while there is no significant difference in environmental KAP with respect to gender, significant differences exist with respect to locality of residence. Rural students demonstrated higher knowledge, more positive attitudes, and better practices towards environmental sustainability compared to their urban counterparts. This finding corroborates the research of Axelsson *et al.* (2013), who discussed the importance of social and cultural sustainability criteria and their measurement. The closer connection to nature and dependence on natural resources in rural areas may explain why rural students show greater environmental awareness and engagement. This rural-urban disparity is a recurring theme in environmental education literature (Pal and Mitra, 2023; Das and Bhattacharjee, 2024). Thakur and Verma (2024) further noted that locality significantly shapes

environmental consciousness among Indian youth, with rural populations often exhibiting more sustainable practices due to direct dependency on natural ecosystems.

Regarding gender, the findings suggest minimal variation in environmental attitudes and behaviors, which contradicts some earlier studies but aligns with recent trends where gender gaps in environmentalism are narrowing (Bhatt and Shah, 2023; Sharma and Gupta, 2024). This convergence could be attributed to the universal exposure to environmental crises through media and general education, transcending traditional gender roles.

The findings of this study have important implications for policy and practice. First, there is an urgent need to strengthen the practical components of environmental education in the curriculum. As suggested by Dash *et al.* (2023), skills-based education through NEP 2020 can drive employability and sustainable careers. Incorporating field visits, hands-on projects, community engagement, and experiential learning opportunities can enhance students' environmental knowledge and foster sustainable practices. Community-based approaches to environmental education have proven effective in fostering long-term sustainable behavior among students (Chakravarty and Mukherjee, 2023).

Second, the study highlights the importance of context-specific approaches to environmental education. The differences observed between rural and urban students suggest that environmental education programmes should be tailored to the specific needs and circumstances of different student populations. This is consistent with the findings of Bhattacharya (2024), who emphasized the importance of embracing global citizenship while addressing local contexts.

Third, the lack of significant improvement in environmental KAP after NEP 2020 implementation points to the need for systematic execution and monitoring of the policy. Teacher training, resource allocation, and institutional support are crucial for the successful implementation of environmental education programmes. Sen and Ganguly (2024) emphasized that teacher preparedness is a critical factor that determines the success of curricular reforms. Without these enabling conditions, the objectives of NEP 2020 regarding environmental sustainability may not be fully realized.

Fourth, the study suggests that greater integration of environmental sustainability across disciplines, rather than treating it as a standalone subject, can enhance student engagement and learning. As highlighted by various scholars, interdisciplinary approaches to environmental education can foster holistic understanding and sustainable behavior (Agarwal and Singh, 2024).

The students' eagerness to know more about sustainable practices through their curriculum, as noted in the abstract, indicates a readiness and willingness to engage with environmental issues. This presents an opportunity for educators and policymakers to harness student interest and motivation to create more effective environmental education programmes.

## CONCLUSIONS

The following conclusions have been drawn from the present study:

- There is a significant difference in the mean score of knowledge of ES before and after the implementation of NEP 2020. The mean score after the implementation of NEP 2020 is slightly lower than before the implementation of NEP 2020. It means, implementation of NEP 2020 did not increase the knowledge of environmental sustainability among the students; rather, it declined their knowledge.
- There is no significant difference in the mean score of the attitude of ES before and after the implementation of NEP 2020. It means, implementation of NEP 2020 did impact the attitude of the undergraduate students towards environmental sustainability.
- There is no significant difference in the mean score of the practice of ES before and after the implementation of NEP 2020. It means, implementation of NEP 2020 did impact the practice of the undergraduate students towards environmental sustainability.
- There is a significant difference in the overall mean score of ES before and after the implementation of NEP 2020. It means, implementation of NEP 2020 has an impact on the overall score of ES on the undergraduate students towards environmental sustainability.
- The effect of the implementation of NEP on students' knowledge scores on ES and gender was not statistically significant.
- The effect of the implementation of NEP on students' attitude scores on ES and gender was not statistically significant.
- The effect of the implementation of NEP on students' practice scores on ES and gender was not statistically significant.
- The implementation of NEP on students' overall scores on ES and gender was not statistically significant i.e. explains that the interaction between implementation of NEP and gender did not vary across the overall score of students in ES.

This study will create a skilled green economy workforce through training programs to identify sustainable related skill gaps among students, who will continue to drive growth in the green job market (Nandy and Chaudhuri, 2025).

The study also enables the teachers and students to enhance their abilities related to social sustainability, such as encouraging participation, collaboration, open communication, creating solutions to challenges, building strong and supportive communities.

The findings underscore the need for a more comprehensive and practical approach to environmental education in higher education institutions. While NEP 2020 provides a policy framework for integrating environmental sustainability, its effective implementation requires attention to pedagogical

approaches, curricular content, teacher training, and institutional support. The significant differences observed between rural and urban students also highlight the importance of context-specific interventions and the need to address urban-rural disparities in environmental awareness and practices.

Future research should explore the specific factors that contribute to the observed differences between rural and urban students and examine the effectiveness of different pedagogical approaches in enhancing environmental KAP. Longitudinal studies tracking students' environmental KAP throughout their academic journey can provide valuable insights into the developmental trajectory of environmental consciousness and the factors that influence it.

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### Acknowledgement

The authors are thankful to the authority of Aliah University and all members of the Aliah University Research and Development Cell (AUDRC) for providing assistance in completing the project work and in publishing this research.

### Grant Support Details

This is an outcome of the project granted by the AURDC of Aliah University. Grant Number AURDC/2024-25/EDU/02 in the letter with Memo number AU/REG/RDC/0017/25 Dated 19/03/2025.

### Conflict of Interest

The author declares that there is not any conflict of interests regarding the publication of this manuscript. In addition, the ethical issues, including plagiarism, informed consent, misconduct, data fabrication and/ or falsification, double publication and/or submission, and redundancy has been completely observed by the authors.

### Life Science Reporting

No Life Science reporting needed for this paper since no life science threat was practised in this research.

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