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Elements of Innovative Pedagogy in Higher Education: Case Study of the University of Delhi

ALKA BEHARI[1]

University of Delhi

ABSTRACT

This article analyzes elements of innovative pedagogy in Indian higher education through a case study of the University of Delhi (DU). Building on contemporary scholarship on pedagogical innovation (blended learning, online teaching-learning, experiential education, and task-oriented curriculum design) and drawing on DU's institutional quality documents and policy-facing curricular frameworks, the study conceptualizes "innovation" as a set of pedagogical design moves—not merely technology adoption. Methodologically, the paper uses a qualitative case-study approach based on documentary analysis (DU Self-Study Reports and publicly available teaching-learning guidance), triangulated with peer-reviewed research on online and blended learning during and after the COVID-19 disruption and with DU-linked research dissertations on experiential learning. Results identify five innovation clusters at DU: (1) curricular modularization and flexibility aligned with national policy (NEP and curriculum-credit frameworks), (2) blended/online teaching-learning infrastructure and practice, (3) experiential learning and internship-based skill formation, (4) undergraduate research and inquiry-based learning, and (5) institutional quality assurance as a diffusion mechanism for teaching-learning innovations. The discussion argues that DU's innovations are best understood as a system of interlocking reforms—curricular, technological, and practice-based—whose effectiveness depends on faculty development, assessment redesign,

[1] Dr. Alka Behari, Department of Education, Lady Irwin College, Delhi University, India. E-mail: alka_behari@yahoo.co.in

and equity-oriented infrastructure. The conclusion proposes an evaluative model for "innovation readiness" in large multi-college universities and offers recommendations for scaling pedagogical innovation without eroding disciplinary depth.

Keywords: innovative pedagogy; higher education; University of Delhi; blended learning; online teaching-learning; experiential learning; undergraduate research; NEP 2020; curriculum reform; quality assurance; case study.

I. INTRODUCTION

"Innovative pedagogy" in higher education is frequently equated with the adoption of educational technology—learning management systems, MOOCs, or video lectures. This equation is incomplete. Innovation in pedagogy is better conceptualized as the redesign of learning environments: how knowledge is sequenced, how students engage with disciplinary practices, how assessment captures competence, and how learning is supported for diverse cohorts. In large public universities, innovation is additionally constrained and enabled by institutional scale, affiliating colleges, resource variation, and policy regimes.

The University of Delhi is a suitable case for studying innovation because it is a large, multi-college public university that has recently navigated multiple overlapping transitions: the rapid move to online teaching during COVID-19; the policy push for curricular flexibility and skills orientation under India's National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020); and the longer-running institutionalization of quality processes through SSR/NAAC-linked documentation and internal quality assurance structures. DU's own Self-Study Report emphasizes blended approaches and active learning spaces, framing innovation as both infrastructural and pedagogical.

This paper addresses the following questions:

1. What elements of innovative pedagogy are visible in DU's teaching-learning ecosystem when examined through institutional documents and DU-linked research outputs?

2. How do these elements align with established scholarship on online/blended learning, experiential learning, and learning design under higher-education reform?

3. What enabling conditions and bottlenecks shape the effectiveness and equity of innovation in a large affiliating university?

The paper contributes a structured analytic model that treats innovation as a multi-layered system: policy and curriculum design; learning design and assessment; faculty capability; infrastructure; and institutional mechanisms for scaling and quality.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Innovative pedagogy in higher education commonly includes learner-centered strategies, active learning, and technology-mediated designs. However, the strongest research traditions treat innovation not as novelty but as learning-effective change—improving engagement, depth of processing, and transferable competence. In the online/blended domain, studies repeatedly show that the value of blended learning lies in intentional integration of face-to-face and digital interaction rather than mere "adding online content."

In the COVID-19 era, a major research stream analyzed the rapid transition to online teaching-learning and identified recurring requirements: platform readiness, faculty training, student access, assessment redesign, and socio-emotional support. Mishra et al. emphasize essentialities and institutional resource mobilization for online teaching-learning continuity.

Empirical work during the pandemic documents both potentials (continuity, flexible access) and limitations (digital divide, reduced interaction quality, assessment

integrity concerns). An India-focused contribution in *Tuning Journal for Higher Education* examines virtual-mode teaching-learning and stresses infrastructural/logistical requirements for effective online learning—an issue especially salient in large public systems.

Within this landscape, case studies are valuable because implementation conditions vary significantly across institutions. A Delhi University–specific case study on online education strategies during COVID-19 reports on institutional approaches and practical strategies used to sustain instruction.

Pedagogical innovation is constrained or enabled by curriculum architecture. NEP 2020 explicitly calls for experiential, holistic, inquiry-driven, discussion-based, flexible pedagogy, making curricular reform a driver of classroom innovation. The UGC's curriculum and credit framework for undergraduate programs (FYUGP/CCF) operationalizes multiple-entry/exit and credit structures, which affects course modularization, assessment cadence, and student pathways—key determinants of learning design. DU's own Undergraduate Curriculum Framework (UGCF) materials, produced for NEP implementation, further situate curriculum redesign as a major institutional undertaking.

Experiential learning—internships, field-based projects, community engagement, practice-based assignments—has become a central innovation vector because it links disciplinary knowledge to skills and professional identity. DU-linked research explicitly analyzes internships as experiential learning in a program context (Cluster Innovation Centre dissertation), providing an internal lens on design and impact. DU colleges also formalize internship schemes as structured experiential learning initiatives, indicating diffusion of practice-based pedagogy across the DU ecosystem.

Inquiry-based learning and undergraduate research function as high-impact practices in higher education, often treated as innovative because they transform students from consumers to producers of knowledge. DU's undergraduate research journal material reflects a local institutional culture that supports undergraduate research as a learning mode, at least in certain units and programs.

For large systems, innovation scales through institutional mechanisms. DU's IQAC pages and SSR documentation indicate that quality assurance structures are used to describe, standardize, and disseminate best practices and teaching-learning initiatives across units.

III. METHODS

This study uses a qualitative case study design focusing on the University of Delhi. The purpose is analytical generalization: deriving a conceptual model of pedagogical innovation in a large public university, rather than statistical generalization to all Indian higher education.

The analysis is based on three data types:

1. Institutional documents: DU Self-Study Reports (SSR) and DU public pages describing teaching-learning supports (e.g., online teaching-learning guidance).

2. Policy frameworks: NEP 2020 and UGC curriculum-credit framework for undergraduate programs, plus DU's UGCF materials for NEP implementation.

3. Research literature and DU-linked studies: peer-reviewed studies on online/blended learning in higher education and DU-specific or DU-linked dissertations and case studies on experiential learning and online teaching strategies.

Documents were coded using a thematic framework capturing: (a) innovation domain (curriculum, digital pedagogy, experiential learning, research-based learning, inclusion/support), (b) pedagogical mechanism (active learning, scaffolding, assessment redesign, feedback systems), (c) institutional enablers (training, infrastructure, policy alignment, QA), and (d) constraints (access inequities, workload, assessment validity, fragmentation across colleges).

IV. RESULTS

Innovation Cluster 1: Curriculum architecture as a platform for pedagogical innovation

DU's recent reform environment positions curriculum design as a primary innovation lever. NEP 2020 emphasizes experiential and inquiry-driven pedagogy and encourages flexible, multidisciplinary pathways. This policy signal is operationalized through the UGC's curriculum-credit framework that institutionalizes credits, semesters, and multi-exit pathways, which in turn requires course modularization and more frequent assessment/feedback cycles. DU's UGCF materials explicitly frame NEP implementation as a large-scale institutional undertaking involving extensive course structures.

At the pedagogical level, modular curricula enable innovations such as micro-projects embedded in courses, competency-based assignments aligned with learning outcomes, and interdisciplinary electives that require new assessment formats (portfolios, reflective writing, applied problem sets). DU's SSR language—highlighting blended approaches, active learning, and skill development spaces—supports the interpretation that curriculum and pedagogy are co-designed rather than separate layers.

Innovation Cluster 2: Blended and online teaching-learning as institutionalized practice

DU publicly documents its online teaching-learning supports, including the use of platforms such as Google Classroom as an LMS-like environment for sharing materials, assignments, links, and online tests. This suggests institutional normalization of digital course management, at least at the guidance level. DU's SSR also states emphasis on blended approaches and the availability of modern learning spaces, linking "innovation" to a hybrid infrastructure model.

The DU-specific COVID-era case study highlights how online teaching strategies were framed as a continuity solution and describes institution-level approaches to manage the transition. More broadly, Indian higher-education research identifies persistent constraints: device and connectivity gaps, limited interaction, and assessment integrity challenges—factors that shape the effectiveness of blended innovation in public universities.

A key result is that DU's innovation in this cluster is not reducible to "moving online." The institutional pattern is better described as **platform adoption + blended intent**: (1) a baseline digital infrastructure for distributing learning resources and managing assignments; (2) a stated commitment to combining digital supports with conventional classroom modalities; and (3) the need for faculty development to translate tools into learning-effective designs.

Innovation Cluster 3: Experiential learning through internships and practice-based programs

Experiential learning appears as a concrete innovation channel in DU through structured internship schemes and program-based models. A DU-linked dissertation from Cluster Innovation Centre investigates internships as market-driven skill development in a program context, indicating internal scholarly attention to experiential learning design and outcomes. This matters because it signals movement beyond ad hoc internships toward research-informed curricular integration.

At the college level, internship schemes are explicitly described as experiential learning mechanisms enabling application of classroom concepts in real contexts (e.g., structured internship programs). The system-level implication is that DU's innovation is partially "distributed": colleges implement localized experiential learning initiatives that can later be formalized through quality documentation and best-practice diffusion.

The pedagogical signature here is **authentic task alignment**: internships and field projects demand writing professional artifacts (reports, reflective logs), presenting findings, and translating disciplinary knowledge into workplace outputs. These practices

represent innovation because they expand learning outcomes from conceptual mastery to situated competence and professional identity formation.

Innovation Cluster 4: Undergraduate research and inquiry-based learning

DU's undergraduate research publication demonstrates a local ecosystem where undergraduate research is recognized as a learning pathway, including references to undergraduate research practice and program models. Even when such practices are not uniformly distributed across all colleges and departments, their institutional visibility is pedagogically significant: undergraduate research is a high-impact practice that transforms the student role, increases engagement, and supports advanced cognitive outcomes.

From an innovation perspective, undergraduate research functions as a **pedagogy of participation**: students engage with research questions, methods, and dissemination formats. The innovation lies not only in content but in epistemic practice—students learn how disciplinary knowledge is produced, debated, and validated.

Innovation Cluster 5: Quality assurance and institutional mechanisms for scaling pedagogy

DU's institutional documentation includes IQAC structures and Self-Study Reports that describe teaching-learning approaches, learning spaces, and innovation-oriented practices. These documents matter pedagogically because they function as **organizational memory** and diffusion instruments: they enumerate practices (blended approaches, labs, seminars, internships, case methods), which can shape internal standards and legitimacy for certain pedagogies.

A related result is that innovation is "audited into visibility." Practices that become documentable—faculty development activities, digital resources, experiential programs, research-based learning—become more likely to scale because they are legible to institutional processes (accreditation, reporting, benchmarking). DU's SSR statements

explicitly reference blended approaches and active learning; earlier SSR material lists practices such as case studies, labs, seminars, presentations, and internships.

V. DISCUSSION

The case study indicates that innovative pedagogy at DU is best understood as a system of interlocking elements:

- Policy-driven curriculum redesign (NEP + UGC frameworks + DU UGCF) enables modularity and flexibility, which can support new learning designs.

- Digital course management and blended intent provide an infrastructure basis for flipped elements, continuous assessment, and resource-rich learning environments.

- Experiential learning mechanisms operationalize skills and employability agendas through internships and applied work.

- Inquiry-based and research-based practices provide a pathway for advanced cognitive outcomes and academic identity development.

- Quality assurance institutionalizes and diffuses innovation by making it visible, comparable, and reportable.

This systemic view helps avoid a common error: treating innovation as a "tool choice." In practice, tools matter only insofar as they reorganize learning activities, feedback loops, and assessment.

The literature on online teaching-learning during COVID-19 emphasizes infrastructure and resource conditions: connectivity, devices, and the logistical supports required for effective online education. In a large public university, the risk is unevenness: some colleges and departments may implement strong blended designs while others rely

on low-interaction content delivery. DU's institutional intent toward blended learning exists, but effectiveness depends on scalable faculty development and consistent student access.

Assessment is another binding constraint. Modular curricula and blended learning often increase continuous assessment demands. Without redesign, innovation can devolve into increased workload (for teachers and students) without improved learning. A well-functioning innovation system requires assessment validity—rubrics, performance tasks, academic integrity strategies, and feedback capacity.

From this case, five "innovation primitives" emerge—pedagogical moves that can travel across disciplines:

1. Modular pathway design (credits, electives, entry/exit): enables personalized trajectories but requires advising and coherent prerequisite logic.

2. Blended learning design (pre-class input, in-class application, post-class consolidation): requires structured interaction, not mere platform use.

3. Experiential assignments (internship, field project, community engagement): demands explicit reflection and assessment alignment.

4. Inquiry sequences (research questions → methods → output): builds disciplinary thinking; scales through labs, writing support, and mentoring.

5. Quality documentation and communities of practice: supports diffusion and institutional learning; risk is performativity if not connected to outcomes.

DU's case shows that "innovation" is most sustainable when these primitives are integrated rather than implemented as isolated pilots.

For DU and similar universities, the most actionable implications are:

- Faculty development as design training: shift training from "how to use tools" to "how to design blended sequences, assess authentic tasks, and manage feedback." DU's public guidance is a baseline; scaling requires deep pedagogical design support.

- Equity-first infrastructure: blended learning effectiveness is bounded by access; institutional strategies must address device/internet constraints identified across the literature.

- Assessment redesign: align continuous assessment with learning outcomes; incorporate authentic tasks from experiential learning and research-based learning.

- Diffusion mechanisms: use IQAC and SSR processes to identify best practices, but complement documentation with evidence of learning outcomes and student experience.

VI. CONCLUSION

This case study of the University of Delhi shows that innovative pedagogy in higher education is not a single technique but a system shaped by policy reform, digital infrastructure, experiential learning, research-based learning, and institutional quality mechanisms. DU exhibits multiple innovation clusters: curricular flexibility aligned with NEP and UGC frameworks, blended/online teaching-learning supports, experiential learning through internships, undergraduate research cultures, and quality assurance structures that document and diffuse teaching-learning practices.

The main challenge is implementation coherence: innovation must be supported by faculty development, assessment redesign, and equity-oriented infrastructure. The DU case suggests a transferable evaluative model for large public universities: innovation readiness is high when (1) curriculum architecture supports modular learning paths, (2) blended learning is designed around interaction and feedback, (3) experiential learning is

assessed as learning (not just placement), (4) inquiry practices are mentored and resourced, and (5) quality processes capture outcomes, not only activities.

Future research should extend this documentary case study with mixed-method evidence—classroom observations, student learning analytics (where ethically feasible), comparative college-level implementation studies, and longitudinal tracking of learning outcomes under UGCF/NEP-aligned reforms.

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