

Commerce Education and The State: Policy Attention, Neglect, And Structural Contradictions

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doi.org/10.64643/IJIRTV12I12-202621-459

Abstract—Commerce education holds a paradoxical position in the contemporary systems of higher education, especially in India, where it is simultaneously widely enrolled and unevenly represented in terms of policy discourse. Although it is central to underpinning employability and economic activity, it is peripheral in terms of articulating a policy statement and theoretical growth. This study explores the connection between the state and commerce education by analyzing it in terms of policy attention, neglect and structural contradictions and how visibility exists alongside marginalization.

This research is a qualitative and theory-focused one with the foundation of a systematic study of policy documents, institutional frameworks, and secondary sources. It is based on the global policy discourses shaped by organizations like OECD, UNESCO, and the World Bank, with special reference to India, especially in the light of the National Education Policy 2020 and the regulatory frameworks established by the University Grants Commission. Based on lessons learned from the agenda-setting theory and policy neglect frameworks, this study examines how commerce education is framed, prioritised, and often neglected in policy-making discourses.

The findings of the study show that commerce education is also marked by the selective policy visibility without corresponding depth, where employability rhetoric often masks weak academic foundations and limited curricular innovation. At the international level, commerce education is often subsumed within broader business education, diluting its disciplinary character. In India, growth has been experienced despite a disproportionate investment in research capacity, faculty development or systemic curriculum reform. This leads to a situation of what can be referred to as instrumental neglect, where the discipline is valued economically, but not developed as an academic discipline.

The study also establishes five structural contradictions within state policy: massification vs. quality, employability vs. academic depth, standardization vs. institutional autonomy, globalism vs. localism, and vocationalization vs. academic identity. These

contradictions demonstrate a policy environment that is influenced by conflicting priorities and governance logics.

This study contributes by constructing a state-centred conceptual framework for understanding disciplinary positioning in higher education and provides a critical policy approach towards commerce education. It advocates for a more logical and well-balanced policy that integrates expansion with intellectual and disciplinary recognition.

Index Terms—Commerce Education; Curriculum; Employability; Higher Education; India; Policy Neglect; State Policy; Structural Contradictions

I. INTRODUCTION

One of the crucial global changes in the knowledge economy has been the expansion of higher education during the last few decades. Massification in systems of both developed and developing countries has been rapid, with a rise in enrolment, diversification of institutions, and the rise of higher education to greater importance in the economic and social policy agenda (Trow, 2007; Marginson, 2018; Durazzi et al., 2025; Bhattacharya, 2024). The governments have actively sought expansion as one way of fostering economic growth, social mobility and national competitiveness. This is the case in India, where the rate of higher education enrolment has grown exponentially over the years, making it one of the largest systems in the world (Naik et al., 2024).

Along with this growth, a change in state priorities has occurred, with higher education becoming a tool of human capital development, employability, and competitiveness at the global level (OECD, 2019; World Bank Group, 2020; Ali, 2023; Madi et al., 2026). Nevertheless, although the system has grown in general, there have been disparities in policy focus

across disciplines. The disciplines such as science, technology, engineering, and innovation-oriented fields receive disproportionate attention in national and global policy frameworks. These supports comprise higher funding, infrastructure, and strategic attention (Marginson, 2018; Dill & Frans, 2010; Bhattacharya, 2024; Hossain, 2025). Other disciplines, however, given their size, have relatively little conceptual and policy attention.

In this changing environment, commerce education stands in an incongruous place. It is one of the most enrolled disciplines, especially in countries like India, where it forms a large proportion of the undergraduate (UG) education (Naik et al., 2024). In most institutions, commerce programs make up a big percentage of total student enrolment and institutional offerings. Conversely, commerce education is an under-theorized and comparatively invisible in policy discourse. It is usually included in wider groups like “business education,” “management studies” and “skills and vocational training,” and as such lacks a distinct disciplinary identity/recognition (Altbach et al., 2009; Hazelkorn, 2015; Bharvad & Bharvad, 2024; Madegowda, 2026).

The functional orientation of commerce education further complicates its positioning. Commerce education has traditionally been linked with courses like accounting, finance, business law, taxation, etc., but is now being more closely linked to employability and skill development agendas (Gary S. Becker, 1993; Brown et al., 2011; Singh & Dixit, 2025; Marginson, 2025). Policymakers often stress the need to prepare “job-ready graduates,” which makes commerce education one of the primary contributors to workforce preparation. Meanwhile, such instrumental framing may tend to restrict its development as a theoretically-based and research-oriented discipline (Ronald Barnett, 2011; Wheelahan, 2010; Muganga et al., 2024; Holdings, 2024). Consequently, commerce education is in danger of becoming too vocational a field as opposed to the building as a robust intellectual discipline.

A series of interconnected paradoxes arise out of this tension and this is the focus of this study. High enrolment and low policy visibility are clearly contradictory. The numerical dominance notwithstanding, the sphere of commerce education is often neglected when it comes to receipt of dedicated

attention in major policy documents, when compared to priority disciplines, Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) or innovation-focused disciplines (Tilak, 2015; Brooks et al., 2023). Furthermore, there is a disjuncture between skill-oriented rhetoric and curricular transformation. Although the policy frameworks are based on the emphases of employability, entrepreneurship, and industry relevance, the real curricular reforms in the field of commerce education can be described as rather incremental, compliance-based, and fragmented (Hyoo, 2025; Wall et al., 2024). This leads to minimal adoption of new fields like digital business, data analytics, and sustainability into mainstream curricula. The occurrence of these paradoxes is not just a descriptive anomaly but points to more far-reaching structural problems. The disregard of the study of commerce programs is manifested at several levels, among them being the stagnation of curriculum, lack of research focus, faculty development gaps, and silence of policy towards its distinct identity (Bacchi, 2009; Tilak, 2015; Sabouri et al., 2026; Brooks et al., 2023). This implies that the problem is not one of omission but rather of systematic marginalization in the larger political economy of higher education.

Although the volume and importance of commerce education is substantial, state-focused analytical studies remain limited. The literature on higher education policy available focuses on system level expansion, governance reforms, or high-priority disciplines. When commerce or business education is addressed, it is frequently considered alongside employability outcomes or management education, but not as a distinct discipline shaped by state policy logics (Dill & Frans, 2010; Marginson, 2018; Hossain, 2025; Bhattacharya, 2024). As a result, a conceptual and analytical vacuum/gap is present in the way commerce education is articulated, prioritized or overlooked in the policy frameworks.

To address and fill this gap, this study adopts a state-centred, policy-analytical approach. It perceives policy not as a tool but as a discursive and strategic domain, where priorities are constructed, silences are produced, and contradictions are embedded (Stephen J. Ball, 2012; Rizaludin, 2025). By doing so, the study transcends descriptive narratives to provide a critical inquiry into the state-commerce education nexus, in terms of how policy attention, neglect, and

contradiction shape the discipline. Additionally, this study aims to address the following research questions:

- a) How does the state articulate commerce education in its policy discourse?
- b) Where and how does neglect manifest within the policy framework?
- c) What structural contradictions shape the relationship between policy and practice in commerce education?

Although the discussion is placed in the larger global policy framework, the emphasis is on India. It (i.e., India) offers a notably relevant setting because of the size of its system of higher education as well as the prominence of commerce education. The National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020) and regulatory frameworks proposed by the University Grants Commission (UGC) are examples of policy developments that are essential to examine how commerce education is framed, supported or neglected by national policy discourse (Wall et al., 2024; Bishop & Omorojie, 2025).

With this introduction, the rest of the study is presented as follows. Section 2 builds the conceptual and theoretical framework, using the literature on state, policy analysis, and higher education. Section 3 discusses the methodology, including sources of data and the method of analysis. Section 4 places commerce education in the context of global policy. Section 5 discusses the policy focus on commerce education in India. In Section 6, major areas of neglect are identified and analyzed. Section 7 examines structural contradictions that shape state policy. A synthesis of findings is presented in Section 8. Section 9 summarizes policy implications, and the last section presents the contributions and limitations of the study, and concludes with the identification of areas for future research.

II. CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This section builds the analytical background of the study by integrating theoretical highlights on the state, policy processes, and higher education. It offers an organized prism through which one can explore the place of commerce education in policy discourse, not as the result of expansion but as a product of selective attention, institutional silences and systemic

contradictions. The discussion continues with the evolving role of the state, theorizing about the policy focus and lack of focus, outlining structural contradictions and placing commerce education within this context of the contradiction.

A. The State and Education: Evolving Roles and Contradictions

The political economy and the governance in the state have changed tremendously over the years, and so has the relationship between the state and education. These transformations can be viewed in terms of three overlapping models, which include the welfare state, the human capital model, and the neoliberal-regulatory state.

- a) Education in the welfare state model was defined as a social good – key to nation-building, social equity, and the formation of citizenship (Thomas & Tom, 1992; Meyer, 1992; Durazzi et al., 2025; Bhattacharya, 2024). The state took the lead in funding, as well as regulation and focused on universal access and social development. Education has been appreciated not only due to its economic payoffs but also due to its intrinsic and social benefits (Naik et al., 2024).
- b) Since the end of the 20th century, the human capital model has shifted this perspective. Education also began to be seen as an investment in productivity and economic growth - both affected by the world institutions as well as the world economic policy structures (Gary S. Becker, 1993; Ali, 2023). This change warranted increased personal cost-sharing, discipline distinction according to economic payoff, and judging by employment results. In this context, commerce education was brought into the limelight as it was perceived to be in line with the labor market requirements (Madi et al., 2026).
- c) Recently, more governance in higher education has been moving towards a more neoliberal-regulatory form of state, which is a combination of reduced direct provision and greater regulatory oversight. Standards, accreditation systems, rankings and accountability mechanisms have replaced direct institutional control of the state (Neave, 1998; Hossain, 2025). This paradigm establishes a set of inherent tensions, as education is at once a “social good” that must be regulated and a “personal good” that must be invested in by individuals. These

tensions are especially pronounced in the area of commerce education, where market-based and academic logic intersect.

In all these changes, education has been conceptualized in three interrelated ways: (i) being a public good, it should focus on fairness and societal cohesion, (ii) being a private investment, with individual returns in mind, and (iii) as a human capital instrument, capitalizing economic competitiveness. These overlapping conceptions produce conflicting priorities in policy making, defining how disciplines like commerce education are valued, promoted or marginalized.

B. Policy Attention and Neglect: Theoretical Foundations

To comprehend the positioning of commerce education, it is important to take a closer look at the construction and distribution of policy attention. The distribution of policy attention is not neutral or even; it is the product of agenda-setting processes, institutional priorities and predominant policy narratives.

- a) Agenda-setting theory, especially that of Kingdon (2014), argues that issues gain prominence when problem recognition, policy solutions, and political conditions align (Bharvad & Bharvad, 2024). Policy focus is thus discriminatory and constitutive, as opposed to being dictated by pure necessity. The high level of enrolment or social importance is not necessarily reflected in policy priority (Madegowda, 2026).
- b) The policy attention can be explicit and implicit. Explicit attention entails explicit strategies, financial commitments, and institutional reforms. Implicit attention is where a field is addressed more obliquely in a wider category, like in the case of “skills,” “employability,” or “business education.” Commerce education usually manifests itself in this unobtrusive way, and hinders its recognition as a distinct policy field (Singh & Dixit, 2025).
- c) Equally important is the policy neglect, i.e., systematic marginalization instead of absolute absence. Policy systems, as Baumgartner & Jones (2013) propose, possess a limited attention capacity, prioritizing on some issues and neglecting others (Marginson, 2025). Neglect in the context of commerce education manifests through (i) absence

of dedicated policy frameworks, (ii) inadequate investment in research and faculty development, and (iii) weak curricular innovation.

This analysis is further intensified by the concept of “policy silence.” According to Bacchi (2009), what is not discussed in the policy discourse is as important as that which is explicitly stated (Muganga et al., 2024). Commerce education can be seen in its expansion and employability, but mostly unseen in its intellectual growth and strategy policy engagement (Holdings, 2024).

This distinction helps in making a distinction between symbolic and substantive attention (Edelman, 1967; Brooks et al., 2023). “Symbolic attention” refers to rhetorical recognition without substantive change, whilst “substantive attention” entails concrete policy actions like funding, institutional restructuring, and capacity building. There is a tendency to provide commerce education with symbolic attention, especially via employability discourse, but with no structural backing.

C. Structural Contradictions: Analytical Lens

Structural contradictions are features of higher education systems, which are the result of conflicting goals within policy frameworks. Such contradictions are not accidental, but they portray some tensions inherent within the system’s governing logic (Kerr, 1963; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2009; Hyoo, 2025; Wall et al., 2024). Structural contradictions are not mere conflicts; they cannot be completely eliminated; on the contrary, they are embedded within the system (Sabouri et al., 2026). Regarding higher education and commerce education, the following contradictions can be identified:

- a) Massification vs. Quality: Growing access challenges institutions by burdening them, and impacting the quality of education, including commerce education (Trow, 2007; Rizaludin, 2025).
- b) Employability vs. Academic Depth: Focusing on job-ready skills may undermine theoretical and analytical learning (Wheeler, 2010; Ronald Barnett, 2011; Bishop & Omorogie, 2025; Hruby, 2025)

c) Standardization vs. Autonomy:

Centralized systems increase comparability, but restrict institutional innovation (Dill & Frans, 2010; Narkhede et al., 2025).

d) Global vs. Local Relevance:

Adaption of international models may be without taking into account local economic and social situations (Verma, 2025).

e) Vocationalization and Academic Identity:

Emphasis on vocational training and practical skills can undermine the disciplinary foundations (Bandhoria et al., 2026).

These contradictions intersect and support each other and define the policy landscape within which commerce education is being operated. They are especially acute in the field of commerce education because of the dual orientation of this discipline on academic knowledge and professional practice.

D. Locating Commerce Education: An Academic-Professional Hybrid

The field of commerce education occupies a unique position as a professional-academic transitional discipline. It is not academic or pure vocational but is at the intersection of multiple domains. Commerce education as a profession equips the students to become accountants, financial analysts and business managers. It should thus be in line with the industry practices, regulatory standards and demands within the labor market. Simultaneously, as an academic discipline, it has such theoretical areas as economics, business theory, and accounting scholarship, which demand research engagement and conceptual depth (Özer, 2024). This hybrid nature brings some tensions, as summarized below:

- a) As commerce borders on accounting, management, economics, etc., there is disciplinary ambiguity.
 - b) Institutional fragmentation, with academic programs spread across colleges, universities and business schools (B-schools).
 - c) Low/weak research identity, as a result of varying methodologies and not having clear evaluation standards.
 - d) Policy marginalization, as commerce education is often subsumed within broader categories.
- Commerce education has not been considered a separate discipline in most policy frameworks, but as

a sub-subject of business education or skill development. This positioning reinforces its instrumental role and, at the same time, restricts intellectual and institutional growth (Petrov, 2025). The following figure summarizes this analysis (Figure 1):

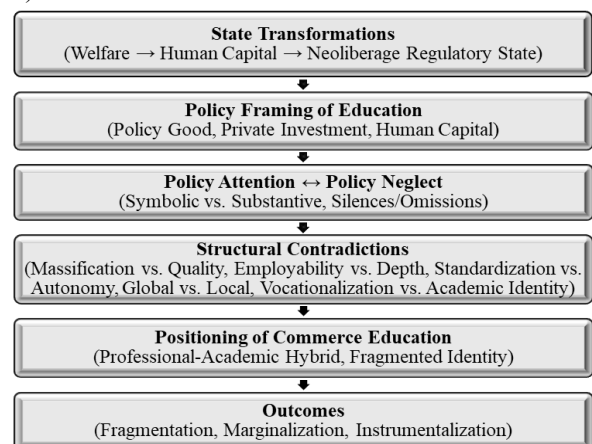


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework Linking State Transformations, Policy Attention–Neglect Dynamics, and the Positioning of Commerce Education

This theoretical framework offers a multi-level analytical perspective of the study. It demonstrates how,

- a) Policy priorities are formed by state transformations,
- b) Disciplinary positioning is framed by policy attention and neglect, and
- c) Tensions arise between the intentions of the policies and their practice due to structural contradictions.

III. METHODOLOGY

This section describes the methodology used in this study to analyze the relationship between the state and commerce education. As the research is aimed at policy articulation, attention and contradiction, the methodology is designed to capture the discursive patterns, institutional positioning and structural gaps as opposed to personal experience.

A. Research Design

The research design used in this study is a qualitative, interpretive and document-based research design. It is not based on primary empirical data such as surveys or interviews. Rather, it methodically examines policy documents, institutional frameworks and other

material to understand how commerce education is constructed, framed and prioritized within state policy. This is an appropriate way to go about it due to many reasons:

- a) Research questions are centered on articulation and policy positioning on the state level, instead of the lived experiences of stakeholders.
- b) Policy documents are the major sources of state intent, which provide insight into priorities, assumptions, and institutional directions.
- c) Document analysis enables making cross-level and cross-context comparisons, linking global policy narratives with national and institutional practices (Durazzi et al., 2025).

The research uses an interpretive (and not positivist) orientation. It attempts to establish meanings, patterns, and contradictions in policy discourse, instead of testing a set of predefined hypotheses. This is consistent with critical policy scholarship, which perceives policy as a discursive and political process, which is shaped by conflicting interests, ideologies and institutional restraints (Bacchi, 2009; Stephen J. Ball, 2012; Bhattacharya, 2024; Naik et al., 2024). Documents are thus seen not as sources of information but as social artefacts that reflect governance priorities and policy logics (Bowen, 2009; Ali, 2023). The research design is structured in such a way that it (i) identifies how commerce education is reflected in policy texts. (ii) looks at the nature and extent of policy attention and neglect, and (iii) evaluates structural contradictions embedded in policy frameworks.

B. Data Sources

This work is based on a purposive and multi-level sample of secondary data sources, which provide breadth and depth of analysis. These sources are grouped into global, national and institutional.

a) Global Policy Context:

At the international level, the research involves major policy documents and reports issued by major international organizations, such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the World Bank, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), etc. These sources present the international policy landscape, especially in terms of massification, employability, skills, and governance of higher

education. They assist in contextualizing country policies in wider international discourses and recognizing dominant narratives guiding business and commerce education (Madi et al., 2026).

b) National Policy Framework (India):

At the national level, the Indian case is the primary empirical context. Major sources comprise, (i) NEP 2020 and the guidelines on its implementation, (ii) Policy documents of the Ministry of Education (Government of India, GOI), (iii) Regulatory frameworks such as the Choice Based Credit System (CBCS) and Learning Outcomes-Based Curriculum Framework (LOCF), etc., issued by the UGC, (iv) accreditation, affiliation, and academic standards regulations, and (v) chosen policies in higher education in states. These sources provide insights into how commerce education is formally positioned, regulated and supported or overlooked/neglected in national policy frameworks (Hossain, 2025).

c) Institutional and Curricular Documents:

The study also uses and analyzes the following institutional documents to capture the translation of policy into practice – (i) Institutional regulations and university websites, (ii) Curriculum documents in commerce, such as model syllabi, the structure of academic programs, and course inputs, (iii) Curriculum revision decisions made by academic councils, and (iv) Accreditation reports, where available e.g., NAAC assessments (National Assessment and Accreditation Council).

Through these materials, a meso-level analysis is made, highlighting how the policy frameworks are interpreted and implemented in institutions, where gaps or inconsistencies emerge.

C. Analytical Approach

The analysis is based on a combination of thematic coding, discourse analysis, and comparative methods that ensure both systematic rigor and interpretation depth:

a) Thematic Coding and Content Analysis:

This study uses a systematic system of coding based on the conceptual model. Key categories include (i) Policy Attention – where and how commerce education is explicitly or implicitly recognized, (ii) Policy Neglect - Areas of absence, underrepresentation

or insufficient engagement, and (iii) Structural Contradictions – Policy objectives and institutional realities/conflicts. Coding is inductive and iterative. Preliminary themes are developed by examining documents, and additional themes are developed during the analysis. By doing so, recurring trends, missing aspects, and contradictions within policy texts are identified (Bharvad & Bharvad, 2024).

b) Discourse Analysis:

The discourse analysis is employed to explore how commerce education is framed and constructed by the policy discourses. This comprises (i) terminology and language describing commerce education, (ii) its positioning in comparison with other fields (e.g., vocational education, STEM – Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics), and (iii) underlying assumptions about its purpose (e.g., entrepreneurship, employability). In the analysis, it is based on (i) representation of the problems, (ii) which solutions are suggested or not suggested, and (iii) what is unarticulated or taken for granted. This enables the research not only to learn explicit policy statements, but also implicit meanings, including policy silences (Bacchi, 2009; Bhattacharya, 2024).

c) Comparative Analysis:

The comparative elements are also included in the study, (i) Cross-Temporal Analysis - the analysis of policy positioning changes, especially before and after NEP 2020, (ii) Cross-Context Analysis - comparing the discourse on global policy and Indian policy frameworks, and (iii) Cross-Institutional Analysis - finding differences in the interpretation and application of policy across institutions.

These comparisons assist in situating commerce education in a wider context of a multi-level policy ecosystem.

D. Limitations

Although the methodology is suitable for the objectives of the study, it has some limitations that must be acknowledged:

a) The study does not include primary empirical data. It fails to reflect the lived experiences of students, faculty members, and administrators. Consequently, the policy-practice gaps are implied as opposed to being directly measured (Madegowda, 2026).

b) Document-based analysis can be biased by selection, i.e., the documents publicly available might not reflect/represent all policy processes, such as informal conversations or unpublished material (Singh & Dixit, 2025).

c) This study is conducted mainly on documents in the English language, which might not cover policy discussions in regional languages.

d) The findings are a reflection of a temporal snapshot, based on the policy developments to the mid-2020s. Conclusions ought to be taken through this time period, given the dynamism of higher education policy.

e) Qualitative analysis is based on interpretive judgment, and there can be alternative readings to the same texts.

However, these weaknesses are addressed by (i) using multiple data sources, (ii) dependency on the existing theoretical models, and (iii) clear articulation of analytical categories.

IV. GLOBAL CONTEXT: COMMERCE/BUSINESS EDUCATION IN POLICY DISCOURSE

This section looks at how international policy frameworks, institutional developments and emerging trends have influenced the positioning of commerce education, mostly within the broader business education discourse.

A. Global Turn Towards Skills, Employability and Entrepreneurship

During the last 30 years, there has been a considerable change in global higher education policy, with an increasing trend towards skills orientation, employability and market responsiveness. Education has been progressively framed as a form of human capital development by governments and international bodies, and there is a need to match the educational outcomes with the demands of the labor market (Durazzi et al., 2025).

The OECD, World Bank and UNESCO are international organizations that have been at the forefront of promoting this agenda. Their policy frameworks prioritize not only a technical set of competencies but also transferable skills, including communication competencies, problem-solving, and adaptability (OECD, 2019; World Bank Group, 2020; Bhattacharya, 2024; Naik et al., 2024). Consequently,

the higher education systems have moved from asking what knowledge students should acquire towards what skills and competencies students are supposed to have upon graduating (Ali, 2023).

In this paradigm, commerce and business education have become prominent as they are perceived to be in tandem with the labor market requirements. The graduates of these disciplines are regarded as ready to work directly in the areas of finance, accounting, management, and entrepreneurship. Such visibility is, however, largely instrumental, with commerce education valued primarily for its economic utility rather than its intellectual contributions (Madi et al., 2026).

Very closely intertwined with this is the increased attention on the education of entrepreneurship that is finding its way into higher education programs. Entrepreneurship is considered by policymakers to be an engine of innovation and economic growth, which is why it is introduced across disciplines (Audretsch, 2012; Nabi et al., 2017; Hossain, 2025; Bharvad & Bharvad, 2024). This not only broadens the scope of commerce education but also strengthens the role of commerce education as a practical and market-oriented field.

B. Global Growth and Institutional Expansion of Business Education

The internationalization of business education provides an important background in the comprehension of commerce education. Business and management education has emerged as one of the largest areas of higher education in the world over the last few decades, with substantial proportions of enrolment in both developed and developing nations (Altbach et al., 2009; Madegowda, 2026). This has been enabled by many factors, such as (i) strong student demand because of the perceived benefits of employability, (ii) development of the knowledge and service-based economies, and (iii) internationalization of business operations and professional roles.

In most of the OECD countries, programs related to business have a significant percentage of tertiary enrolments (Singh & Dixit, 2025). Nevertheless, this growth has also created some issues as far as quality, standardization, and relevance are concerned, especially in the situation whereby rapid expansion has surpassed institutional ability. The growth of business education has been coupled with the

development of international accreditation systems, including the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB), EFMD Quality Improvement System (EQUIS) and Association of MBAs (AMBA). These frameworks emphasize, (i) graduate employment and skills, (ii) faculty qualifications and research output, and (iii) mechanisms of quality assurance in institutions.

Although the frameworks have led to standardization and global benchmarking, they are still more or less vested in elite institutions and developed economies. A large percentage of commerce education, especially in developing nations, exists outside of these accreditation systems, leading to disparate quality and recognition (Marginson, 2025).

C. Influence of Global Policy Actors: OECD and World Bank

The discourse on higher education and commerce education has been greatly influenced by global policy actors, especially the World Bank and the OECD. Their interventions on policy focus on (i) employability and development of skills, (ii) higher education systems' efficiency and accountability, and (iii) public-private partnerships and market-oriented reforms. These organizations foster a higher education vision that is focused on tangible outcomes, including employment rates and economic payoffs, through reports, funding schemes, and benchmarking exercises (Robertson, 2012; Muganga et al., 2024). This has been accompanied by the increasing prevalence of performance-based policy frameworks whereby disciplines are judged on the basis of their contribution to the economy in terms of productivity.

Commerce education is well aligned with this agenda, making it more visible in the policy discourse. Nonetheless, this alignment further solidifies its instrumentalization and constrains its emergence as a discipline of critical inquiry and theoretical progress (Holdings, 2024).

D. Commerce-Business Education Merger: Loss of Disciplinary Identity

One of the crucial trends in world policy discourse is the incorporation of commerce education into general business education. Commerce is not a field, and is usually subsumed within groups like business studies, management education or skills development (Brooks

et al., 2023). This aggregation has many important implications:

a) Loss of Disciplinary Identity:

The particular emphasis of commerce education on accounting, finance and regulatory systems is lost under the wider managerial narratives.

b) Harmonization of Curricula:

Various national traditions and institutional conditions are substituted with uniform international models.

c) Policy Invisibility:

Although the role of business education in policy is well-profiled, as a separate domain, commerce education remains under-recognized.

This is further enhanced by global ranking systems, accreditation standards, and institutional branding strategies, which promote integrated business programs, rather than discipline-specific identities (Hazelkorn, 2015; Hyoo, 2025). Because of this, commerce education is frequently framed as a subservient part of more extensive business education systems, instead of a separate discipline.

E. Emerging Trends: Interdisciplinarity and Digital Business Education

The content and delivery of commerce and business education are also being redefined by the global developments. The shift to interdisciplinarity is one of the trends, as it is a response to complex economic and social problems. Business education is incorporating more and more knowledge of (i) data analytics and science, (ii) psychology and behavioural sciences, (iii) environmental studies and sustainability, and (iv) governance and policy. This change can contribute to the diversification of commerce education by increasing its intellectual capacity and applicability (Datar et al., 2011; Wall et al., 2024). Nevertheless, these interdisciplinary strategies are usually hampered by institutional arrangements.

The second important trend is the emergence of digital business education due to the development of technologies. Other fields like financial technology (FinTech), digital marketing, e-commerce, and artificial intelligence (AI) are becoming focal points of commerce programs (Brynjolfsson & McAfee, 2014; Sabouri et al., 2026). Meanwhile, pedagogical practices are being changed by the use of digital

platforms and online modes of learning. Although these advancements have occurred, several commerce programs, especially in developing environments, are struggling to incorporate these innovations because of, (i) faculty capacity constraints, (ii) rigid curricular structures, and (iii) limited institutional resources (Rizaludin, 2025).

F. Key Observation: Visibility Without Strategic Depth

One of the key lessons that come out of the global environment is that commerce education is full of policy visibility but lacks strategic clarity. It is often found in the discourses of employability, skill and economic development, but this focus is mainly instrumental and superficial. Commerce education is (i) apparent as a policy issue, in terms of producing/generating adequate graduates and employability, and (ii) intangible as a field of strategy, as it needs a long-term commitment to research, curriculum and faculty building.

This forms some kind of paradoxical scenario. Growth and expectations are on the rise, whereas support and conceptual growth are systematically restrained. A business-oriented education is supposed to address the changing needs, digital transformation, sustainability, interdisciplinarity, and lack sufficient policy support or institutional capacity (Bishop & Omorojie, 2025).

In brief, the international policy environment has brought the significance of commerce and business education to a new level by focusing on employability, skills, and economic relevance. Nevertheless, this increase is coupled with instrumentation, disciplinary assimilation, and strategic laxity. Commerce education becomes visible in the context of a larger business education discourse, losing its identity and policy focus. This international tendency offers an invaluable context to study the Indian context, in which the same processes of expansion, instrumentalization, and marginalization can be observed, though under the influence of certain national factors.

V. COMMERCE EDUCATION IN INDIA: POLICY ATTENTION

This part of the study explores the types, places and nature of policy attention towards commerce education in India. Although the preceding sections highlighted global dynamics, the Indian setting has a unique trend in which commerce education shines

brightly in terms of expansion and employability, but lacks policy articulation based on strategy and discipline. The discussion is carried out across three dimensions: historical development, modern policy awareness, and institutional growth. The main thesis is that commerce education in India is visible but instrumentally framed, with policy attention privileging its functional role over its intellectual development.

A. Historical Evolution

To obtain insight into the present status of commerce education, a brief discussion of its historical development is necessary. The history of commerce education in India can be categorically separated into four stages: colonial origins, post-independence consolidation, expansion of commerce education in the period of liberalization, and the contemporary reform phase.

- a) In the colonial era, commerce education emerged on the basis of administrative and commercial requirements of the colonial economy. Initial programs included bookkeeping, accounting and clerical work, which were commonly funded by merchant associations and professional organizations. It was highly practical and utilitarian, and did not focus much on a theoretical basis (Bansal, 2017; Durazzi et al., 2025).
- b) During the post-independence era (1947-1990s), commerce education started being institutionalized in the university system. Growth of higher education and introduction of planned economic development created demand for skilled professionals in finance, administration and business. Commerce programs, especially the Bachelor of Commerce (B.Com), have become a standard offering in all universities and colleges that are affiliated with them (University Grant Commission, 2003; Bhattacharya, 2024). Nevertheless, the attention of policy was still entrenched in larger nation-building objectives, as opposed to commerce being a distinct discipline (Naik et al., 2024).
- c) The liberalization period (1990s-2010) was a period of booming growth and diversification. With economic reforms, the services sector, financial markets, and corporate jobs became more significant and therefore commerce graduates were more in demand. Private institutions proliferated, and B-schools emerged as distinct entities, often

operating separately from traditional commerce departments. Curricula were more market-oriented, and employability became the dominant framing of commerce education (Tilak, 2015; Ali, 2023).

- d) The contemporary phase (post-2010) in policy formation has presented new trends, like multidisciplinary and flexibility, as articulated in the NEP 2020. Yet, these reforms are a continuation of oblique and encrypted attention as opposed to direct disciplinary attention (Madi et al., 2026).

Throughout these stages, a common trend emerges, i.e., commerce education has been responsive to the economic and labor market demands, but has been publicly and explicitly poorly articulated as an academic discipline.

B. Contemporary Policy Recognition

During the contemporary period, commerce education is most visible within broader higher education reforms. The focus is indirect, embedded, and instrumental, and not discipline-specific. One of the principal policy references is the NEP 2020, which represents a comprehensive framework for restructuring Indian higher education. The policy emphasizes (i) multidisciplinary and removal of rigid subject boundaries, (ii) flexibility in curriculum design and student pathways, (iii) integration of skills and vocational education, and (iv) promotion of research and innovation (Ministry of Education, 2020; Hossain, 2025). These postulates have significant implications for commerce education. As an example, multidisciplinary enables commerce students to engage with other disciplines like data science, economics, and public policy. The ability to be flexible helps to add new topics and competency-based elements. The focus on entrepreneurship and innovation is more or less consistent with the traditional orientation of commerce education.

However, in the policy, there is no specific mention of commerce education as a separate area of interest. There is (i) no special curriculum framework for commerce, (ii) no particular strategy of research in the field of commerce, and (iii) no targeted faculty development programs. Commerce education is, therefore, implicitly considered as a part of generic higher education reforms, as opposed to a focused policy lens (Bharvad & Bharvad, 2024).

The UGC is instrumental in translating these policy directions into practice. By means of guidelines, such

as CBCS and LOCF, the UGC has brought standardization and flexibility to UG programs, such as commerce. These paradigms have resulted in (i) the inclusion of elective and interdisciplinary courses, (ii) emphasis on learning outcomes and competencies, and (iii) increased institutional standardization (University Grant Commission, 2018; University Grants Commission, 2020; Madegowda, 2026; Singh & Dixit, 2025).

Nevertheless, these reforms also have shortcomings. They are rather regulatory than strategic, and are concerned with structure and compliance as opposed to innovation and disciplinary development. Learning outcomes tend to be generic, focusing on communication and problem-solving as opposed to commerce-specific intellectual competencies (Marginson, 2025). Therefore, the contemporary policy recognition of commerce education is extensive yet superficial, solidifying its position in the employability and skill systems without further developing the academic grounds of this educational discipline.

C. Institutional Expansion: Scale Without Strategy

Among the most important signs of policy focus on commerce education in India is the impressive institutional growth. Commerce education has become one of the biggest UG programs, with its enrolment taking a significant proportion across universities and colleges (Ministry of Education, 2022; Muganga et al., 2024). This growth is necessitated by many factors, such as (i) strong student demand for employability-based education, (ii) relatively few infrastructure demands (compared to science and technical disciplines), and (iii) broad access to commerce programs in institutions, including institutions in rural and semi-urban areas.

Commerce programs are provided in a wide variety of institutions, such as central universities, state universities, affiliated colleges, open universities, etc. The affiliated college system has been important in the expansion of access, which has helped commerce education to cover a wide demographic base (Holdings, 2024). Also at the program level, there has been greater diversification with institutions providing (i) B. Com (General and Honours), (ii) specialized Bachelor's Degree programs in accounting, finance, banking, taxation, etc., and (iii) integrated programs involving management or technology with commerce.

This diversification indicates efforts to align commerce education to new market demands. Nevertheless, it also indicates the lack of a national strategy, which creates discrepancies in quality and curriculum, as well as institutional capacity.

The notable feature of this growth is that it is mostly demand-driven, as opposed to policy-driven growth. Students view commerce education as a route to jobs, and institutions find it relatively easy to provide commerce programs. The role of the state is more facilitative than strategic, with more emphasis on regulation and expansion, and less on discipline-specific development (Brooks et al., 2023).

The historical development evaluation, policy acknowledgement and the growth of institutions show a consistent pattern. In India, commerce education is very prominent both quantitatively and functionally, but narrow in terms of conceptual and policy richness. Commerce education is conspicuously found in (i) expansion and access narratives, (ii) discourse of employability and skill development, and (iii) market-oriented education and private provision. Nevertheless, it is underdeveloped in (i) research planning and knowledge creation, (ii) faculty training and capacity building, (iii) curriculum innovation at a structural level, and (iv) discipline-specific policy articulation. This results in a state that can be termed “instrumental attention without strategic depth.” Commerce education is appreciated more as a means of producing employable graduates and supporting economic activities, as opposed to being an academic discipline, which is theoretically grounded. The outcome is a “high volume, low depth” system whereby many students are admitted, but little effort is put into the development of the discipline itself (Hyoo, 2025).

India has a comprehensive but disparate policy focus on commerce education. It promotes growth and is in harmony with overall economic goals, but is not as deep and unified as it needs to be to achieve sustained disciplinary development.

VI. ZONES OF NEGLECT

Although the above section has shown that commerce education in India has a high level of visibility in the areas of enrolment, institutional growth, and indirect policy recognition, this visibility is accompanied by a

set of systematic and entrenched gaps. The existence of these gaps is not due to the total lack of policy focus but its limited depth, unequal distribution and instrumental focus. Commerce education is upheld in the measure/scale but not in the substance. Against this backdrop, this section outlines four key areas of neglect, viz., curricular stagnation, weak research orientation, faculty development deficits, and policy silence. The combination of these dimensions supports the main thesis that commerce education is characterized by “attention without depth.”

A. Curricular Stagnation

Curricular stagnation, both in content and methodology, is one of the most persistent areas of neglect in commerce education. Even post-reforms, including CBCS and LOCF, the structure of commerce studies at most universities has changed very little, with a strong focus on conventional courses like financial accounting, cost accounting, taxation, auditing and business law (University Grants Commission, 2020; Durazzi et al., 2025). Although these subjects are significant, they are overrepresented in the curriculum, being a significant part of the course content. The problem is not their existence but their overemphasis and delivery format, which is more inclined to focus on procedural knowledge than on analytical thinking and conceptual learning. Curriculum reform must be meaningful and therefore, should not only include content revision, but also revision of knowledge frameworks and pedagogical practices (Ronald Barnett, 2011; Bhattacharya, 2024; Naik et al., 2024).

The incorporation of emerging areas is still limited and uneven. Topics such as (i) data analytics and business intelligence, e-commerce and digital marketing, (iii) ESG and sustainability models, and (iv) forensic accounting and behavioural finance are not included or provided as peripheral electives, but not as part of the core curriculum (University Grants Commission, 2020; Ali, 2023). This brings about a failure in linking curriculum with the contemporary business environments, and especially in an economy that is fast becoming more digitalized. This stagnation is caused by several structural factors, including (i) curricula are often changed to meet regulatory requirements but not intellectual advancement, (ii) faculty members use outdated teaching materials and textbooks, (iii) institutional incentives favour

completion of syllabus and performance in examinations rather than experimentation, and (iv) weak industry linkages restrict awareness of changing competency requirements. This would lead to the risk of graduating students with few and outmoded skills, which would not serve the employability objectives that policy discourse seeks to achieve (Jackson, 2016; Madi et al., 2026).

B. Weak Research Orientation

The second major area of neglect is the poor research orientation of commerce education. In contrast to STEM disciplines, which are firmly entrenched in research ecosystems, commerce education in India is still largely teaching-focused, particularly at the UG level. Empirical patterns reveal (i) lower enrolment for doctoral studies in commerce as opposed to other fields, (ii) low productivity of research per faculty member, (iii) low access to external research funding, and (iv) lack of research centres or even think-tanks in the areas of commerce (Tilak, 2015; Hossain, 2025). This imbalance demonstrates policy and structural aspects. The affiliated college system puts heavy burdens on faculty members in terms of teaching workloads and does not allow them to devote much time to conducting research. Simultaneously, the policy frameworks, in general, do not specifically support the commerce scholarship, although they tend to promote research. Priority in funding tends to focus on STEM disciplines and more innovation-driven sectors at the expense of commerce research (Tilak, 2015; Hossain, 2025). These implications are significant in the form of (i) reduced development of contextual knowledge, especially in fields like the MSMEs, informal economies, and regional business practices, (ii) inadequate interconnection between research and teaching, which lowers the level of learning in the classroom, and (iii) loss of scholarly nature of commerce education, supporting its view as an instructional discipline only. Academic quality requires strong research-teaching linkages (Healey, 2005; Bharvad & Bharvad, 2024). The lack of such linkages in the field of commerce education points out a very critical gap between policy ambitions and the institutional realities.

C. Faculty Development Gaps

The gaps in faculty development are closely linked with curricular and research restrictions, and can be

considered another area of critical neglect. The success of any educational reform depends on faculty capacity, which has not been properly invested in terms of professional growth systematically and over the long term in commerce education. This gap is marked by several challenges, as summarized below:

a) Qualification and Training Profile:

(i) There is a large percentage of faculty members with only master's degrees, (ii) Limited doctoral and postdoctoral training opportunities, and (iii) Minimal exposure to discipline-specific pedagogy (University Grants Commission, 2020; Madegowda, 2026).

b) Professional Development Limitations:

(i) The generic training programs with minimal emphasis on commerce-specific teaching techniques, (ii) Limited familiarity with case-based learning, simulations and digital pedagogy, and (iii) Poor engagement in learning networks and knowledge-sharing platforms.

c) Industry Exposure Constraints:

(i) Limited internship, consultancy, and industry partnership, and (ii) Lack of exposure to new business practices, especially in digital and global settings.

d) Institutional Conditions:

(i) Dominance of faculty members appointed on a temporary basis or appointed on a contractual basis, (ii) Poor career advancement opportunities, and (iii) Inadequate incentives to research or teaching innovation.

All these make the situation in which teaching is frequently not connected with contemporary industry practice and knowledge areas that are developing. To have an effective system of higher education, the faculty members must be developed continuously and contextually (Gibbs, 2013; Singh & Dixit, 2025). The lack of such initiatives in the field of commerce education is a huge institutional and policy gap.

D. Policy Silence

Policy silence may be the most fundamental form of neglect. There is no specific strategy for commerce education at the national level. Though commerce programs are widespread and highly-enrolled, they are seldom explicitly addressed in policy. Significant policy frameworks, such as the NEP 2020, discuss

commerce education implicitly, within broader categories, including business education, skill development, and vocational training (Ministry of Education, 2020; Marginson, 2025). There is (i) no national commerce education policy, (ii) no professional regulatory/standard-setting authority (as with engineering or medical training), (iii) no specific research funds, and (iv) no detailed curriculum structure specific to the discipline. Such a lack has many repercussions, including (i) fragmentation, where the institutions are independent in the development of their curricula, but do not work in coordinated directions, (ii) decreased innovation, as there is no focused policy support, and (iii) secondary status, where the position of commerce education is below priority disciplines like STEM.

The policy silence concept plays a significant role in this case. According to Bacchi (2009), what is not addressed in policy discourse can be as significant as what is explicitly articulated (Bacchi, 2009; Muganga et al., 2024). In the case of commerce education, "silence" indicates a taken-for-granted status, where the discipline is assumed to function effectively without strategic intervention.

An examination of these areas shows a consistent and reinforcing trend. In India, commerce education is typified by (i) conspicuousness in the expansion and employability discourse, and (ii) poor investment in intellectual, institutional and policy development. This state of affairs may be described as "attention without depth" or "shallow attention." The state recognizes commerce education in terms of enrolment and access, workforce preparation, and institutional expansion. It does not, however, sufficiently engage with (i) structural curriculum transformation, (ii) research ecosystem development, (iii) faculty capacity building, and (iv) discipline-specific policy articulation.

Implicit assumptions underlying this pattern are (i) commerce education is mostly practice-oriented and applied, (ii) it is market-responsive and self-sustaining, and (iii) its value is instrumental and not intellectual. These are some problematic assumptions. Commerce education needs to be theoretically rich, research-oriented, and pedagogically innovative to be competitive in the intricate and changing economic world.

VII. STRUCTURAL CONTRADICTIONS IN STATE POLICY

It is the analytical core of the study that analyzes the structural contradictions inherent in state policy governing commerce education in India. Such contradictions are not merely incidental inconsistencies but structural tensions that occur due to conflicting policy goals, institutional constraints, and governance logics. The state simultaneously promotes expansion, employability, standardization and global alignment, all at once, but these goals tend to work against one another, yielding results that discourage the richness of academia, institutional adaptability, and disciplinary identity.

A. Massification vs. Quality: Growth vs. Declining Rigor

Growth of higher education in India is a testimony to a solid policy dedication to massification, especially by increasing the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER). The policy frameworks, like the NEP 2020, emphasize widening access and democratization of higher education (Ministry of Education, 2020; Durazzi et al., 2025). But this expansion creates a quantitative-qualitative contradiction. Although the enrolment has risen considerably, the institutional resources (faculty, infrastructure and research capacity) have not risen proportionately. A key locus/site of this growth has been commerce education, which is very accessible and low-cost. This manifests in (i) raising student-teacher ratios, which tend to increase from 15:1 to 25-30:1, (ii) overcrowded infrastructure, such as libraries and computer laboratories, (iii) continued use of examination-based methods of assessment, and (iv) limited scaling of research and academic support systems (Tilak, 2015; Bhattacharya, 2024)

The affiliated college system only aggravates this conflict, with large student cohorts being handled in uniform and resource-constrained environments. Although policy discourse highlights both access and quality, the operational aspect is, in fact, inclusive of expansion, which leads to what can be referred to as “thin massification,” i.e., wide access but lack of academic depth.

B. Employability vs. Academic Foundations: Skill Rhetoric vs. Conceptual Learning

The second significant contradiction is that the focus on employability contradicts the need for a strong

academic basis. Organizational policies, like those of the OECD and the World Bank, are structured to focus on skill building and labor market alignment (OECD, 2019; World Bank Group, 2020; Naik et al., 2024; Ali, 2023). Indian policy supports this orientation by supporting internships, vocational integration, and industry linkages. But different curricular orientations are needed with employability and academic depth:

- a) Employability emphasizes (i) immediate, job-specific skills, (ii) applied knowledge and practical skills, and (iii) workplace preparedness and soft skills.
- b) Academic depth, on the other hand, demands (i) conceptual and theoretical knowledge, (ii) intelligent questioning and critical thinking, and (iii) historical and disciplinary points of view.

This contradiction has been reflected in the growing emphasis on procedural and applied content in the field of commerce education, at the cost of theoretical engagement. For example, (i) Accounting is learned as a rule-based practice, but not as a theoretical inquiry, (ii) Business Law becomes more rule-based than legal reasoning, and (iii) Economics is offered as an instrument instead of a conceptual discipline.

The result of this transition is graduates who are ready to be immediately hired but intellectually not prepared, and who are not able to adjust to changing professional environments or think critically. Overemphasis on skills, as Wheelahan (2010) suggests, undermines the development of powerful knowledge, which is a key to successful long-term professional development (Wheelahan, 2010; Madi et al., 2026). Therefore, the paradox indicates the hegemony of human capital logic in which education is appreciated in terms of economic utility, as opposed to intellectual growth.

C. Standardization vs. Autonomy: Central Frameworks vs. Institutional Flexibility

A third contradiction is based on the tension between standardization and institutional autonomy. The introduction of regulatory frameworks, like CBCS and LOCF, by the UGC is designed to create uniformity, comparability, and quality assurance across institutions (University Grant Commission, 2018; University Grants Commission, 2020; Hossain, 2025; Bharvad & Bharvad, 2024). Standardization involves (i) common credit structures and course frameworks, (ii) defined learning outcomes, and (iii) uniform accreditation criteria.

Simultaneously, the policy discourse, especially NEP 2020, focuses on the importance of institutional autonomy, innovation, and responsiveness to local contexts. However, these objectives are inherently contradictory. Standardization restricts the capability of institutions to design context-specific curricula, introduce innovative or experimental courses, and respond to regional economic and social needs. For instance, institutions in metropolitan areas might want to combine digital business and data analytics, whereas institutions in small towns could focus on foundational accounting. Such differentiation is inhibited by uniform structures (Madegowda, 2026). This paradox is indicative of the rationality of the regulatory state whereby it governs through structures and standards. Although this type of governance promotes accountability, it can also lead to bureaucratic rigidity, restricting innovation and responsiveness.

D. Global Alignment vs. Local Relevance: International Models vs. Indian Context

The fourth contradiction is the conflict between international orientation and local relevance. The policy of higher education in India is more and more aligned with global standards, promoting competitiveness and mobility on a global scale. This includes the adoption of International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS), the use of global business case studies, and conformity to global accreditation systems. Simultaneously, policy frameworks focus on local relevance, based on the economic, legal, and social context of India. This brings about a contradiction between (i) global models, where standardization and universal applicability are stressed, and (ii) local needs, demanding contextual adaptation and specificity.

This is reflected in the curricular duality in commerce education – (i) Instruction in the international and Indian accounting standards, (ii) Integrating international business operations with local policies, and (iii) The inclusion of international case studies with Indian examples. Although this two-sided approach has its benefits, it may lead to the incoherence of the curriculum, where the priorities are not clear, and the learning experience is disrupted. Graduates can be partially ready for either the global or local environment, but not both (Singh & Dixit, 2025).

E. Vocationalization vs. Academic Identity: Commerce as Training vs. Discipline

The last contradiction is the vocationalization of commerce education and its consequences for academic identity. The policy discourse is focused more on skill development, internship, and work-based learning, making education a pathway to employment.

Commerce education, being practical, is a subject that is quite vulnerable to this trend. The curriculum is becoming more and more integrated with skill-based modules and certifications, practical training and industry internships, and competency-based assessment methods. Although such developments are beneficial to employability, it also brings a conflict with the academic identity of commerce education as a university discipline. Academic identity involves engagement with theory and research, development of critical and analytical skills, and contribution to knowledge production.

The paradox is where career demands take precedence over academic objectives. Commerce education is at risk of becoming narrowed down to technical training, where the emphasis is on learning procedural skills and not intellectual development (Ronald Barnett, 2011; Marginson, 2025). On the other hand, “academic-only” methods run the risk of breaking the ties with practice. The integration of vocational and academic components, often with the NEP 2020, leads to partial or superficial integration, instead of coherent synthesis.

F. Institutional Responses to Contradictions

Institutions are responding to these contradictions in different ways, frequently adopting strategies of adaptation, as opposed to resolution. Common patterns include, (i) Conformity - Following the standardized models and minimizing creativity, (ii) Differentiation - Division of institutions into elite (research-oriented) and mass (teaching-oriented) parts, (iii) Fragmentation - New piecemeal reforms, e.g., with the addition of electives or internships, but without structural integration, and (iv) Withdrawal - Shifting attention to other fields other than commerce education. These responses fail to resolve contradictions but cope with them within the given limits, frequently supporting systemic disparities and irregularities (Muganga et al., 2024).

The five contradictions that have been addressed above (i.e., massification vs. quality, employability vs. academic depth, standardization vs. autonomy, global alignment vs. local relevance and vocationalization vs. academic identity) should be seen as interrelated and reinforcing each other. Combined, they demonstrate that state policy works by (i) selective attention, expansion and employability focus, (ii) relative lack of attention, especially in areas of research and curriculum richness, and (iii) structural contradictions, as a result of conflicting policy objectives. The existence of these contradictions is indicative of a more general policy space, which is influenced by a multiplicity of logics that are sometimes conflicting. The outcome is a system both enabling and constraining, both broadening access and narrowing depth and coherence.

Overall, the paradoxical positioning of commerce education can be explained by structural contradictions that are inherent in state policy. They expose the fact that policy frameworks, although rational in their own right, produce systemic tensions, which shape institutional practices and outcomes.

VIII. DISCUSSION: RETHINKING THE STATE– COMMERCE EDUCATION RELATIONSHIP

This part summarizes the study findings by redefining the relationship between the state and commerce education. The analysis goes beyond the dichotomous view of “attention versus neglect” to conceptualize this relationship as selective, structurally neglectful and internally contradictory. With insights from global, national, and institutional levels, the discussion reveals how the study of commerce is placed at the center of expansion and at the edges of strategic development.

A. Synthesis: Selective Attention and Systematic Neglect

The evidence in the previous sections indicates a consistent trend - the state exercises selective and instrumental attention towards commerce education and systematic disregard of its substantive development. This dichotomy can be seen in the difference between the visibility and invisibility aspects of policy engagement.

Commerce education would be very conspicuous in (i) discourse of access and expansion, (ii) rhetoric of

employability and skill development, (iii) institutional proliferation and enrolment statistics, and (iv) narratives of economic efficiency and labor training (Ministry of Education, 2022; Durazzi et al., 2025). Meanwhile, it is not so visible in priorities in national research and funding, (ii) discipline-specific policy frameworks, (iii) faculty development initiatives, and (iv) theoretical and intellectual engagement within the policy discourse (Tilak, 2015; Bhattacharya, 2024).

This paradoxical stance is indicative of the reasoning of contemporary state governance, in which commerce education should (i) massify access (logic of massification), (ii) respond to the market needs (market responsiveness), (iii) develop job-oriented graduates (human capital orientation), and (iv) work with minimal governmental funding, i.e., a self-financing model (Gary S. Becker, 1993; Naik et al., 2024).

On the other hand, the state does not place priority on (i) continued state funding of commerce education, (ii) intellectual development of the discipline in a strategic manner, (iii) systematic quality enhancement, and (iv) change in professional and academic standards. This has placed commerce education as a high-volume, low-touch discipline, which is controlled using regulatory frameworks as opposed to strategic investment. This reinforces the larger trend found above, as “attention without depth.”

B. The State as Contradictory Actor

The findings of the study challenge the idea of the state as a coherent and unified actor. Rather, the state is seen as a contradictory and multi-dimensional entity, acting in multiple and largely disjointed roles. The state may be perceived in three intersecting ways:

a) As Regulator:

It sets standards, accreditation criteria and curriculum designs via agencies like the UGC, NAAC, etc. This mode is focused on standardization, accountability, and compliance (University Grants Commission, 2020; Ali, 2023).

b) As Expander:

It encourages expansion and enrolment growth, especially through policies like the NEP 2020. It suggests that the state promotes institutional growth, which may be conducive to the encouragement of the

models of private provision and flexible delivery (Ministry of Education, 2020; Madi et al., 2026).

c) As Neglector:

It offers little strategic guidance, research support, or discipline-specific investment in commerce education. Under this mode, the state believes that institutional mechanisms and market forces will ensure the adequacy and relevance (Tilak, 2015; Bhattacharya, 2024).

These functions are not aligned into a consistent approach. Rather, they produce a policy fragmentation and inconsistency, e.g., (i) expansion pressure is in opposition to regulatory demands on quality, (ii) strategic neglect undermines the effectiveness of regulatory frameworks, and (iii) market-oriented strategies are accompanied by centralized control systems. In this way, the policy of commerce education seems not as a planned design but rather as a piling of overlaying requisites, representing various policy moments, stakeholder interests, and governance logics (Stephen J. Ball, 2012; Hossain, 2025).

C. Commerce Education as Mass yet Marginalized

Commerce education in this policy environment has a paradoxical situation, which could be termed as “mass but marginalized.” On the one hand, it is among the most widely accessed disciplines, and it plays a key role in massifying higher education. The ease of access, the low cost and the perceived employability give it (commerce education) an advantage over a large segment of students (Trow, 2007; Bharvad & Bharvad, 2024).

Conversely, commerce education is peripheral/marginal to policy discourse and academic prioritization. It lacks (i) a well-defined disciplinary identity, (ii) institutional support and specific research funding, and (iii) well-represented high-level policy discussions.

This paradox underscores the difference between quantitative centrality and qualitative marginality. Commerce education is central in terms of enrolment, intellectual recognition and policy prioritization.

D. Commerce Education as Instrumental but Under-Theorized

The second important characterization is that commerce education is instrumental yet under-theorized. The policy discourse has always addressed

commerce education in the context of its economic value, focusing on its role to prepare the workforce, equip individuals with skills and support the business world (OECD, 2019; Madegowda, 2026).

As much as it improves its policy relevance, it also limits its growth as a theoretically based academic discipline. The minimal focus on research, critical inquiry, and interdisciplinary interaction leads to a discipline that is strong in practice-based training but weak in conceptual and theoretical depth. The imbalance has significant repercussions. It limits the ability of commerce education to (i) be agile to new economic conditions, (ii) make contributions to knowledge production and innovation, and (iii) participate critically with wider societal and policy issues. Therefore, commerce education is a functionally important field, but intellectually underdeveloped (Ronald Barnett, 2011; Singh & Dixit, 2025).

The generalization of these findings can be captured in a sophisticated conceptual framework, in which these critical dimensions of state engagement and disciplinary positioning are combined (Figure 2):

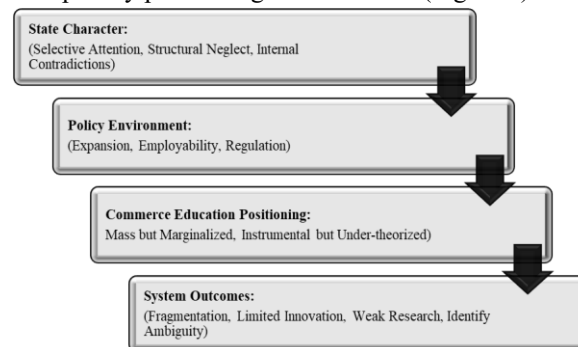


Figure 2: Refined Conceptual Model of State Policy Dynamics and the Positioning of Commerce Education

This model emphasizes the influence of state characteristics on the policy environment, which subsequently defines the positioning and performance of commerce education.

E. Implications for Understanding Higher Education Governance

The discussion of commerce education offers a wider perspective on the administration of the higher educational systems:

a) It exposes the illusion of comprehensive policy. Although some frameworks, like the NEP 2020,

seem all-inclusive, they tend to conceal discipline-related gaps and blind areas. Universal policies do not necessarily translate into equitable attention across fields (Stephen J. Ball, 2012; Hossain, 2025).

b) The research emphasizes the growing role of market logic in governing higher education. Commerce education is also viewed as something that can be controlled by market demand and competition in institutions, and as such, there is less perceived necessity of state intervention (Brown et al., 2011; Marginson, 2025).

c) The results imply that the contradictions of policies are systematic and not merely accidental. They are the result of the simultaneous presence of various governance logics, viz., welfare, neoliberal, and regulatory, that cannot be completely aligned in the current frameworks (Marginson, 2018; Muganga et al., 2024).

d) The discussion also shows the relevance of discipline-specific policy strategies. Standardized structures and universal quality assurance systems do not have enough to address the special challenges and opportunities of commerce education. Major reform requires targeted and context-sensitive approaches.

Therefore, the relationship between the state and commerce education needs to be reconsidered in terms of getting rid of fragmented and instrumental approaches to the relationship and adopting a more coherent and strategically-based policy framework. A framework like this one should acknowledge that commerce education is a mass and academic field that is able to balance its economic applicability with intellectual growth.

IX. POLICY IMPLICATIONS: TOWARD STRATEGIC ENGAGEMENT WITH COMMERCE EDUCATION

This part translates the analytical findings of the research into practical and specific policy implications. The discussion goes beyond general directions of reform to suggest a discipline-sensitive and strategic approach to commerce education. It combines system-based, policy-based and institutional-level interventions, highlighting the need to move to coherent and sustained engagement instead of fragmented and reactive policies.

A. National Commerce Education Strategy

One of the key suggestions is the development of a specific National Commerce Education Strategy, which will outline the vision and the way forward for the discipline. Currently, the study of commerce is integrated into the wider contexts, including the NEP 2020, yet it does not have its policy identity and strategic prioritization (Ministry of Education, 2020; Durazzi et al., 2025). Such a plan, which ideally would be developed by the UGC with the help of academic and industry stakeholders, should contain the following components:

a) Research Development:

(i) Establish dedicated research funds to support commerce research, such as accounting theory, business ethics, organizational behaviour, quantitative analysis, etc., (ii) establish special research centres and doctoral training programs, and (iii) provide funding levels comparable to other major disciplines to ensure parity (Tilak, 2015; Bhattacharya, 2024).

b) Faculty Development:

Introduce structured faculty development programs, such as (i) visiting scholar positions and international sabbaticals, (ii) industry immersion programs for 3-6 months, (iii) incentive programs for doctoral and postdoctoral studies, (iv) training about commerce-related pedagogy and online learning tools, and (v) foster national and international academic networks for commerce educators (Gibbs, 2013; Naik et al., 2024).

c) Curricular Innovation:

(i) Encourage the introduction of new areas like digital commerce, data analytics, and sustainability, (ii) Integrate business ethics, governance, and social responsibility in all courses, (iii) Promote experiential and project-based learning models, (iv) Enhance research practices and the academic activities at UG and postgraduate (PG) programs, and (v) Incorporate Indian business context, regulatory systems and economic history (Ronald Barnett, 2011; Ali, 2023).

d) Quality Assurance:

Establish trade-specific accreditation schemes to acknowledge (i) discipline-specific quality indicators, (ii) scholarship and productivity, (iii) qualification and development of faculty, (iv) innovation and

responsiveness of curriculum, and (v) graduate and employer satisfaction (Dill & Frans, 2010; Madi et al., 2026)

This would contribute to reducing fragmentation and establishing a shared national vision, while maintaining flexibility for institutional adaptation.

B. Resolving Structural Contradictions

Since structural contradictions are inherent to the existing policy frameworks, one of the main recommendations is to clearly identify and address these contradictions, instead of letting them exist subtly and without being resolved.

a) Massification vs. Quality –

(i) Set clear policy priority for both quality maintenance and expansion, (ii) Implement capped student-teacher ratios and minimum standards of infrastructure, (iii) Attach institutional expansion to proven capacity and quality standards, and (iv) Introduce the concept of continuous quality monitoring with built-in control (Trow, 2007; Hossain, 2025).

b) Employability vs. Academic Depth –

Design a combined model of curriculum where (i) core courses provide strong theoretical foundations, (ii) applied courses develop systematically on these foundations, and (iii) every content is both intellectually rigorous and professionally relevant (Wheelahan, 2010; Bharvad & Bharvad, 2024).

c) Standardization vs. Autonomy –

Present a model of standardized flexibility, which consists of (i) essential elements of the national curriculum, (ii) important elective space (e.g., 30-40% credits) of specialization, and (iii) adaptable pedagogical and assessment strategies with defined standards (University Grants Commission, 2020; Madegowda, 2026).

Policy can stop making implicit trade-offs and instead make explicit design that can enhance coherence and effectiveness by making these priorities clear.

C. Addressing Policy Silences

The second important area that is critical is the need to deal with the policy silences, which have led to the marginalization of commerce education.

a) Disciplinary Identity –

Understand commerce education as an independent academic discipline with (i) clearly defined subject domains (accounting, finance, business law, etc), (ii) professional linkages and standards, (iii) intellectual traditions and research agendas, and (iv) formulate official declarations on its position in higher education (Bacchi, 2009; Singh & Dixit, 2025).

b) Research Ecosystem Development:

(i) Incorporate commerce research into the national research agenda, (ii) Provide dedicated funding and recognition within institutional evaluations, (iii) Promote research-based teaching practices, and (iv) Enhance linkages among commerce research, public policy, industry, and governance (Tilak, 2015; Bhattacharya, 2024).

c) Global–Local Calibration –

Create systems in which there is a balance: (i) International standards (e.g. IFRS, global business practices), (ii) Indian regulatory systems (e.g., Ind AS, Companies Act 2013), (iii) explicitly teach the contextual applicability of different frameworks, and (iv) Foster comparative and context-based learning (OECD, 2019; Marginson, 2025).

By addressing and resolving these silences, commerce education would be better seen and heard in the policy discourse.

D. Institutional-Level Recommendations

Institutional initiatives should complement policy reforms, and universities and colleges must play instrumental roles in implementation:

a) Faculty Prioritization:

(i) Implement institutionalized programs of faculty development and sabbatical systems, (ii) Establish detailed doctoral and research opportunities among commerce faculty members, (iii) Implement research, innovation and industry engagement incentive programs, and (iv) Establish institutional liaison systems in the industry (Gibbs, 2013; Naik et al., 2024).

b) Curricular Coherence –

Design programs with clear progression: (i) Foundational courses → Advanced theoretical courses → Applied and multidisciplinary courses, (ii) Integrate

emerging areas, like digital business and sustainability systematically, and (iii) Make sure that learning outcomes, teaching methods and assessment are aligned (Ronald Barnett, 2011; Ali, 2023).

c) Research Infrastructure:

(i) Establish business-oriented research centres and thematic clusters, (ii) Provide opportunities for student research and project work, (iii) Develop faculty research networks and groups, and (iv) Enhance case studies and data access, as well as applied research collaboration with industry (Healey, 2005; Muganga et al., 2024).

These measures would help institutions to transition beyond compliance toward innovation and academic growth.

E. Aligning with Industry Without Losing the Academic Core

Although alignment with industry is necessary, it should be well-coordinated with academic integrity. The policy should strive to establish a paradigm in which commerce education is relevant and reflective. Key strategies include: (i) structured industry-academia partnerships in curriculum design and delivery, (ii) adjunct faculty, with academic supervision of practitioners, (iii) development of practice-based modules grounded in theory-oriented frameworks, and (iv) continuous but balanced industry feedback systems (Brown et al., 2011; Holdings, 2024).

The objective is to keep off both extremes, viz., (i) Excessive vocationalization, which reduces commerce to training, and (ii) Excessive academization, which disconnects it from practice. Rather, an integrated approach must be devised, with the conceptual richness and practical applicability complementing each other.

Collectively, these suggestions point to the need for shifting to integrated, proactive policy solutions rather than fragmented, responsive strategies to commerce education. This transformation requires (i) awareness of commerce education as a unique and strategically significant field, (ii) access, quality and relevance integration, and (iii) coherence among teaching, research and professional practice.

Such a change would enable commerce education to be transformed so as to be no longer a matter of instrumental visibility, but of substantive academic

and policy importance and value, and so contribute to economic growth and knowledge creation.

X. CONCLUSION AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

This part of the paper wraps up the study by summarizing the key argument, its conceptual and policy implications, and areas for future research. It sums up the discussion to reaffirm the need for a more coherent and strategically grounded environment with commerce education.

A. Reiterating the Key Argument

This study has explored how the state and commerce education are linked based on the analytical tools of policy attention, neglect and structural contradictions. The thesis statement presented is that “commerce education has a paradoxical status” - it is both apparent and marginalized, endorsed and overlooked. Although the state takes the initiative of expanding and aligning commerce education with the agenda of employability and skill development, it invests little in its conceptual depth, research capacity, and disciplinary identity.

Commerce education is very prominent in the discussion of expansion and employability. It is placed as a high-enrolment area and a prime workforce development area. This exposure is, however, mostly instrumental, whereby the discipline is seen as a functional part of the economy but not an academic discipline that needs long-term intellectual involvement. Simultaneously, as far as commerce education is concerned, it is substantially invisible in (i) research strategy and funding priorities, (ii) discipline-specific policy frameworks, (iii) faculty development initiatives, and (iv) theoretical and conceptual discussion.

The result of this duality is systemic, such as (i) persistent structural contradictions among policy objectives, (ii) zones of lapses in curriculum, research and faculty development, and (iii) weakness of academic and professional standards. Accordingly, it is not a matter of mere negligence but rather a question of selective visibility and structural marginalization.

B. Contribution of the Study

The study makes three important and interrelated contributions: conceptual, empirical, and critical.

a) Conceptual Contribution:

This study proceeds to support a state-centred analytical approach to comprehending the positioning of disciplines in higher education policy. It also draws a line between policy attention and policy neglect, and how the selective visibility can co-exist with substantive underdevelopment. The fact that commerce education is a professional-academic hybrid field further explains why it is merely ambiguous in the policy discourse. Moreover, the concept of “attention without depth” offers a conceptual aid to examine some patterns of similarity in other mass disciplines.

b) Empirical Contribution:

A steady trend of instrumentality focuses and structural underfunding of commerce education is recorded in the paper. It determines and visualizes five main structural contradictions that influence policy. They are (i) massification vs. quality, (ii) employability vs. academic depth, (iii) standardization vs. autonomy, (iv) international consistency vs. domestic topicality, and (v) vocationalization vs. academic identity. The basis of these findings lies in the cross-global and Indian policy analysis, which illustrates the functioning of these contradictions at different levels.

c) Critical Contribution:

The paper provides a critical perspective on the current policy of higher education, especially the focus on growth and employability. It puts into question the belief that the market mechanisms and generic policy frameworks are adequate to control professional education. It also questions the sufficiency of the neoliberal models of governance, which emphasize access and efficiency, and restrict strategic investment in disciplinary development.

C. Limitations of the Study

Although the present study offers valuable insights, a few limitations must be acknowledged:

- a) The analysis is founded on the analysis of documents, which reflects the intent of policy but not the realities of its implementation. It does not explicitly look at the manner in which policies are construed and implemented in institutions.
- b) It is primarily focused on India, and the discussion of the world is used as the contextual background.

Although this offers richness, the results might not be entirely applicable to other national contexts.

- c) The analysis reflects a specific temporal moment, which is determined by the policy developments until the middle of the 2020s. These conclusions need to be viewed within this period due to the dynamic nature of higher education policy.
- d) Although commerce education is taken as an example, the applicability of the framework to other fields needs to be studied further.

D. Future Research Directions

This research presents a few significant research opportunities for the future, especially in generalizing and confirming its results:

a) Empirical Follow-Up Studies:

There is a need for empirical research that examines the policy–practice interface, including (i) perception studies of students and faculty members through surveys, (ii) institutional implementation research based on interviews, (iii) case studies of university and college cases, and (iv) tracer studies exploring graduate outcomes and employability. Such research would assist in verifying and improving the patterns in this article.

b) Comparative Cross-Country Research:

A cross-national comparison can be used to gain a better understanding of the place of commerce education in the world. Future studies may investigate (i) policy variance across countries, (ii) differences in curriculum structure, research focus and industry linkage, and (iii) influences of worldwide policy players on the formation of national strategies.

c) Thematic Extensions:

Other themes that can be investigated in future research are (i) integration of sustainability and ethics in commerce education, (ii) digital transformation and implications to curricula, (iii) interdisciplinary linkages with STEM and social sciences, and (iv) the trade-off between international and regional economic interests.

d) Methodological Development:

Future research can be based on mixed methods, which will involve a combination of field-based research and document analysis. Action-oriented and

participatory research with educators and policymakers can also help to design context-sensitive policy solutions.

E. Concluding Reflection

Although commerce education is still among the most extensive and prominent streams of higher education, it is still peripheral/marginal in serious policy attention and intellectual debate. The analysis indicates that the condition is not predetermined but is affected by the policy decisions and priorities in the governance.

Rethinking commerce education should consider the shift out of instrumental attention to strategic engagement. This involves (i) the acknowledgement of commerce education as a special scholarly and professional area, (ii) investing in research, faculty development, and curriculum innovation, and (iii) a balance between growth, and quality and intellectual depth.

The tensions that are found in this research are a manifestation of more profound conflicts in the governance of higher education. They need to be tackled not just through policy change but also through changing the way disciplines are valued and supported.

Finally, the future of commerce education will lie in the ability of the state, institutions and professional communities to treat it not as a workforce preparation mechanism but as an area of study and inquiry. This study is provided as a contribution to that continuing and required discussion.

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