
Implementation of the National Education Policy 2020 in School Education: A Critical and Evaluative Assessment

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Abstract

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 represents a radical change from the existing education system in India which is more input- and examination-oriented, to a new one, which is learning, competency, equality, and holistic development-oriented. In this study, implementation of NEP 2020 will be critically and analytically reviewed and the following aspects would be taken into consideration: F.L.N, curriculum and pedagogy, teacher preparedness, assessment, digital education, multilingualism, E.C.C.E., vocational education, equality and inclusion, and governance. This study will follow a descriptive, analytical and evaluative approach through secondary sources such as policies, reports, international reports, and research articles. The analysis of the problem is mainly centered on the connection between the goals of the policy, ways of its implementation, accomplishments, and shortcomings. Based on the findings, it can be said that there are quite a few developments that were triggered by NEP 2020 in relation to implementation, including NIPUN Bharat, teacher's training programs, digital platforms, and curriculum changes. Foundational Literacy and Numeracy turn into one of those domains where the greatest accomplishments have been made. Teacher readiness becomes a key constraint, as training and knowledge of the policy may not automatically translate into shifts in classroom practices. Moreover, curriculum and assessment reform policies face constant pressure from exams, while the extent of digitization policies is limited by existing disparities in device access, internet and digital literacy. Multilingual education, ECCE and vocational education have a lot of potential, but must be provided with enough resources and be locally contextualized. Overall, it can be said that NEP 2020 went beyond policymaking, but education reform has not been fully achieved.

Keywords: National Education Policy 2020; Foundational Literacy and Numeracy; Teacher Preparedness; Digital Education; Educational Equity and Inclusion

1. Introduction

Education is a fundamental element for the advancement of humanity, community, and progress. Coming to the Indian scenario, there is much improvement in the field of education in the schooling stage, but still there are some problems such as poor performance of students, lack of teachers, scarcity of resources, scarcity of information, poor infrastructure, and social discrimination. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, ratified on 29 July 2020, superseded the policy established in 1986. It seeks to implement significant alterations in the framework, curriculum, teaching, assessment and governance of education. The 5+3+3+4 system focuses on children's developmental needs and includes early childhood education. The policy also promotes critical thinking, creativity, problem-solving, multilingualism, vocational education and overall development.

The Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN) constitutes a crucial element of NEP 2020. The National Initiative for Proficiency in Reading with Understanding in Schools (NIPUN Bharat), initiated in 2021, seeks to equip children up to class 3 with literacy and numeracy competencies. However, this requires trained teachers and proper infrastructure. Moreover, the NEP 2020 stresses that education should be learner-centric, experiential, and competency-based. There will be changes in the evaluation process as well as vocational education from middle school onward. However, such changes are highly contingent upon the preparation of teachers and schools to adopt these teaching methods. Inclusion and Equity are some other goals of NEP 2020. In this regard, NEP

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2020 purposes to develop the chances of vulnerable communities in terms of education, reduce dropouts, ensure education for differently abled children, and provide education right from childhood till Grade 12. However, there will be difficulties in the execution of NEP 2020 as there are variations in resources, infrastructure, teachers, language, geography, and administration among the Indian states. Furthermore, as the education system is a joint function of both the Center and States, coordination would become an issue. There could be a gap between policy and its implementation.

The preparedness of educators becomes crucial in light of the evolving function of teachers as catalysts for change in education. The NEP 2020 has emphasized continuous training of teachers through initiatives such as NISHTHA and DIKSHA. However, training does not automatically imply that there will be change in practice in the classroom setting. Another important aspect of NEP 2020 is that of digital education. Although the use of technology can prove very effective in making education accessible, disparities regarding access to devices, connectivity, electricity, and digital knowledge can lead to even more inequalities, particularly in rural areas. The regional differences constitute yet another challenge in the implementation process. The national policy must be flexible to accommodate any regional matters. There is, therefore, need for a balance between national interests and regional interests.

Similarly, it cannot be measured in terms of how many programs have been developed. Rather, it should be measured in terms of the progress that has been made in learning, equity, pedagogy, and teacher and student effectiveness. For this reason, the study critically reviews the implementation of NEP 2020 based on the following aspects: foundational literacy, pedagogy, teacher preparedness, assessment, digital learning, vocational education, equity, infrastructure, and governance. The study focuses on the differences between the goals of the policy and the actual situation and on whether NEP 2020 makes any difference to school education.

2. Literature Review

The introduction of NEP 2020 has resulted in the evolution of an increasing body of scholarly literature in regard to issues of curriculum redesign, literacy and numeracy, teacher training, assessment, multilingual education, digital education, vocationalization, and inclusion. Literature relating to NEP 2020 may be broadly categorized into two types. The first classification of research includes those that involve both policy-based and theoretical approaches that evaluate the goals, philosophy, and structure of NEP 2020. The second category of research involves the empirical and implementation-based type of research that evaluates how the policies are interpreted, implemented, and experienced by various stakeholders such as teachers and students. After a critical review of these researches, it can be observed that NEP 2020 involves a major paradigm shift in terms of education in India from examination-based to learning-based. However, this is not consistent across all institutions.

a. Evolution of School Education Policy and the Context for NEP 2020:

The discourse on NEP 2020 in contemporary times has to be understood in light of the history of growth in education in India. The policies that came into existence in the past, for example, the National Policy on Education of 1986 (revised in 1992), emphasized universality, equity, teaching, and development in education. However, enrollment growth does not necessarily ensure improvement in learning outcomes. In his assessment of schooling education in India, Kingdon (2007) noticed several positive aspects concerning the rate of enrollment in primary schools, but he also found many problems related to attendance, retention, and enrollment in secondary schools, learning, and the teacher's role in schools. The above observation particularly important for comprehension of why there is more focus nowadays on schooling as learning.

The expansion of schooling also generated a complex public-private educational landscape. Muralidharan and Kremer (2008) demonstrated the substantial presence of private schools in rural India and highlighted differences in resource use, teacher deployment and educational provision between public and private institutions. Such evidence suggests that educational reform cannot be assessed only by measuring government expenditure or physical infrastructure; it must also consider the institutional organisation of

teaching and the incentives facing schools and teachers. Similarly, the PROBE Team (1999) documented persistent deficiencies in infrastructure, teacher availability, classroom processes and social inequalities in elementary education, establishing an important empirical foundation for later debates on educational quality.

The literature on school effectiveness further indicates that educational inputs do not necessarily translate mechanically into learning outcomes. The World Bank (2018) argues that schooling and learning are distinct and that education systems must place actual learning at the centre of policy design. In the Indian context, this distinction is particularly relevant because the expansion of enrolment has occurred alongside persistent weaknesses in foundational learning. Thus, NEP 2020's emphasis on foundational literacy and numeracy can be interpreted as an attempt to address a long-standing structural weakness in Indian school education rather than simply as a new curricular initiative.

b. NEP 2020 as a Paradigm Shift in School Education

NEP 2020 marks a complete shift in the educational paradigm of Indian schooling systems in terms of its structure and intention. As opposed to the conventional 10+2 structure, the NEP introduces the 5+3+3+4 curricular pedagogy design together with ECCE in the foundational stage. These include a focus on holistic development, competency-based education, critical thinking, innovation, experiential learning, multilingual education, vocational experience, and flexible assessment (Government of India, 2020). A plan has been made by the Ministry of Education for the implementation of NEP in which policies have been linked with certain duties and outcomes. It shows that the implementation of NEP was not supposed to happen suddenly but rather in a phased manner (Ministry of Education, 2021).

In this regard, according to Dey (2022), NEP 2020 can be evaluated as a transformative paradigm within the sphere of education and is considered important due to the extensive scope of the reforms suggested in school, teacher, and higher education. Similarly, in Sangai (2021), conceptual-driven transformation, such as competency-based education, has been identified as one of the key transformations to be made for the improvement of teacher education programs.

However, it should be noted that some issues associated with the application of these concepts also exist. It is worth mentioning that these results align with earlier studies regarding the execution of reforms, indicating that pedagogical adjustments necessitating alterations in teaching practices are more challenging to accomplish than organizational reforms. However, in the scholarly literature, scholars caution against viewing NEP 2020 merely as a technocratic initiative. As Gulati and Jain (2022) note, NEP 2020 develops its own perception of the schoolteacher, making the teacher an agent of change in the field of education. There emerge several interesting questions about language, community, motivation, and performance. Therefore, the success of NEP is inseparable from the context in which teachers operate socially and professionally. The high demands on teaching, testing, the use of technology, multilingual education, and vocational education in NEP policy could possibly add to the list of teachers' duties.

c. Foundational Literacy and Numeracy as the Core of Implementation

The consistency of policy objectives and their execution is guaranteed by prioritizing fundamental literacy and numeracy (FLN). According to NEP 2020, "The primary objective of the education system is foundational learning" and emphasizes that "subsequent reforms in the education system will be ineffective if children lack essential literacy and numeracy" abilities (Government of India, 2020). This pledge was implemented under the National Initiative for Proficiency in Reading with Understanding and Numeracy (NIPUN Bharat), inaugurated in 2021, aimed at equipping pupils with essential skills by Grade 3.

The NIPUN Bharat framework places emphasis on teacher capacity building, learning materials, child tracking, school readiness and systematic monitoring (Ministry of Education, 2021). The National Curriculum Framework for the Foundational Stage enhances this methodology by prioritizing play, activity, language,

interaction, and developmental learning at the core of the foundational stage (NCERT, 2022). The ensuing National Curriculum Framework for School Education aims to create enhanced alignment among curricular goals, competences, teaching methods, and evaluation (NCERT, 2023).

The empirical justification for prioritising FLN is substantial. ASER evidence has repeatedly demonstrated that enrolment does not necessarily imply adequate learning. The most recent rural evidence continues to highlight substantial variation in children's reading and numeracy capabilities, even while school participation has expanded (ASER Centre, 2024). Earlier ASER evidence similarly demonstrated that many children in the primary grades were unable to perform tasks expected at lower grade levels (ASER Centre, 2018). The NCERT's fundamental Learning Study in 2022 marked a significant effort to create a national benchmark for fundamental learning encompassing 20 languages and almost 86,000 Grade 3 pupils across 10,000 schools (NCERT, 2022).

The literature therefore suggests that NIPUN Bharat represents one of the most evidence-responsive components of NEP implementation. Nevertheless, the challenge is not simply to establish benchmarks but to develop institutional capacity for achieving them. The Central Square Foundation (2021) argues that foundational learning outcomes are shaped by interconnected systemic factors including teacher capacity, instructional time, school leadership, learning materials, assessment and system management. This reinforces the argument that FLN should not be treated as a stand-alone programme but as an indicator of the broader effectiveness of school-system reform.

d. Teacher Preparedness and Professional Development

Teachers occupy a central position in the implementation literature because most NEP reforms ultimately depend upon classroom-level enactment. Sharma and Akalamkam (2021), based on a mixed-method study involving 151 school teachers, found varying degrees of agreement with different dimensions of NEP 2020, while qualitative evidence revealed apprehensions concerning its implementation. Importantly, their findings indicate that policy awareness and policy acceptance should not be assumed to be equivalent to implementation readiness.

It should be noted that Gulati & Jain (2022) also found that the teacher plays an important and complex role within the policy framework. The problems related to the notion of teacher performance, motivation, community and language under NEP 2020 have been discussed through this analysis. Moving on to the realm of teacher education, Sharma, Mittal, and Zayan (2023) maintain that the discourses surrounding teacher education reforms consist of various traditions of intellectual and policy thinking, which sometimes conflict with each other. Moreover, it is evident that the recommended reforms are not entirely dissimilar from the conventional approaches employed within teacher education.

The broader empirical literature on Indian teachers strengthens this concern. Kremer et al. (2005) found substantial teacher absence in government primary schools and demonstrated the importance of institutional monitoring, infrastructure and everyday working conditions for teacher presence. Muralidharan and Sundararaman (2011), through a randomised evaluation in rural Andhra Pradesh, found that carefully designed teacher performance incentives could improve student achievement. These studies predate NEP 2020 but remain relevant because they demonstrate that teacher behaviour is influenced by organisational conditions, incentives, monitoring and professional environments rather than by policy directives alone.

The importance of teacher professional development is also supported by Kennedy (2016), whose synthesis of professional development research shows that the effectiveness of teacher learning depends on the nature, duration and content of professional development rather than simply on participation. In the Indian context, Sinha (2017) argues for a re-conceptualisation of continuous professional development that recognises teacher agency, school context and sustained professional learning. These findings have direct implications for NEP 2020: training programmes such as NISHTHA and digital professional-development platforms can support

implementation, but training must be sufficiently contextualised and connected to classroom practice to produce sustainable change.

e. Curriculum, Pedagogy and Competency-Based Learning

A major component of NEP 2020 is the proposed transition from rote learning towards conceptual understanding, experiential learning and competency development. The policy aims to diminish curricular content and foster increased opportunities for inquiry, dialog, critical analysis, and practical application of knowledge (Government of India, 2020). Sangai (2021) views competency-based education as an important means of aligning teaching, learning and assessment with holistic learner development. Dey (2022) similarly interprets the curricular provisions of NEP 2020 as an attempt to transform the conventional structure of Indian schooling. However, the literature on curriculum implementation indicates that curricular reform rarely operates in a direct or linear manner. Teachers interpret policy through their existing professional knowledge, institutional cultures and local conditions. Coburn (2001), for example, demonstrates that teachers' sense-making processes are central to how educational policy is interpreted and enacted within professional communities. Spillane, Reiser, and Reimer (2002) similarly conceptualise policy implementation as a process of cognitive and social sense-making rather than simple compliance. These perspectives are especially useful for analysing NEP 2020 because its implementation requires teachers to reinterpret their roles as facilitators, mentors and designers of learning experiences.

The international implementation literature further suggests that policy outcomes are shaped by school context. Braun, Maguire, and Ball (2011) emphasise the importance of contextual factors in understanding how schools enact policy. Ball, Maguire, and Braun (2012) subsequently demonstrates that policies are actively understood and adapted by schools instead than being simply executed according to centrally defined directives. Considering this methodology in India implies that the implementation of the NEP policy will vary in terms of government, aided, and private institutions as well as urban, rural, tribal, and remote geographic areas.

f. Assessment Reform and the Shift from Examinations to Learning Outcomes

Assessment of students is another important dimension of the NEP implementation. NEP-2020 recommends the introduction of competency-based assessments, holistic progress cards, and modifications in board examinations. This effort would help to shift away from rote learning and work towards assessing the conceptual understanding and applications of knowledge. This has been evident from the development of PARAKH framework and improved learning outcome framework. However, literature shows that there are certain problems involved in transforming the assessment practices since the examinations are deeply connected with the parents' expectations, the schools' accountability, and the students' educational expectations. Black & Wiliam (1998) have found out that formative assessment plays an main role in the process of student learning.

Hattie & Timperley (2007) have demonstrated that feedback is also of high importance in the process of learning. It can serve as the basis for the transformation of the NEP 2020. One way of evaluating the learning outcomes at different levels of schooling in India is through the National Achievement Survey conducted by India (Ministry of Education, 2022). However, a large-scale assessment process cannot substitute the formative assessment process at the classroom level. According to literature, there is a need for coherence among curriculum, teaching methods, teacher training, and assessment for the process to be applied successfully. This is because the competence-based curriculum and the rote-based examination system.

g. Multilingualism and Mother-Tongue-Based Education

Regarding the language policy, it is clear that it constitutes one of the most intricate elements of NEP 2020. According to the recommendations, if feasible, the home language, mother tongue, local language, or regional

language could serve as the medium of instruction at least until Grade 5 and possibly beyond (Government of India, 2020). This methodology is validated in various respects, since numerous scholarly studies globally affirm that youngsters acquire knowledge more efficiently through their linguistic capabilities. The importance of multilingualism in education has frequently been emphasized by UNESCO (2016), and it has also been explained by Cummins (2000) that first language development is very important for the success of learners cognitively and academically. Some of the relatively new studies in this area that have considered the policy setting of India have provided suggestions about multilingual models that accommodate translanguaging as well as real-life situations in multilingual classrooms (Mohanty, 2019; Singh, 2025).

According to Singh (2025), multilingual education in the policy NEP 2020 faces some difficulties due to the high parental desire for English-medium education. Multilingualism is very important in the tribals and linguistically rich areas of India. For example, in one such study conducted on multilingual teaching in the government primary schools of Delhi and Assam, it has been found that structured multilingual instruction can coexist with English language instruction without any problem (British Council, 2026). This proves that the real issue is not whether there will be desirability of using multilingual instruction, but rather whether the institution has the right personnel, textbooks, dictionaries, books, and evaluation tools to enable multilingual instruction.

h. Digital Education and the Digital Divide

Technology serves as another important pillar for NEP 2020. As per the NEP policy, the technology can be used as an instrument for accessing, pedagogy, assessment, teacher education, and educational administration. The expansion of DIKSHA, digital tools, virtual learning, and NDEAR reflects the approach adopted under this policy (Ministry of Education, 2021). Kasinathan (2021) argues that digital technologies have considerable potential within the NEP framework but also emphasises the need to examine how technology can genuinely contribute to educational objectives rather than simply increase the availability of digital content. Sharma (2022) similarly identifies technology as a significant component of school transformation but highlights issues of accessibility, teacher preparedness and the effective integration of digital resources into pedagogy.

These concerns are supported by UNESCO's (2023) Global Education Monitoring Report, which warns that technology in education can produce benefits but can also exacerbate inequality when access, regulation, teacher capacity and pedagogical appropriateness are weak. India-specific experimental evidence provides a more nuanced picture. Muralidharan, Singh, and Ganimian (2019) found that a personalised technology-assisted instructional programme in urban India produced substantial gains in mathematics and Hindi, particularly among academically weaker students. This suggests that technology can be effective when it is pedagogically targeted and integrated into a coherent instructional model rather than treated as a substitute for teachers. More recent evidence on DIKSHA likewise highlights both the scale of India's digital public infrastructure and the importance of institutional capacity, usability and implementation conditions (Pachori et al., 2026).

i. Equity, Inclusion and the Problem of Unequal Implementation

Equity is one of the normative foundations of NEP 2020. The policy identifies socio economically disadvantaged groups, children with disabilities, girls and geographically disadvantaged populations as groups requiring targeted support (Government of India, 2020). This dedication is founded on the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009, which created the legislative structure for free and mandatory elementary education for children between the ages of 6 and 14 years (Government of India, 2009). However, the literature demonstrates that formal educational access does not automatically produce substantive equality. UNESCO (2019), in its State of the Education Report for India, documents continuing barriers affecting children with disabilities, including infrastructure, teacher preparedness and institutional implementation gaps. Similarly, Sen (1999) provides a broader theoretical framework for understanding development in terms

of substantive capabilities rather than formal access alone. From this perspective, educational equity under NEP 2020 should be assessed not only through enrolment but also through participation, learning, progression and educational outcomes.

The Performance Grading Index is a major institution-based instrument used for analyzing differences among different states and Union Territories. The Performance Grading Index 2.0 aims to measure education in schools on various aspects including learning, access, infrastructure, equity, governance, and teacher education (Ministry of Education, 2023). The multi-dimensional aspect of the index becomes particularly relevant when measuring the effectiveness of the NEP because the NEP itself is multi-dimensional in its nature. Yet composite indices can mask significant intrastate disparities, and therefore need to be supported by district-level and school-level analysis.

j. Early Childhood Care and Education

The introduction of ECCE within the foundation stage via NEP 2020 has been regarded as a significant restructuring step. According to NEP 2020, it has been observed that the development in the form of cognitive, linguistic, social, and emotional aspects during the initial years has a significant bearing on learning in the coming years (Government of India, 2020). This has been followed by a curriculum framework via National Curriculum Framework for the Foundational Stage (NCERT, 2022). Global evidence proves that it is essential to invest in early childhood development. As Heckman (2006) notes, Investment in early childhood yields both economic and social advantages, and as noted by UNESCO (2021), universal access to early childhood education is essential for attaining SDG 4. The implementation of ECCE in India is hindered by institutional segregation as far as Anganwadi schemes and educational institutions are concerned. In the view of Mondal & Mondal (2025), while the importance of ECCE has been recognized in the NEP 2020 document, there are some challenges that continue to emerge with regard to the implementation of ECCE. These challenges range from infrastructure to curriculum shift challenges.

As such, ECCE can be used as an example of a basic issue that emerges when implementing NEP, because large-scale structural integration will have to involve institutions that have operated under different organizational and professional systems in the past. Without funds and competent personnel, the inclusion of ECCE in the curriculum may not provide the same advantages for the child's education.

k. Vocational Education and the Academic–Vocational Divide

Additionally, NEP 2020 aims at bridging the divide that has long been existing between academics and occupations. It provides an approach whereby vocational experience begins in middle schools through internships and more practical training (Government of India, 2020). This is as a outcome of the issue in the Indian educational system that has been highly academic and devoid of practical experience and employment. As stated by Unnisa (2020), vocational training provided in the schools might be helpful in controlling this issue and making the education relevant. It has also been observed from recent researches that vocational training suffers from certain institutional and social barriers since more social prestige is attached to the academic way as compared to the vocational one. What this implies is that only introducing the vocational course is not enough; rather, there are many other requirements for the same.

This is consistent with the general literature on human capital, where a clear difference is drawn between years of schooling and the actual skill set that is developed as a result of those years of schooling. According to Hanushek & Woessman (2008), cognitive skills are strongly related to economic growth, and this means that not only should education systems be concerned about their output of educational services but they should also focus on the development of skills in their learners. Governance, Federalism and Policy Implementation the discussion of the implementation of NEP 2020 cannot take place without considering the federal character of the Indian institutional setup. The subject of education falls in the concurrent list, and hence cooperation among the central and state governments becomes imperative. It has been noted in the implementation

framework of the Ministry of Education that coordination among various institutions is essential for implementation (Ministry of Education, 2021). The general policy-implementation literature provides useful analytical tools for understanding this process. Lipsky (1980) conceptualises frontline public officials as “street-level bureaucrats” whose discretionary decisions shape the actual delivery of public policy. Applied to education, teachers, head teachers, district officials and local administrators become important actors in translating policy objectives into practice. Honig (2006) similarly argues that implementation is shaped by institutional environments, political conditions and local capacity. Fullan (2007) emphasises that educational change is complex and that sustainable reform requires changes in organisational culture, professional practice and leadership rather than merely issuing policy directives.

These theoretical insights are especially relevant to NEP 2020 because the policy is exceptionally broad. Ball, Maguire, and Braun (2012) show that schools do not simply implement policy; they actively interpret and enact it according to their available resources, institutional histories and local circumstances. Therefore, variations in the state capabilities, school facilities, availability of teachers, and administration efficiency may result in significant variance in the NEP implementation process. This is why having the same national framework does not guarantee similar results in education.

1. Emerging Empirical Evidence on NEP 2020 Implementation

Nevertheless, the empirical literature on NEP 2020 is relatively young, as the policy was formulated just in 2020. Yet, some research exists, presenting significant results. To start with, Sharma and Akalamkam (2021) found the presence of conflicting views of teachers and the implementation issues. Secondly, Kulal et al. (2024), who used an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design and conducted interviews with students, teachers, and experts, noted that the nature of NEP 2020 is revolutionary; however, there were still some doubts regarding the capacity building and implementation of NEP 2020.

As observed by Singaraju (2024) in the context of primary schools in the National Capital Region, the implementation process had brought about changes in aspects like curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment. This observation is especially important since it moves the debate away from what the NEP 2020 suggests into what schools are doing. From the research findings, it can be observed that implementation is not fully successful or unsuccessful, but it is partial and there are variations in terms of institutions’ capacity and policy realities.

In the same vein, the latest research in multilingual education has revealed that the issue of implementation of multilingual education has been affected by teacher unpreparedness and lack of resource due to the preference for English-medium education (Singh, 2025). In addition, the recent research in ECCE has also revealed that there has been integration with constraints at the institution level (Mondal & Mondal, 2025). All these suggest that the NEP implementation can be viewed as a negotiated institutional process

m. Critical Synthesis and Research Gap

On the basis of the review of literature discussed above, there are three main findings. First of all, it should be admitted that NEP 2020 has covered some serious weaknesses of Indian school education such as foundational learning, teaching by rote, fragmented curriculum, lack of vocational education, teaching development, and overwhelming use of summative assessment. Second of all, as far as empirical findings are concerned, it can be said that the policy has been implemented in several areas such as FLN, curricula, teacher training, digital and assessment. Third of all, and foremost, there is some gap between policy and implementation capability.

However, there are certain problems in the existing research body. Firstly, many articles in the early literature on NEP 2020 were mainly conceptual or descriptive rather than empirical. Secondly, a lot of studies focus on individual aspects like digital education, teachers' education, multilingualism, or foreign language

nationalism, yet they do not study these aspects in combination. Moreover, there is a lack of longitudinal research that can help ascertain if the reforms being implemented in the institutions in accordance with NEP 2020 are playing any role in bringing any sort of improvement in the educational performance and equity of students.

Moreover, there are not enough studies on the variations among states and districts in India's school education system.

Another limitation worth taking into account is the differentiation between implementation and outcomes indicators. The documents provided by the government contain enormous amounts of information regarding different programs, training sessions, infrastructure, curricula, institutions, but the existence of something does not necessarily prove its efficiency. The World Bank's (2018) classification of 'schooling' and 'learning' is therefore highly relevant; the adoption of the former through the latter would hopefully become the case in the future. The literature also suggests the need for a more integrated analytical framework. Teacher preparedness, curriculum reform, assessment, digital infrastructure, multilingual education, ECCE, vocational education and inclusion should not be examined as isolated variables because implementation outcomes are likely to be interdependent. For example, competency-based assessment cannot be effectively implemented without teacher preparation; multilingual education cannot operate effectively without appropriate learning materials; digital education cannot reduce inequality without connectivity and digital competence; and FLN cannot improve sustainably without classroom-level instructional capacity.

Accordingly, the present study addresses an important gap by approaching NEP 2020 as a multi-dimensional school education reform rather than evaluating individual schemes in isolation. The study adopts a critical and evaluative perspective to examine the extent to which the policy's objectives have been translated into institutional practices and educational outcomes. It particularly distinguishes between policy intent, implementation mechanism, implementation status, observed outcomes and persistent gaps. Such an approach allows the assessment to move beyond the question of whether NEP 2020 has been "implemented" towards the more meaningful questions of *how*, *where*, *to what extent*, and *with what consequences* it has been implemented. A certain body of literature is coming up to explain the importance of adopting such an approach in light of the fact that the available evidence shows a complex path to implementation with high level of politics involved.

In general, it can be found that NEP 2020 is endowed with immense transformative power; however, it cannot be concluded through its policies as to whether it will be successful or not in the end. As per the evidence provided, its success lies in consistent investment from the public, teaching ability, management of schools, institutional coordination, contextualization, proper evaluation, entry into the digital world, and involvement of the teachers and community. Hence, an important analysis of NEP 2020 requires an essential shift from evaluation based on policy to that which is based on implementation and its outcomes.

3. Objectives of the Study

- I. To critically examine the implementation of NEP 2020 in school education, with particular focus on FLN, curriculum and pedagogy, teacher preparedness, assessment, digital education, vocational education, equity and inclusion, infrastructure and governance.
- II. For measuring the discrepancy between the objectives set forth in NEP 2020 and its implementation and outcome, and finding out the main challenges in the area of institutions, finances, technology, society and region regarding its implementation.

4. Methodology

In this research, the main methodological approach applied is that of a descriptive, analytical and evaluative research methodology using secondary data sources. The focus will be on governmental documents, policy statements, educational frameworks and literature on NEP 2020. Data and evidence are collected from sources such as the Ministry of Education, Government of India, NCERT, ASER, UNESCO, World Bank and peer-reviewed research studies. In this study, we investigate various fields, such as the FLN, teacher training, curricula, methods of instruction, evaluation techniques, multilingual education, e-learning, ECCE, vocational learning, equality, and governance.

The data collected is then analyzed using thematic analysis and comparative analysis in order to recognize the achievements, challenges, and gaps present between the policy objectives and the way the policy was implemented on the ground. The process of implementing the policy is compared to other processes from other contexts where there is secondary data available. This research focuses on the following five elements: policy objectives → implementation process → state of the implementation process → results → what should be improved.

This is how we can find out whether NEP 2020 really makes any difference in school education or just means that the government has its programs. Critical Analysis of the Implementation of NEP 2020: Progress, Gaps and Emerging Outcomes From the review of literature, it becomes evident that the NEP 2020 cannot be reviewed in terms of inclusion of the policies provided in the policy document alone. The interaction between the intent of the policy and the capability of its implementation should be observed for proper understanding of the policy.

The current study endeavors to address this research gap through the multidimensional school education reform policy, i.e., NEP 2020.

A. From Policy Ambition to Implementation Reality:

The NEP 2020 has positioned itself in terms of its scope and intent. At the same time, changes are being planned for the curriculum, pedagogy, evaluation system, teacher training, ECCE, FLN, vocational education, digital education, multilingual education, and governance. Additionally, various initiatives have been launched by the Ministry of Education in line with the NEP, including NIPUN Bharat, Vidya Pravesh, NISHTHA 2.0, DIKSHA-related initiatives, and other initiatives related to school education. The existence of these programs, however, does not guarantee successful implementation. It is this that sets apart the successful implementation from the unsuccessful one on the basis of literature review. Successful implementation involves having enough teachers who are competent enough, the right training, infrastructure, resources, technology, finances, and coordination. New studies have shown that this is true as the teachers realize the transformative nature of NEP 2020 yet recognize the need for further training [Kulal et al., 2024]. Thus, the evidence suggests that NEP 2020 has moved considerably from the policy-design stage towards programme implementation, but the transition from administrative implementation to effective classroom transformation remains incomplete.

B. FLN: One of the Strongest Areas of Implementation

Foundational Literacy and Numeracy represents one of the clearest areas where NEP 2020 has generated a measurable implementation focus. The policy identified FLN as an urgent national priority, subsequently supported by NIPUN Bharat and associated teacher training, teaching- learning materials and school-readiness activities. Available evidence provides some encouraging signs. ASER 2024 reports substantial improvement in basic reading and arithmetic levels in rural India compared with 2022. For example, the proportion of government-school children in Std III able to read a Std II-level text increased nationally from 16.3% in 2022 to 23.4% in 2024, while the corresponding figure for Std V increased from 38.5% to 44.8%. Arithmetic performance also improved [ASER Centre, 2024].

But such gains must still be viewed with some amount of skepticism because even though they represent progress in gaining basic skills, they don't prove NEP 2020 has been the sole cause of the gains being realized. Further, the ASER results themselves differ from one state to another and from one type of school to another. What is crucial to realize is that the main thing about FLN is its measurability.

Most importantly, the findings from the ASER 2024 survey reveal that there are also some gaps in the implementation input variables. According to the survey conducted among government schools, while most schools have guidelines for FLN along with teacher training, not all of them have materials or preparation activities for FLN [ASER Centre, 2024]. This directly confirms the thesis statement, which states that implementation of policy must be measured through process indicators and outcome indicators.

C. Teacher Preparedness: The Major Implementation

Constraint Teacher readiness is one of the areas that have been identified as major weaknesses in the implementation of NEP. According to NEP 2020, teachers need to move away from conventional methods of lecturing and memorizing and instead use a multilingual and experiential teaching method. This poses many challenges for teachers. Indeed, empirical findings seem to validate this concern. As pointed out by Kulal et al. (2024), while the teachers supported the objectives of NEP 2020, they felt nervous about their competence and readiness to teach such a diversified curriculum.

This makes it evident that there is a substantial capacity gap in implementation. Just being enrolled in training classes does not ensure that the teacher is fully prepared for teaching. A teacher can go to the training class without changing anything about his classroom behavior. Thus, the success of the training programs such as NISHTHA and DIKSHA must be evaluated on the basis of some criteria. The main thing that should be emphasized is the fact that NEP 2020 will not be able to change into what was planned, if it is based on teacher training which is estimated according to attendance and completion rates.

D. Curriculum and Pedagogy: Structural Reform versus Classroom Transformation

Incorporation of education by competence and experience as opposed to traditional rote education has been one of the revolutionary concepts introduced by NEP 2020. However, changes in curricula do not automatically result in educational revolutions. In terms of policy implementation research, teachers' implementation of a policy is based on their own professional knowledge about the policy and the resources available to them [Coburn, 2001; Spillane et al., 2002]. This helps explain the fact that the same curriculum may result in varying practices in different classrooms.

This creates an important divide between the prescription of the curriculum and its implementation. As long as teachers have to continue to work amid the pressure from exams, large class sizes, and insufficient teaching materials and preparation, the competency-based curriculum reforms can proceed while still retaining traditional ways of teaching. In this way, the present study is gauging the impact of curriculum reform not only in terms of implementing a new framework for the curriculum, but also in terms of the change that comes about with regard to teaching and learning processes.

E. Assessment Reform: A Potential Contradiction

The NEP 2020 is in alignment with the theory of transitioning from tests that are based on rote-learning to those that are competency-based and formative assessment [Government of India, 2020]. However, an important challenge that arises is the potential conflict between the goals of the new curriculum and the process of examinations. Considering the continued emphasis on examination results, there is very little likelihood for teachers to employ inquiry- and competency-based modes of teaching. In light of this, therefore, assessment reform becomes one of the main measures of whether the New Education Policy 2020 is actually leading to

systemic change. The creation of new assessment frameworks is important, but what is even more important is whether classroom assessments will emphasize comprehension, application, problem solving, and competency.

Thus, the study treats assessment as an implementation-outcome linkage, rather than as an isolated administrative reform.

F. Digital Education: Expansion without Guaranteed Equality

The NEP 2020 has improved the use of digital technologies within educational policies. The use of digital technologies such as the DIKSHA project has created an important digital infrastructure for teachers and students in India [Ministry of Education, 2025]. It is not true that continued technological growth automatically ensures digital inclusion because the means of accessing the necessary gadgets, connectivity, electricity, education, and digital literacy are not equally available. This consideration applies more particularly to rural and impoverished communities.

The rationale for keeping digital availability separate from digital accessibility is clear. For instance, a school may have digital accessibility even when the learners themselves do not possess devices or have access to internet outside the school. Similarly, the teacher can have digital accessibility but may not be able to use the digital content pedagogically. In this regard, the application of digital learning within NEP 2020 can be analyzed on three dimensions:

Digital infrastructure --> Use --> Effectiveness in Education.

This is a far more analytical approach when compared to counting the various digital platforms, devices or Internet technologies.

G. Multilingual Education: Strong Policy Principle, Difficult Implementation

The emphasis on mother tongue and multilingual learning in NEP 2020 is extremely significant in the wake of the diversity of languages in the Indian education system. However, recent researches have shown that there have been issues in implementing the policy owing to logistical problems and due to the preference for English language education system [Singh, 2025]. Not what should be doubted here is the need for such multilingual education, but rather whether there are teachers and textbooks, and all other means and tests necessary to implement it. This makes an excellent case study for the difference between feasibility and aspiration in policy making. A policy prescription that would be made at the national level could be ideal in relation to educational objectives but difficult to implement because of linguistic differences. In this case, NEP 2020 needs to be flexible, and not rigid. The local circumstances regarding the language will determine how multilingual education is carried out.

H. Equity and Inclusion: Access versus Substantive Equality

NEP 2020 has certainly placed great emphasis on disadvantaged groups, disabled children, girls, and disadvantaged geographies. However, the vital criticism from this research clearly points out that school education is not the same as quality education. Equality implies the provision of an equal chance for participation, learning and development among the students. The differences that exist in terms of infrastructure, teachers, availability of technology, language proficiency, domestic surroundings, and isolation may lead to inequality even with high enrollment numbers.

This is the reason why multi-dimensional indicators like the Performance Grading Index become handy; but then they should not be regarded as the whole story of educational reform. State-level indicators will tend to cover up many differences between district and school levels. Therefore, this study will add to existing knowledge by examining equity as a dimension of outcome rather than only as a policy goal.

I. ECCE and Vocational Education: Reform Areas with Long-Term Potential

The incorporation of ECCE in the NEP 2020 in the foundational stage is a crucial structural reform. However, for the success of such an endeavor, coordination between Anganwadi centers, schools, teachers, and others would be necessary. Hence, the incorporation of ECCE into the new curriculum framework does not necessarily mean that there is quality ECCE. Along the same lines, vocational education is another avenue where education can be made very relevant to skills and employment. However, for the success of the vocationalization process, the following issues would need to be taken into account: teachers, infrastructure, internship, ties with local industries/local communities and social acceptability. Therefore, these areas must be assessed through practical exposure rather than simply adding vocational subjects.

J. Regional and Institutional Variation: The Central Problem of NEP Implementation

One of the most important findings emerging from the critical review is that NEP 2020 is a national policy being implemented through a highly heterogeneous education system. Policy Implementation versus Educational Outcomes the primary significance of the present study lies in the gap between the implementation process and its effectiveness. Activities which have been seen since NEP 2020 include curriculum, FLN, teacher training, technology-enabled learning and assessments and more [Ministry of Education, 2021, 2025]. But it is necessary not to perceive these trends as an indicator of the effectiveness of the processes of educational reform. It is especially topical to refer to the distinction that the World Bank makes between schooling and learning: provision of education does not guarantee effective learning [World Bank, 2018].

Similarly, empirical research conducted suggests that there is a favorable perception of NEP 2020 among stakeholders, however, problems related to training and implementation have been pointed out [Kulal et al., 2024].

In this regard, it is evident that the NEP 2020 has achieved considerable success regarding implementation, although transformation at the level of outcomes remains unfinished.

5. Major Findings

- **FLN is one of the strongest areas of implementation**, with evidence of improvement in basic reading and numeracy, although outcomes remain uneven across regions and school types.
- **Teacher preparedness is a major constraint**, Training and policy awareness do not invariably lead to modifications in classroom practices.
- **Curriculum and assessment reforms show a gap between policy intention and classroom practice**, particularly because traditional examination pressures may continue to encourage rote learning.
- **Digital education has expanded**, but unequal access to devices, internet, electricity and digital skills limits its inclusive impact.
- **Multilingual education, ECCE and vocational education have strong potential**, but their implementation depends on teachers, materials, infrastructure, institutional coordination and local conditions.

Overall, **regional and institutional differences remain a central challenge**, meaning that a common national policy cannot produce uniform outcomes without adequate local adaptation and capacity.

6. Conclusion

From the above discussion, it can be deduced that NEP 2020 has created many opportunities for transformation of schooling system in India through foundations of literacy and numeracy, curricula and

pedagogical reforms, teacher education, digital education, assessment reforms, multilingualism, vocational education, ECCE, and equity and inclusiveness. Though the process has progressed beyond policy-making, many schemes have been devised but the transition from policy implementation to educational transformation is not yet complete.

The research relies more on secondary data such as policy documents, reports by government organizations, and academic journals. Therefore, there is no sufficient creation of evidence on the primary level from the viewpoint of teachers, students, parents, or school organizations. As the implementation of NEP 2020 is still in the early stages, there has not been sufficient creation of data with the passage of time to assess the impact of NEP 2020. Research that is carried out in the future should be centered around longitudinal data so that changes can be examined in the field of learning outcome, teaching process, and student experience. Research carried out by comparing one state with another, comparing urban and rural areas, comparing government with private sector, will aid us in gaining more knowledge about the variations in the different regions. In the future, research could also involve evaluation of the success of the teacher training program, digital education, multilingual education, FLN, ECCE, and vocational education through school data

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