



BRIDGING TRADITION AND INNOVATION: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF NEP 2020'S CURRICULUM REFORMS AND PEDAGOGICAL APPROACHES

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RESEARCH ARTICLE



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DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.70096/tssr.260401012>

Abstract

NEP 2020 aims to make a flexible, comprehensive, and student-centred educational system where learners' variety and vibrancy are reflected in classrooms where inquiry and creativity are fostered (Sarkar, 2023). The curriculum reforms' efficiency in fusing old-style values with modern teaching methods and evolving inclusive, learner-centred, and all-round education, the study pursues to understand how NEP 2020 links India's Educational traditions with cutting-edge pedagogical innovations. The curricular and pedagogical changes of NEP 2020 are critically examined in this paper using a qualitative policy analysis technique. The researcher interprets policy aims, assumptions, and implications by methodically reviewing the NEP 2020, official publications, and academic interpretations using document analysis. A thematic and interpretative framework guides the analysis. NEP 2020 effectively mixes India's educational tradition with current teaching by promoting classical languages and values with competency-based, student-centered pedagogy. It encourages a comprehensive, interdisciplinary curriculum that develops life skills, creativity, and critical thinking. While teacher empowerment via improved training connects pedagogy with high-quality instruction. It takes a varied range of contextual adaptability to strike a balance between traditional values and cutting-edge techniques. The effectiveness of the policy hinges on closing the gap between the ideal and actual classroom environment through sustained support and curriculum customisation at the local level. For reforms to be operationalised, professional development for teachers is essential. Long-term, NEP 2020 has the potential to transform Indian education into a culturally grounded, inclusive, and future-ready system if these challenges are addressed.

Keywords: *NEP 2020, Curriculum Reform, Pedagogical Innovation, Multilingualism, Experiential Learning, Policy Analysis*

Introduction

A comprehensive overhaul of India's educational system is the goal of the National Education Policy 2020. It aims to provide a more flexible, inclusive, and all-encompassing method of instruction that fosters each student's unique abilities. The main goal is to produce people who are not only highly qualified academically but also have the capacity for critical thought, creativity, and environmental adaptation. The strategy emphasises how crucial it is to have an educational system that can provide pupils the abilities and information needed to prosper in a world that is changing quickly.

The goal of NEP 2020 is to close the gap between present educational practices and expectations of the future. To make sure that students are ready for the possibilities and challenges of the twenty-first century, it places a high priority on interdisciplinary learning, career preparation, and technological integration. By encouraging fairness and inclusion, the strategy also aims to lessen educational inequities by guaranteeing that all children, irrespective of their socioeconomic background, have access to high-quality education.

The core tenets of NEP 2020's higher education vision are equity and inclusiveness. The goal of the policy is to give students from all backgrounds- especially those from under-represented communities- access to opportunities. Special programs are suggested to help women, pupils with impairments, and underprivileged populations. NEP 2020 seeks to create an educational system that represents the full potential of India's varied people by fostering diversity and inclusiveness.

In order to completely revamp India's existing educational system, NEP 2020 proposes a number of ground-breaking changes. The reorganisation of the school curriculum, which now prioritises a more adaptable and varied educational experience, is among the biggest changes. In order to offer a more comprehensive education, the strategy promotes the addition of disciplines like coding, environmental education, and Indian culture in addition to standard academic subjects. Additionally, the goal of early vocational training is to provide pupils real-world skills that are applicable in today's workforce.

The emphasis on early childhood care and education (ECCE), which acknowledges the crucial role that the early years play in a child's development, is another significant innovation. The strategy promotes a curriculum that encourages curiosity, creativity, and a love of learning together with a solid foundation in reading and arithmetic. Additionally, NEP 2020 emphasises the importance of technology in education by encouraging digital literacy and the utilisation of online resources to improve the educational process.

NEP 2020 has infrastructural challenges despite its lofty goal, particularly in rural and isolated areas. A lack of enough classrooms, technology, and basic facilities hinders the policy's successful implementation. Although the policy encourages the integration of technology, many parts of India continue to confront significant challenges because of a lack of reliable energy and internet access.

Despite NEP 2020's strong emphasis on technological integration, the digital divide remains a severe issue. As of 2021, only around 24% of rural Indian homes had internet connectivity (NSSO), which means that many pupils are unable to access online education, especially during pandemics. The policy's focus on digital education is not completely accessible to many pupils due to the digital gap, which exacerbates already-existing inequalities.

Despite the fact that NEP 2020 places a high priority on teacher preparation, many educators still lack the abilities necessary to adapt to new pedagogical techniques, especially those working in rural and marginalised regions. Teachers' digital literacy is relatively poor, and traditional teaching methods are still widely used. The policy's capacity to provide a transformative educational experience may be compromised by this discrepancy in teacher preparedness.

Review of Related Literature

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 represents a landmark reform in Indian education, striving to balance traditional philosophical roots with global trends in curriculum and pedagogy. Scholars observe that the policy's focus on holistic, multidisciplinary, and competency-based learning reflects an effort to preserve India's indigenous educational ideals while modernizing for 21st-century needs (Kumar, 2021; Batra, 2021). Drawing inspiration from Tagore's humanism and Gandhi's Nai Talim, the policy re-centres value-based and experiential learning while aligning with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's "Education 2030" framework (Srivastava, 2022).

Curricular reforms emphasize a move from rote memorization toward competency-based and experiential approaches. The new 5+3+3+4 structure promotes developmental alignment and flexibility (Sinha & Gupta, 2021). Empirical studies suggest that while pilot projects have improved learner engagement, disparities in teacher training and infrastructure continue to limit nationwide implementation (Bhattacharya, 2022; Banerjee & Reddy, 2022). The integration of art, vocational, and technological components into mainstream curricula is viewed as progressive but demands systemic teacher capacity-building and redesigned assessments (Nayak & Kaur, 2021).

Pedagogically, NEP 2020 advocates learner-centred, play-based, and inquiry-driven methods, particularly in the foundational years. Research by Rao and Newnham (2021) shows that play-based learning enhances socio-emotional and cognitive development, resonating with international early-childhood standards. In higher education, the policy's push toward multidisciplinary structures and flexible credit systems encourages creative inquiry (Mishra, 2022; Raman, 2021). Nevertheless, Sharma and Patel (2022) note that exam-oriented cultures and bureaucratic rigidity may undermine these pedagogical innovations unless teachers are adequately empowered.

Digital pedagogy also occupies a central role in NEP 2020. Platforms such as DIKSHA and SWAYAM have widened access, yet the digital divide persists, particularly in rural contexts (Chakraborty, 2022). Scholars caution that while technology can personalize and democratize learning, it must complement rather than replace humanistic traditions of teaching (Singh & Thomas, 2023).

Equity and teacher education remain decisive for bridging tradition and innovation. Although NEP 2020 envisions inclusive, reflective teacher preparation, implementation gaps are widespread (Mehta, 2022). Without sufficient investment in professional development, the transformative intent of the policy may remain unrealized (Tilak, 2021).

Research Objectives

The researcher formulated several research objectives to carry out the study, the objectives are:

1. To study the major curriculum reforms proposed under NEP 2020.
2. To analyze the pedagogical approaches recommended by NEP 2020 on traditional education and modern education.
3. To evaluate the potential impact and challenges of implementing these reforms across diverse educational contexts in India.

Research Questions

The researcher formulated several research questions based on research objectives to carry out the study. The research questions are:

1. What are the key components of curriculum and assessment reforms introduced under NEP 2020?
2. How does NEP 2020 integrate traditional education with modern pedagogical innovations?
3. What practical and structural challenges may affect the implementation of these Curriculum reforms?

Methodology of the Study

The researcher used qualitative, analytical, and interpretive methodologies for this study, obtaining data from a variety of sources, including the NEP 2020 policy document, government publications, scholarly journals. Additionally, the study included thematic and linguistic analysis of NEP 2020's requirements. The researcher's main areas of interest were NEP 2020-related curriculum framework, teaching, assessment, and implementation. The research did note certain drawbacks, though, most notably the use of interpretive analysis and secondary data.

Analysis and Discussion of the Study

Curricular Restructuring under NEP 2020: According to the NCERT director, a new curriculum based on a new policy will be introduced in the 2023–2024 academic year. The New Curriculum Framework (NCF) will be adopted for a year, and the textbooks will be developed for an additional two years. In order to be able to deploy the textbooks in three years, we will develop them in phases. He went on to say that the curriculum would be approved by the Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE) before being adopted by every state. The four NCF will be covered in that program- Early childhood care and education (ECCE), School education, Teacher education, Adult education curriculum.

NEP-2020 developed the following evolving aspects of curriculum and pedagogy in school education: Reorganizing the curriculum and pedagogy of the school using a new 5+3+3+4 design. The educational system's pedagogical and curriculum framework will be reorganized to make learning more engaging for all students. Preparatory Stage (Grades 3-5, covering 8-11 years of ages), Middle Stage (Grades 6-8, covering 11-14 years of ages), Secondary Stage (Grades 9-12 in two phases, 9-10 first and 11-12 second, covering 14-18 years), and Foundational Stage (three years of Anganwadi/preschool + two years in primary school in Grades 1-2; both together covering 3-8 years of ages) comprise the 5+3+3+4 design.

The Foundational stage, also known as Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE), will include five years of flexible, play-based, activity-based, and inquiry-oriented learning. The three years of instruction in the preparatory stage were built on play, exploration, and an activity-based curriculum and pedagogy that included interactive classrooms and some light textbooks. Learning to establish a strong foundation in a variety of disciplines, including as science, math, languages, physical education, reading, writing, and speaking. Students in the middle stage, which lasts three years, will be prepared for the sciences, mathematics, arts, social sciences, and humanities by building on the pedagogical and curriculum style of the preparatory stage. Building on the Middle Stage's subject-oriented pedagogy and curriculum, the Secondary Stage will consist of four years of interdisciplinary study with more critical thinking, in-depth study, and subject choice freedom. The choice to leave after Grade 10 and return in the following phase to take any further courses offered in Grades 11–12 is highlighted.

Focusses on students' overall development: NEP-2020's primary goal is to shift the focus from the educational system to actual comprehension and learning strategies. Education's primary goal is to support students' entire development in addition to their cognitive growth. Curriculum and pedagogy will be refocused with an emphasis on achieving certain objectives. Every learning level will integrate certain sets of values and abilities. These necessary competencies will be determined by NCERT in order to construct the National Curriculum Framework for education and early childhood. Curricula should be simplified to improve critical thinking and foundational knowledge. More inquiry-based, holistic, discovery-based, and analytically orientated curriculum content is needed. Key concepts, ideas, application, and problem-solving must be the main emphasis of the content. There will be more interactive teaching and learning, more supportive questions, and more enjoyable, imaginative, and exploratory activities for students to get a better comprehension of the material.

Give students options in their courses to empower them: In secondary school, students have greater freedom to select the topics they want to study, such as physical education, arts and crafts, and practical skills, allowing them to create their own educational route. Another intriguing aspect is the distinct division between "Curricular" and "Extracurricular," or "Co-curricular," as well as between "Arts," "Humanities," and "Sciences," as well as between "Academic" and "Vocational" streams. Along with Science, Humanities, and Mathematics, a school curriculum that offers pupils more options will include subjects like Physical Education, Arts and Crafts, and Vocational Skills.

Multidisciplinary Approach

The word "discipline" in education literally means "subject," referring to a distinct field of study. Therefore, combining many or distinct fields into a single curriculum is known as interdisciplinary education. The scope of education as a field is so broad that it has no boundaries. The nature of learning and education is the same as the subject's methodology. We learn how to act, behave, and thrive in a world that is always changing through education. There are several areas and facets of learning that may occur in an individual's life. Renaissance humanism taught us that the cosmos is homocentric and that humans are the source of all possibilities, virtues, and goodness. The ultimate goal of education is to help children reach their full potential and potential. Furthermore, knowledge is limitless. As a result, education is a multifaceted field. NEP 2020 states that "such an education will help develop well-rounded individuals who possess critical 21st century capacities in fields across the arts, humanities, languages, sciences, social sciences, and professional, technical, and vocational fields; rigorous specialisation in a chosen field or fields; an ethic of social engagement; and soft skills, such as communication, discussion, and debate." The New Education Policy is also multidisciplinary. It has been proposed for implementation by the policymakers. This policy states that the notion that all areas of creative human endeavour, including as science, mathematics, professional and vocational disciplines, and soft skills, should be categorised as "arts" has clearly Indian roots. This idea of "knowledge of many arts," or what are now often

referred to as the “liberal arts.” Through a variety of information streams, a student may satiate his curiosity and make decisions about his future thanks to the interdisciplinary approach to education.

A multidisciplinary approach to education has several advantages. Students that use a multidisciplinary approach learn to see things holistically or as a whole. The youngster is able to comprehend the situation in its entirety. There are several aspects of each issue, circumstance, lesson, and learning to comprehend. How to correlate them is taught via interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary approaches. The lesson can be learnt by the youngster from a factual perspective. The child’s approach becomes considerably more realistic. The youngster learns a lot of things at once with this program. The youngster gains a strong critical thinking skill that makes them a true mentor or leader. Every moment of life is a challenge that we must overcome. Children are taught how to handle problems in real-world scenarios using a multidisciplinary approach. The youngster has exceptional learning abilities in the classroom. Realistic initiatives draw bright minds and spark curiosity about potential new opportunities. By learning several subjects in a single curriculum, a kid develops the abilities necessary to perform and matures to accept a decent job, turning them into human resources.

Pedagogical Approaches: One of the core tenets of the National Education Policy 2020, a landmark document in Indian education, is the encouragement of cutting-edge pedagogical strategies that support experiential learning, flipped classrooms, and technological integration. According to these methods, which are backed by research (Hattie, 2009; Major, 2011), students learn better when they actively participate in their education and are able to apply ideas in practical settings even when they have access to interactive, technologically advanced resources.

Experimental Learning: NEP 2020 encourages learning by doing, or experiential learning. With this approach, students are encouraged to participate in practical exercises that are closely related to the ideas they are learning. As it shifts away from passive learning methods and towards active engagement, it fosters greater comprehension and memory of the material. This method is also used internationally in nations like Finland, where students engage in “phenomenon-based learning,” completing multidisciplinary projects that model real-world difficulties.

Flipped Classrooms: The flipped classroom approach, which reverses the conventional responsibilities of homework and classroom teaching, is another idea that NEP 2020 supports. In a flipped classroom, students watch videos, read books, or utilise interactive software to study new material at home before using class time for group projects, debates, and problem-solving. By changing the teacher’s position from lecturer to learning facilitator, this approach enables deeper comprehension and more individualised attention to each student’s requirements.

Technology Integration: Another essential component of creative pedagogy under NEP 2020 is the use of technology in the classroom. To improve the learning process, the policy places a strong emphasis on integrating digital tools and AI-based learning platforms. Students may access materials that are customised to meet their unique requirements and learning preferences thanks to technology. Additionally, it makes it easier for teachers to monitor their students’ development and offer prompt interventions.

AI and Digitisation in Education: The educational landscape is constantly evolving to include individualised learning routes based on student requirements. AI-driven processes examine behavioural patterns and student data to identify unique learning preferences. Looking back at the actions taken in 2023, it is clear that programs for upskilling and digitalisation will continue to be the major forces influencing Indian education’s future and the country’s workforce’s readiness. In addition to the dynamic nature of technological platforms or educational technology, technology’s transformational potential is set to reshape the educational landscape and enable people to thrive in the future’s evolving, technologically driven labour market. Therefore, in the field of educational technology, the combination of artificial intelligence and digitisation has been crucial in bringing high-quality education to India and in influencing the development of affordable and user-friendly solutions that have raised educational standards across linguistically diverse regions.

Problem-Solving Skills: Students are frequently required to solve challenging, open-ended challenges as a result of the integration of collaborative, project-based learning and flipped classroom methods.

Balancing Tradition and Modernity: India’s national education system is very successful and regarded as superior to that of many other modern nations. On July 29, 2020, the Union Cabinet adopted the National Education Policy (NEP). Both public and private schools are encouraged to use the home language, mother tongue, local language, or regional language as the medium of teaching “wherever possible, until at least Grade 5, but preferably till Grade 8 and beyond,” according to the National Education Policy, 2020. Higher education institutions will either offer bilingual education or utilise their home tongue or local language as the medium of teaching, according to the NEP’s chapter on “Promotion of Indian Languages, Arts, and Culture.”

Since English continued to be India’s primary language long after independence, it had a significant impact on Indians. English is now used extensively in our educational system for everything from science and technology to literature. According to NEP, the three-language approach will have more flexibility. However, no State will be forced to choose any particular language. States, regions, and students themselves will decide whether or not to learn three languages, provided that at least two of them are indigenous to India.

Use of mother tongue in education: The notion of using one’s mother tongue in the classroom is not new. The Indian educational system is not new to the concept of teaching elementary school students in their native tongue. According to the Constitution, every state and local government shall make an effort to give “children belonging to linguistic minority groups adequate facilities for instruction in the mother-tongue at the primary stage of education.”

According to the Kothari Commission's report on education and national development (1964–66), books and teaching in tribal regions should be in the native tribal tongue during the first two years of schooling. By the third year, the regional language needs to be the primary language of instruction and be taught independently. The Rights to Education Act of 2009 additionally mandated that, to the greatest extent feasible, the language of teaching in schools be the child's native tongue.

Despite its effectiveness, mother tongue implementation is challenging: According to the National Education Policy, early instruction in a child's mother language can enhance learning, boost student engagement, and lower the dropout rate. However, this would require additional cash, new teacher training, and new books. Additionally, it might be challenging to choose which of India's many languages and dialects should be utilised as the primary language of teaching in a specific region. Early on in school, using the child's native tongue enhances learning results, attendance, and the capacity to pick up new languages. Global studies also shown that it lowers grade repetition, dropout rates, and boosts classroom involvement.

The difficulty of several mother languages: Due to the diversity of mother tongues in India, some kids may speak more than one language in a classroom. All languages may not be able to be used as the primary language of teaching, and many regions of the nation may find it challenging to adopt this. The government would technically require instructors and kids to speak their mother tongue in the classroom, but the child's language would not be the medium of instruction. In addition to studying the local tongue or English, this would enable kids to converse, argue, and express themselves in their own tongue.

Incorporation of 21st-century skills and global perspectives: Critical thinking, creativity, teamwork, communication, information literacy, media literacy, technological literacy, adaptability, leadership, initiative, social skills, and productivity are all examples of 21st-century talents. Students are better prepared for success in contemporary businesses and civic life when problem-solving, flexibility, and ongoing learning are prioritised. By including digital literacy, students are guaranteed to be able to use technology sensibly and productively.

Understanding and valuing cultural variety, global challenges, and the interconnectedness of nations and peoples are all part of an education that adopts a global viewpoint. The curriculum should include international case studies, promote languages other than the home tongue, promote cross-cultural interaction, and incorporate global topics. Students are better equipped to understand their place in the larger world when global issues like climate change, sustainable development, and global citizenship are highlighted.

Assessment and Evaluation Reforms

A number of significant elements introduced in NEP 2020 alters educational assessment. The goal of these rules is to make evaluation more learner-centric and comprehensive. Among the important clauses are:

Transition from Summative to Formative Evaluation: It is suggested that formative evaluations, which take place all during the learning process, replace traditional summative assessments, which mostly rely on end-of-year exams. The purpose of formative assessments is to continually evaluate a student's development while offering prompt feedback and chances for development. This change highlights the value of education as a continuous process as opposed to a final destination decided by a single test.

Prioritizing Competency-Based Education: Competency-based learning is emphasized heavily in NEP 2020. Competencies cover a wider variety of abilities, information, and qualities that students must learn. The strategy pushes teachers to create tests that emphasize gauging a student's capacity to use information and abilities in practical contexts. This method encourages creativity, critical thinking, problem-solving, and real-world application.

The function of comprehensive and ongoing evaluation (CCE): As the cornerstone of assessment changes, the policy reintroduces the idea of Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation (CCE). Throughout the academic year, a student's learning progress is continuously assessed as part of CCE. It includes a range of evaluation instruments, such as tests, assignments, presentations, and observations, among others. CCE targets each student's unique learning requirements while attempting to present a comprehensive picture of their skills.

Reforms to Higher Education Assessment: Institutions of higher learning are urged to give research and innovation top priority. Assessment procedures must to be in line with students' growth in critical thinking, problem-solving, and research skills. Higher education institutions are encouraged to have more autonomy under NEP 2020.

They are free to create their own curriculum and evaluation techniques, tailoring them to the unique requirements of their fields and students. Mechanisms for accreditation and quality control are heavily emphasized in the policy. To make sure that their evaluation procedures adhere to set norms, institutions are urged to pursue accreditation.

Findings of the Study

The findings of the present study are:

- The study found that 5+3+3+4 Model A developmental approach to learning that is in line with child psychology, is shown in the switch from the 10+2 system to the 5+3+3+4 architecture. Through the use of the four National Curriculum Frameworks (NCFs), it unifies ECCE, school education, teacher education, and adult education into a single, cohesive framework. Age-appropriate teaching, flexibility, and inquiry are encouraged by the restructuring of learning into

Foundational, Preparatory, Middle, and Secondary Stages. Instead of emphasising rote memorisation, this child-centered restructuring places more emphasis on conceptual understanding and competency-based growth.

- The NEP's change from traditional content-heavy education to competency-oriented learning is a significant conceptual shift. The curriculum integrates cognitive, emotional, social, and ethical development to emphasise the learner's holistic progress. In order to create well-rounded people, values and life skills like empathy, resilience, civic duty, and creativity are ingrained at every level.
- NEP promotes a simplified and concept-based curriculum that emphasises application-based learning, problem-solving, and important ideas. Inquiry-driven, immersive, and discussion-based learning that develops critical and higher-order thinking abilities is prioritised. In order to ensure nationwide uniformity, NCERT plans to update textbooks and instructional materials in phases starting in 2023.
- The curriculum promotes an interdisciplinary approach by doing away with strict divisions between academic, vocational, artistic, and scientific streams. Students are given more options for course pairings, which encourages adaptability and customisation of learning paths. Curricula influenced by the liberal arts help students make connections between information from different fields, which fosters critical thinking and flexibility two qualities that are essential in the twenty-first century.
- In order to improve engagement and retention, NEP 2020 encourages active and immersive learning modalities. Experiential learning is "learning by doing" through practical exercises and links to the actual world. Flipped Classrooms: Students watch videos or read books at home before class time is used for application and teamwork. A focus on artificial intelligence (AI) and digital platforms to provide individualised, flexible learning environments. Using multidisciplinary projects to develop problem-solving and cooperation abilities is known as project-based and collaborative learning.
- Reforms in Assessment and Evaluation highlights the transition from summative to formative evaluation, which places more emphasis on learning process than on end outcomes. Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation (CCE), which connects feedback to learning objectives, was introduced. encourages competency-based evaluations that measure intellectual comprehension, creativity, and problem-solving skills. Enhancing research, innovation, and quality assurance are the goals of institutional autonomy in higher education evaluation.

Acknowledgment: No

Author's Contribution: *Utam Kumar Das*: Data Collection, Literature Review, Methodology, Analysis, Drafting, Referencing

Funding: No

Declaration: Not Applicable

Competing Interest: No

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