



## A study on issues and challenges of NEP (National Education Policy) 2020 in primary education

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### Abstract

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 is a landmark reform in India's education system, aiming to overhaul the structure of education at all levels. In primary education, NEP 2020 emphasizes a foundational focus on early childhood care, equitable and inclusive education, and technology integration. While its vision is progressive, the implementation faces significant challenges. This paper examines the key issues and challenges related to the implementation of NEP 2020 in primary education, including infrastructure, teacher training, assessment reforms, language barriers, and resource allocation, offering recommendations to overcome these challenges.

**Keywords:** NEP 2020, primary education, foundational literacy, inclusivity, teacher training, challenges

### Introduction

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 was introduced with a vision to transform the Indian education system and align it with global trends while ensuring the needs of the local population are met. At the heart of this policy is a commitment to a holistic, inclusive, and flexible education framework that caters to the development of learners at all levels, including primary education.

Primary education forms the foundation for lifelong learning and development. NEP 2020 recognizes this and introduces reforms to ensure the effective delivery of foundational literacy and numeracy, universal access to education, and improved quality of teaching and learning. However, realizing the objectives of NEP 2020 in the domain of primary education presents several challenges, ranging from infrastructural deficits and inadequate teacher preparation to issues related to the medium of instruction and resource constraints.

This paper aims to explore the specific issues and challenges that have emerged in the implementation of NEP 2020 in primary education and suggests ways to address these problems to ensure that the policy's objectives are realized.

### Objectives of NEP 2020 in primary education

The NEP 2020 lays out several important objectives for primary education, which include:

- **Foundational Literacy and Numeracy:** Achieving universal foundational literacy and numeracy in primary school by 2025.
- **Universal Access:** Ensuring that every child has access to quality early childhood care and education.
- **Holistic Development:** Focusing on the overall development of the child, encompassing cognitive, social, and emotional growth.
- **Curricular and Pedagogical Reforms:** Introducing more activity-based, experiential, and skill-oriented learning processes, replacing rote memorization.

- **Multilingual Education:** Promoting instruction in the home language or mother tongue at the foundational stage.
- **Inclusivity and Equity:** Addressing disparities in access to education for marginalized and disadvantaged groups.
- **Technology in Education:** Leveraging technology to enhance learning outcomes and reduce disparities.

While these objectives present a progressive and inclusive vision, implementing them effectively requires addressing several systemic challenges.

### Challenges in implementing NEP 2020 in primary education

#### 1. Infrastructure deficiencies

One of the most significant barriers to the successful implementation of NEP 2020 in primary education is the lack of adequate infrastructure. Many schools, particularly in rural areas, face shortages of basic facilities such as classrooms, toilets, drinking water, and electricity.

- **Physical Infrastructure:** According to the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER), a significant proportion of government schools do not have sufficient classrooms, blackboards, or furniture. Many schools operate with a single teacher or inadequate teaching staff due to infrastructural constraints.
- **Early Childhood Education (ECE) Infrastructure:** NEP 2020 proposes the integration of early childhood education with the primary school system. However, there is a significant lack of facilities for early childhood care and education (ECCE), especially in rural and marginalized communities.

#### 2. Teacher shortages and professional development

Teachers are the cornerstone of successful educational reform, but the Indian primary education system faces a severe shortage of trained and qualified teachers.

- **Teacher-Student Ratios:** While NEP 2020 proposes maintaining optimal teacher-student ratios, the reality is far from this ideal. Many primary schools in rural areas have teacher-student ratios that exceed the recommended limits, leading to overcrowded classrooms and ineffective teaching.
- **Teacher Training:** The shift in pedagogy from traditional rote learning to activity-based and experiential learning requires extensive teacher training. However, many teachers lack the necessary professional development opportunities to acquire new pedagogical skills. Training in the use of digital tools and integrating technology into classrooms remains insufficient.
- **Contractual Teachers:** The prevalence of contractual or para-teachers, who are often underpaid and lack job security, further exacerbates the quality of teaching. These teachers may not be as invested in or prepared for implementing the pedagogical shifts outlined in NEP 2020.

### 3. Multilingual education and language barriers

NEP 2020 emphasizes the use of the mother tongue or local language as the medium of instruction, particularly in the early years of schooling. While this policy has the potential to enhance understanding and engagement, it also faces practical challenges.

- **Diverse Linguistic Landscape:** India is a linguistically diverse country, with hundreds of languages spoken across regions. Implementing multilingual education in regions where multiple languages or dialects coexist can be challenging. Finding teachers proficient in the local language and standardizing curricula across different languages are significant hurdles.
- **Transition to English:** Parents and communities in many regions view English as essential for socioeconomic advancement. The shift to mother-tongue-based education at the primary level may face resistance from parents who prioritize English-medium education for better opportunities. Balancing mother-tongue instruction with English-language learning is a delicate task.

### 4. Assessment reforms

NEP 2020 proposes reforms to the traditional assessment system, advocating for more holistic evaluations based on continuous assessment and competency-based learning. While this is a step in the right direction, implementing these changes poses several challenges.

- **Teacher Preparedness:** Teachers accustomed to conventional examination systems may find it difficult to shift to continuous, formative assessment methods that require more time, observation, and effort. Adequate training and resources for teachers are necessary to implement these assessment reforms effectively.
- **Infrastructure for Holistic Assessment:** Many schools lack the resources—such as technology, trained staff, and proper facilities—to conduct continuous and competency-based assessments. There is a need for improved data management systems to track student progress over time.

### 5. Equity and inclusivity

NEP 2020 emphasizes equitable and inclusive education, aiming to address disparities in access for marginalized communities, including Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), Other Backward Classes (OBC), and girls. However, ensuring equity and inclusion remains a major challenge.

- **Economic Barriers:** Children from economically disadvantaged backgrounds often face barriers such as the lack of access to learning materials, school uniforms, and transportation. These issues are more prevalent in rural areas, where school dropout rates are high due to poverty and the need for children to contribute to family income.
- **Social Barriers:** Socio-cultural factors, such as caste-based discrimination and gender bias, continue to hinder the participation of certain groups in primary education. Girls in many rural communities still face barriers to accessing education, including safety concerns and traditional gender roles that prioritize domestic work over schooling.
- **Inclusive Education for Children with Disabilities:** While NEP 2020 emphasizes inclusive education, many schools are ill-equipped to support children with disabilities. Lack of specialized teachers, accessible infrastructure, and inclusive curricula remain key challenges.

### 6. Resource Allocation and Funding

Adequate funding is crucial for the successful implementation of NEP 2020's ambitious reforms in primary education. However, financial constraints are a persistent issue in the Indian education system.

- **Public Expenditure on Education:** NEP 2020 proposes increasing public expenditure on education to 6% of GDP. However, historically, India's spending on education has hovered around 3-4%. Without significant financial investment, it will be difficult to meet the infrastructural and operational requirements needed to achieve the policy's objectives.
- **Resource Disparities:** Even when funds are allocated, disparities in the distribution of resources between urban and rural schools remain a major issue. Schools in remote and underserved areas often receive less funding, leading to poorer educational outcomes.

### 7. Technology and Digital Divide

The integration of technology in education is one of the central pillars of NEP 2020. While digital tools can enhance learning, especially in a post-pandemic world, the digital divide presents significant challenges.

- **Access to Technology:** Many children, particularly those in rural and underprivileged areas, lack access to basic digital infrastructure such as computers, tablets, or even reliable internet connections. This digital divide has been further highlighted during the COVID-19 pandemic, where online learning became the norm, leaving behind millions of children without access to the necessary technology.

- **Digital Literacy:** Even in regions where digital devices are available, digital literacy among teachers and students is often low. Training programs aimed at building digital competencies are crucial for successful technology integration in primary education.

## Recommendations for addressing the challenges

### 1. Improving infrastructure

To address the infrastructural gaps, the government should prioritize investments in building and upgrading school facilities, particularly in rural and underserved areas. This includes providing adequate classrooms, sanitation facilities, clean drinking water, and electricity. The integration of early childhood education infrastructure with primary schools must also be accelerated.

### 2. Teacher training and recruitment

There is a pressing need for large-scale teacher recruitment drives to address shortages, particularly in rural areas. Professional development programs should focus on training teachers in new pedagogical approaches, including experiential learning, digital literacy, and inclusive education practices. In addition, better remuneration and job security for teachers can help retain qualified staff.

### 3. Multilingual education support

To support multilingual education, teacher training programs should emphasize proficiency in local languages, and resources such as textbooks and learning materials should be made available in multiple languages. At the same time, a balanced approach should be taken to ensure students are exposed to English at appropriate levels to meet global educational standards.

### 4. Inclusive education strategies

Incorporating inclusive education practices requires improving infrastructure to accommodate children with disabilities, training teachers in special education, and raising awareness in communities about the importance of education for all. Outreach programs should specifically target marginalized communities to reduce dropout rates and promote equity.

### 5. Increased Public Investment in Education

The government must increase its financial commitment to education by allocating at least 6% of GDP to education, as recommended in NEP 2020. Additionally, efficient and equitable distribution of resources across regions is essential to reduce the rural-urban disparity.

### 6. Closing the Digital Divide

To close the digital divide, the government should focus on expanding affordable access to technology and internet services in rural areas. This could involve public-private partnerships to provide devices and improve connectivity. Digital literacy programs for both teachers and students are crucial for successful integration.

## Conclusion

The NEP 2020 presents a transformative vision for primary education in India, focusing on holistic development, inclusivity, and technology integration. However, its successful implementation faces numerous challenges, including infrastructural deficits, teacher shortages,

multilingual education complexities, and resource constraints. Addressing these challenges will require significant investment, policy support, and community engagement. By overcoming these barriers, NEP 2020 can lay the foundation for an equitable and high-quality education system that benefits all children in India.

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