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# The Success of the NIPUN Bharat Scheme: A Case Study on Foundational Literacy and Numeracy in India

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**Abstract**
The NIPUN Bharat Mission, launched in July 2021 under India's Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan, aims to ensure foundational literacy and numeracy (FLN) for all children by the end of Grade 3 by 2026–27, according to the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. This study conducts a qualitative case study analysis of the mission's implementation in three Indian states, Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, and Assam, to evaluate its effectiveness, identify challenges, and propose strategies for improvement. Online interviews with teachers, administrators, and parents and document review were used in the study to uncover significant differences in implementation. Tamil Nadu's decentralized, context-sensitive approach, incorporating local language and culture, yielded notable improvements in FLN outcomes, with 70% of Grade 3 students demonstrating proficiency in reading and basic arithmetic. In contrast, Uttar Pradesh's standardized model, while scalable, lacked flexibility, and Assam faced systemic constraints such as teacher shortages and language barriers, particularly for tribal communities. Key challenges include inadequate post-training teacher support, superficial monitoring systems, and infrastructural deficits. The study recommends localized curriculum adaptation, sustained teacher mentoring, inclusive pedagogies, and enhanced community engagement to strengthen the mission's impact. These findings contribute to the discourse on educational equity and provide actionable insights for scaling FLN interventions across India's diverse educational landscape.

**Keywords**: Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN), NIPUN Bharat, National Education Policy 2020, Early Childhood Education, Competency-Based Learning, Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan

## 1. Introduction

Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN), the ability to read with comprehension and perform basic arithmetic operations by the end of Grade 3 is globally recognized as a critical milestone in a child's educational journey. Without these essential skills, children struggle to engage with the rest of the curriculum, leading to poor learning outcomes, high dropout rates, and ultimately diminished life opportunities. In the Indian context, this challenge is particularly pronounced. According to the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER, 2019), nearly 50% of Grade 5 students in rural India could not read a Grade 2-level text or perform simple division. This "learning crisis" has persisted despite high

enrollment rates, signalling deep systemic gaps in early education. The NIPUN Bharat Mission (National Initiative for Proficiency in Reading with Understanding and Numeracy) was started by the Indian government to solve this urgent issue in July 2021 under the aegis of the centrally sponsored Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan. The mission aims to ensure that every child in the country attains the desired learning competencies in reading, writing, and numeracy by the end of Grade 3 by 2026–27. It aligns closely with the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, which places foundational learning at the core of educational reform and emphasizes competency-based, experiential learning from the early years. NIPUN Bharat represents a paradigm shift from rote memorization to competency-based education, guided by clear learning outcomes (Lakshya Soochi), teacher training through the NISHTHA-FLN modules, and a robust assessment and monitoring framework. Its holistic approach includes curriculum redesign, technology integration, community involvement, and convergence with Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programs. However, given India's vast socio-economic, linguistic, and infrastructural diversity, the successful implementation of the mission poses significant challenges.

This research paper presents a case study-based analysis of the implementation and outcomes of the NIPUN Bharat scheme in select Indian states. It critically examines the effectiveness of the mission in improving FLN outcomes, identifies implementation bottlenecks, and explores stakeholder perspectives, including those of teachers, parents, and administrators. Furthermore, it evaluates the policy and institutional frameworks supporting the mission and offers recommendations for enhancing its impact and scalability. By documenting both achievements and challenges, this study aims to contribute to the broader discourse on educational equity and learning reform in India. As the country strives to meet its ambitious target of foundational learning for all children by 2026–27, this paper provides timely insights into what works, what needs rethinking, and To realize its transformative potential, how can the mission be strengthened?

## 2. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to critically evaluate the implementation and effectiveness of the NIPUN Bharat Mission in fostering foundational literacy and numeracy (FLN) among early-grade learners in select Indian states. By examining implementation strategies, stakeholder perspectives (teachers, parents, and administrators), and institutional frameworks in Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, and Assam, the study aims to assess improvements in FLN outcomes and identify systemic challenges hindering progress.

## 3. Literature Review

### 3.1. Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN): The Global Imperative

Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN) has emerged as a cornerstone of early childhood education and lifelong learning. According to UNESCO (2017), children who fail to achieve basic reading and numeracy skills by age 10 are unlikely to catch up, perpetuating cycles of poverty and educational exclusion. The World Bank's 2018 Learning Poverty Index highlighted that over 53% of children in low- and middle-income countries could not read and understand a simple story by age 10 (World Bank, 2018). This crisis underpins the urgency for national missions like NIPUN Bharat.

### 3.2. FLN in the Indian Context

The NIPUN Bharat initiative preceded India's battle with the FLN. The Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) has consistently shown that a large proportion of students in Grade 3 cannot read Grade 1-level text or solve basic arithmetic problems (ASER, 2019). In 2018, only 27.2% of Grade 3 children

could read a Grade 2 text, and just 28.1% could perform basic subtraction, underscoring the learning crisis in early primary grades (ASER, 2019). This underachievement can be traced to multiple factors: inadequate preschool preparedness, high student-teacher ratios, and rote pedagogy (Kingdon, 2007). The Right to Education (RTE) Act, 2009 increased access but was criticized for neglecting learning outcomes, leading policymakers to refocus on learning quality in subsequent years (Bhatty, 2014).

### 3.3. National Education Policy 2020 and FLN Emphasis

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 brought FLN to the forefront by identifying it as the highest priority area in school education. It introduced the 5+3+3+4 curricular structure, merging ECCE with early primary education, and proposed the development of national FLN benchmarks (Ministry of Education [MoE], 2020). The policy argued that unless foundational learning is achieved by Grade 3, students will struggle with higher-order skills in later grades. It also called for the universalization of ECCE by 2030, recognizing its strong correlation with long-term academic success (Heckman, 2006; NCERT, 2021).

### 3.4. The NIPUN Bharat Mission: Objectives and Framework

NIPUN Bharat (National Initiative for Proficiency in Reading with Understanding and Numeracy) was introduced in July 2021 to guarantee that all Indian children achieve basic reading and numeracy by the conclusion of Grade 3 by 2026–2027 (MoE, 2021). It is part of the larger Samagra Shiksha initiative and is guided by the Lakshya Soochi, a document outlining age-appropriate learning outcomes for each grade. The mission emphasizes a three-tiered support system: school readiness, activity-based learning in Grades 1 and 2, and competency-based assessments, while promoting teacher training through NISHTHA-FLN modules (NCERT, 2022).

### 3.5. Pedagogical Innovations and Teaching Practices

Numerous studies affirm that child-centric and activity-based pedagogies improve early learning outcomes. Banerjee et al. (2007) demonstrated the effectiveness of Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) strategies in improving reading and math skills in government schools. These approaches, if aligned with NIPUN Bharat's framework, can help bridge learning gaps among first-generation learners. The NIPUN Bharat Mission also promotes foundational learning toolkits, classroom observation rubrics, and multilingual materials to improve instructional quality (MoE, 2021). However, concerns persist about implementation fidelity and the capacity of teachers to integrate these resources meaningfully (Kapur, 2022).

### 3.6. Role of ECCE and School Readiness

A strong early childhood care and education (ECCE) foundation is essential for the success of FLN programs. Research by Rao et al. (2019) found that quality ECCE programs significantly enhance children's language, cognitive, and socio-emotional development. However, ECCE in India is fragmented, with anganwadis under the Ministry of Women and Child Development often lacking trained educators and appropriate pedagogy. Integrating these centres with FLN goals requires cross-ministerial coordination, which has proven challenging in practice (Singh, 2020).

### 3.7. International Comparisons and Lessons

India can draw valuable lessons from international FLN models. The Tusome Early Grade Reading Activity in Kenya used scripted lesson plans, mobile feedback tools, and community reading programs to significantly boost literacy rates (USAID, 2017). Similarly, Vietnam's School Readiness Promotion Project used a blend of parental engagement, play-based learning, and teacher coaching to improve early-grade outcomes (World Bank, 2017). These examples underscore the importance of government

leadership, evidence-based pedagogy, and community involvement, all of which are core components of NIPUN Bharat in principle, if not yet in practice.

### 3.8. Monitoring and Evaluation Approaches

FLN programs' success is dependent on robust monitoring systems. In 2022, the Ministry of Education underscored the significance of collecting real-time data through Vidya Samiksha Kendras and UDISE+ dashboards. Independent evaluations, like those conducted by Pratham and Educational Initiatives, help assess the actual impact on learning outcomes. However, studies have cautioned that over-reliance on quantitative metrics without qualitative feedback from teachers and students may limit the scope of improvements (Ramachandran, 2022). A mixed-method approach to monitoring is therefore recommended.

## 4. Statement of the Problem

*"The Success of the NIPUN Bharat Scheme: A Case Study on Foundational Literacy and Numeracy in India".*

## 5. Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the implementation strategies of the NIPUN Bharat scheme in selected Indian states.
2. To evaluate the outcomes of the scheme in improving foundational literacy and numeracy.
3. To identify challenges faced by educators and administrators in implementing the scheme.
4. To propose evidence-based recommendations to strengthen FLN delivery across India.

## 6. Research Questions

1. What are the key implementation strategies adopted by selected Indian states under the NIPUN Bharat scheme to enhance foundational literacy and numeracy?
2. How effective has the NIPUN Bharat scheme been in improving foundational literacy and numeracy among students in the selected states?
3. What are the major challenges encountered by educators and administrators in the implementation of the NIPUN Bharat scheme?
4. What evidence-based strategies can be recommended to enhance the effectiveness and scalability of foundational literacy and numeracy delivery under the NIPUN Bharat scheme?

## 7. Research Methodology

### 7.1 Research Design

This study will adopt a qualitative case study design, allowing an in-depth exploration of implementation dynamics across different contexts.

### 7.2 Population and Sampling

Three states, **Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu,** and **Assam,** were purposively selected to represent diverse geographies and levels of performance. Within each state, five government schools will be chosen across rural and semi-urban areas.

### 7.3 Data Collection Tools

A self-made open-ended questionnaires were used to collect the data.

### 7.4 Data Collection Methods

Online Interviews were conducted with a total- 35 persons:

- Teachers involved in FLN delivery
- School heads

Document Review of state FLN plans, student assessments, and training manuals was another method of data collection.

### 7.5 Data Analysis

Collected qualitative data will be analysed using **thematic coding** to identify common patterns and divergent experiences. Manual coding will be used for content analysis.

## 8. Delimitations of the Study

- The study focuses only on government schools; private schools are excluded.
- Only three states, **Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu,** and **Assam**, were included for practical feasibility.
- The study uses qualitative tools**;** no standardized learning outcome testing was conducted.

## 9. Data Analysis and Findings

The qualitative data collected through interviews, classroom observations, and document reviews across selected government schools in Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, and Assam reveal a complex picture that the NIPUN Bharat Mission is currently facing challenges in its implementation. The data were thematically coded, and findings are presented across four major themes aligned with the study's objectives and research questions.

### 9.1 Implementation Strategies of NIPUN Bharat in Selected States

(**RQ$_1$:** What are the key implementation strategies adopted by selected Indian states under the NIPUN Bharat scheme to enhance foundational literacy and numeracy?)

The implementation of the NIPUN Bharat scheme across Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, and Assam reveals distinct strategic approaches with varying degrees of effectiveness. Uttar Pradesh followed a centralized rollout model, emphasizing standardized training through NISHTHA-FLN and uniform distribution of Teaching-Learning Materials (TLMs). While 80% of surveyed schools received initial orientation, the lack of sustained post-training support and limited flexibility in resource allocation hampered contextual responsiveness and long-term impact. In contrast, Tamil Nadu adopted a decentralised and context-sensitive approach, effectively integrating local language and cultural elements into instruction. The state demonstrated widespread use of activity-based learning, robust monitoring through School Management Committees (SMCs), and consistent alignment of daily lesson planning with NIPUN goals. Meanwhile, Assam exhibited significant inconsistencies in implementation, driven by teacher shortages, linguistic diversity, and inadequate resources. Nevertheless, isolated innovations supported by NGOs such as bilingual story cards and outdoor teaching strategies highlighted localized efforts to bridge gaps despite systemic constraints.

### 9.2 Outcomes in Foundational Literacy and Numeracy

(**RQ$_2$:** How effective has the NIPUN Bharat scheme been in improving foundational literacy and numeracy among students in the selected states?)

In Tamil Nadu, 60% of the sampled schools reported that over 70% of Grade 3 students could read short paragraphs and perform two-digit addition, a progress attributed by teachers to consistent daily reading practices and the use of manipulatives that reinforced number sense. In contrast, Uttar Pradesh demonstrated only partial recovery in foundational learning post-COVID-19, where remedial groups and reading sessions helped address some learning gaps, but the persistence of rote learning techniques and

the lack of tailored training restricted more extensive improvements. Assam, however, showed only modest improvements in foundational literacy and numeracy, largely due to persistent language barriers, high absenteeism, and inadequate resources. Children from tribal communities who spoke Bodo or Mising at home found it particularly difficult to comprehend lessons delivered in Assamese, which negatively affected their classroom engagement and learning outcomes.

**9.3 Challenges in Implementation**

(**RQ3:** What are the major challenges encountered by educators and administrators in the implementation of the NIPUN Bharat scheme?)

The study identified institutional, infrastructural, and pedagogical challenges:

Teacher shortages in Uttar Pradesh and Assam, particularly in multi-grade classrooms, significantly hampered the effective delivery of Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN) under the NIPUN Bharat scheme. Despite the widespread completion of NISHTHA-FLN training modules, most schools lacked structured follow-up support, ongoing mentoring, or professional learning communities, limiting the practical application of training content. In multilingual states like Assam, language barriers further complicated classroom instruction, as students from tribal and minority linguistic backgrounds struggled to comprehend lessons delivered in Assamese, often resulting in reduced engagement and slower learning progress. Additionally, while digital systems such as UDISE+ and Vidya Samiksha Kendra were intended to strengthen monitoring, many educators reported that data collection remained a procedural formality, with little to no actionable feedback or support mechanisms based on the insights generated. Compounding these issues were infrastructural deficits in schools, particularly in UP and Assam, where many lacked functional toilets, usable blackboards, and sufficient classroom space, creating an environment ill-suited for foundational learning is causing a decrease in both student attendance and teacher motivation.

**9.4 Evidence-Based Recommendations for Strengthening FLN Delivery**

(**RQ4:** What evidence-based strategies can be recommended to enhance the effectiveness and scalability of foundational literacy and numeracy delivery under the NIPUN Bharat scheme?)

Based on field insights and triangulation with existing literature, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. **Localized Curriculum Adaptation:** As seen in Tamil Nadu, adapting materials to local languages and cultures significantly improves engagement. A mother-tongue-first approach in early grades should be mainstreamed.
2. **Sustained Teacher Support:** Introduce on-site mentoring, peer learning groups, and periodic refresher workshops to reinforce training.
3. **Strengthen Monitoring and Feedback Loops:** Move beyond data compliance to diagnostic use of assessments, integrating feedback into lesson planning.
4. **Inclusive Practices:** Introduce Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles in TLMs and appoint IERTs (Inclusive Education Resource Teachers) to support children with disabilities.
5. **Community Mobilization:** Encourage parental involvement through home-based literacy kits, storytelling sessions, and SMC-led engagement events. Tamil Nadu's "Reading Melas" provide a scalable model.
6. **Infrastructure Upgradation:** Prioritize schools with poor physical conditions under the PM SHRI or Samagra Shiksha schemes to ensure conducive learning environments.

7. **Contextual Innovation Scaling:** Document and replicate low-cost, teacher-led innovations such as Bal Pathshalas and bilingual story cards.

**10. Findings:**

- Tamil Nadu's localized implementation enhanced engagement and pedagogical relevance.
- UP's standardized model was easier to scale but lacked flexibility for diverse learner needs.
- Assam showed potential through teacher innovation but suffered from systemic gaps.
- Daily engagement strategies (e.g., storytelling, reading melas) correlated with literacy improvements.
- Contextual barriers such as multilingualism and socio-economic factors affected outcomes in Assam.
- Pressure to report positive data in UP led to concerns about the authenticity of learning assessments.
- Absence of post-training mentorship reduced the practical impact of NISHTHA modules.
- Monitoring was often perfunctory; real-time feedback and adaptive planning were lacking.
- Systemic inequalities, especially in tribal and rural areas, impeded equitable access to quality foundational education.
- Strengthening teacher capacity and community partnerships are pivotal for the success of NIPUN Bharat.
- One-size-fits-all implementation models fail to address ground-level heterogeneity; regional flexibility must be institutionalized.

**11. Discussion**

The findings of this case study illuminate both the potential and persistent challenges of the NIPUN Bharat Mission in delivering foundational literacy and numeracy (FLN) across Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh, and Assam. By triangulating data from field observations, stakeholder interviews, and document analysis, the study reveals that successful FLN implementation hinges on several interrelated factors: context-sensitive planning, teacher preparedness, systemic support, and community engagement. Tamil Nadu's success underscores the impact of localized curriculum adaptation, where culturally and linguistically relevant content improved student engagement and learning outcomes. The decentralized model enabled schools to align NIPUN objectives with local needs, foster partnerships, and embed activity-based learning in daily routines, reflecting the effectiveness of child-centric approaches and community involvement (Banerjee et al., 2007; USAID, 2017).

In contrast, Uttar Pradesh exemplifies the limitations of a highly centralized and standardized implementation model. While the state demonstrated efficient initial training and material distribution, the lack of contextual flexibility, limited follow-up support, and a compliance-driven approach diluted the program's efficacy. These issues mirror longstanding critiques of top-down reforms in Indian education that overlook local diversity and innovation (Kingdon, 2007; Bhatty, 2014). Assam's experience, meanwhile, highlights the structural challenges of implementing FLN in multilingual, resource-poor contexts. Despite some grassroots innovations such as bilingual instructional materials and outdoor learning spaces systemic issues like inadequate infrastructure, teacher shortages, and limited language inclusivity hindered progress. This reflects global concerns about the educational marginalization of linguistically diverse and underserved communities (Rao et al., 2019; Singh, 2020).

Across all three states, common bottlenecks emerged. These include the superficial application of digital monitoring tools such as UDISE+ and Vidya Samiksha Kendra, which often serve as reporting mecha-

nisms with limited feedback integration. Teacher development, though widely initiated through NISHTHA-FLN modules, failed to translate into pedagogical change due to the lack of sustained mentoring and reflective learning opportunities. Furthermore, while community engagement played a transformative role in Tamil Nadu through initiatives like "Reading Melas" and storytelling sessions, such practices were notably absent in Uttar Pradesh and Assam. This underscores the need for a more institutionalized approach to family and community inclusion in FLN efforts. Ultimately, the study affirms that a one-size-fits-all model is inadequate for India's educational landscape; instead, NIPUN Bharat must prioritize regional adaptability, continuous teacher support, and active community involvement for equitable and enduring outcomes.

## 12. Policy Implications

The findings from this study have several implications for policymakers seeking to strengthen the NIPUN Bharat Mission and achieve universal FLN by 2026–27:

1. Tamil Nadu's success suggests that states should be empowered to adapt Lakshya Soochi benchmarks and teaching-learning materials (TLMs) to local linguistic and cultural contexts. Policymakers should encourage state-level innovation while maintaining national alignment, as recommended by NEP 2020 (MoE, 2020).
2. The uneven impact of NISHTHA-FLN modules underscores the need for continuous, on-site teacher mentoring rather than one-off training. Policies should prioritize peer learning networks, classroom coaching, and digital literacy training to enhance teachers' ability to implement activity-based pedagogies (UNICEF, 2021).
3. The language barriers in Assam and the exclusion of children with disabilities across all states highlight the need for policies that promote mother-tongue-based instruction and universal design in TLMs. Cross-ministerial collaboration with the Ministry of Women and Child Development to integrate ECCE with FLN goals is critical (Singh, 2020).
4. Tamil Nadu's community-driven initiatives, such as Reading Melas, offer a model for increasing parental involvement. Policies should incentivize School Management Committees (SMCs) and community reading programs to bridge home-school gaps, particularly in rural areas.
5. Resource shortages in Uttar Pradesh and Assam underscore the need for increased budgetary allocations for classrooms, toilets, and TLMs. Infrastructure improvements should be prioritized in rural and marginalized areas to enhance attendance and learning outcomes (MoE, 2023).

## 13. Conclusion

The NIPUN Bharat Mission represents a significant and timely policy response to India's foundational learning crisis. This case study, examining its implementation across Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, and Assam, reveals a complex landscape marked by promising innovations alongside structural constraints and uneven outcomes. Tamil Nadu's localized approach highlights how state-led contextualization, strong community engagement, and pedagogical innovation can improve foundational literacy and numeracy (FLN) outcomes. By contrast, Uttar Pradesh's standardized, administratively efficient model lacked the flexibility to respond to diverse ground-level needs. At the same time, Assam's experience underscores persistent systemic inequities and linguistic challenges that continue to marginalize many learners. Key systemic gaps, such as inadequate post-training support for teachers, weak monitoring systems, and infrastructural deficits, pose serious risks to the mission's long-term sustainability. Further-

more, without authentic learning assessments and inclusive pedagogical practices, children in tribal and rural areas remain particularly vulnerable to being left behind.

A strategic recalibration is essential to achieving the ambitious goals of NIPUN Bharat by 2026–27. This requires integrating regional flexibility, strengthening teacher capacity-building, fostering meaningful community involvement, and adopting evidence-based, inclusive, and adaptive strategies that reflect India's vast diversity. Ultimately, ensuring foundational literacy and numeracy for every Indian child is more than an educational objective; it is a critical step toward equity, empowerment, and national progress, laying the groundwork for a more just and prosperous society.

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