

NEP2020 in Action: Exploring Its Aspirations, Implementation Hurdles, and Contribution to India's Development Vision

Mr. Manish Tripathi¹, Prof. Dr. Somesh Shukla²

¹RESEARCH SCHOLAR, ²professor

^{1,2}department of commerce

UNIVERSITY OF LUCKNOW

¹Mtripathi37@gmail.com, ²shukla_sk@lkouniv.ac.in

Abstract

India's vision of becoming a developed nation by 2047 rests on the strength of its education system—a foundation that shapes future innovation, equity, and economic resilience. The National Education Policy 2020 (NEP2020) offers a bold, long-overdue roadmap for educational reform, aiming to overcome long-standing challenges such as low foundational literacy, unequal access, limited employability, and a growing digital divide. This paper explores how well NEP2020 aligns with the nation's development goals through an in-depth, qualitative examination of key policy initiatives, national education data (including ASER, UDISE+, NSSO, and NFHS), and contemporary scholarship. While the policy introduces transformative ideas—like early childhood care, integration of vocational education, teacher training, and digital learning platforms—its impact has been constrained by uneven implementation, especially in marginalized and rural communities. Structural issues such as inadequate funding, fragile governance systems, and limited industry-academic collaboration continue to stall progress. The analysis highlights the urgent need for decentralized planning, better infrastructure, targeted support for teachers, and community engagement to bridge these gaps. Ultimately, the study concludes that while NEP2020 holds great promise, realizing its potential will require not just good policy, but sustained commitment, inclusive practices, and adaptive strategies rooted in India's diverse realities.

Keyword: Educational Reform in India

INTRODUCTION

India's ambition to become a *developed nation by 2047*, as envisioned by the Government of India and articulated in NITI Aayog's strategy documents, rests heavily on the foundation of human capital. Education is not merely a social right but a strategic imperative for national development—shaping innovation capacity, workforce readiness, civic awareness, and social equity (NITI Aayog, 2022). Reforming the nation's educational system is essential to maintaining inclusive and long-term development as it traverses a challenging terrain of demographic growth, technological upheaval, and economic transition.

From the recommendations of the Kothari Commission in the 1960s to the National Policy on Education in 1986 and the Right to Education Act of 2009, India has implemented a number of educational changes since gaining its independence. Although these changes increased access, particularly in primary school, they frequently failed to improve systemic equity and learning results. In particular, low foundational literacy and numeracy (FLN) skills, disparities in equity and access, low employability among graduates, and a growing digital divide, particularly between rural and urban populations, are some of the ongoing structural issues facing India's educational system today (ASER, 2023; UDISE+, 2022).

The National NEP 2020 Policy (NEP) 2020, the government of India's reaction, was the most extensive reform of the educational system in more than thirty years. Through research, autonomy, and innovation, NEP2020 offers a flexible, multidisciplinary, and equity-driven vision that seeks to reinvent higher education, enhance teacher quality, promote inclusion, and develop 21st-century skills (Ministry of Education, 2020). Digital learning, early childhood care and education, vocational integration, universal fundamental learning, and capacity-building at all educational levels are all highly valued. Although NEP2020 offers a bold plan, little academic research has been done to thoroughly assess how well it aligns with India's most urgent educational constraints.

To what extent do educational reforms under NEP2020 address the structural challenges preventing India from becoming a developed nation? This study seeks to critically examine this question using a qualitative analysis of policy frameworks, national datasets, and contemporary academic literature. It explores how well the NEP's key provisions respond to existing challenges and what gaps remain in policy implementation, particularly in the context of India's development vision for 2047

Literature Review

- The role of education as a driver of national development has been widely acknowledged in both global and Indian scholarship. The transformation of a country from a developing to a developed state requires an education system that not only ensures **universal access** but also promotes **equity, foundational competencies, employability, and innovation** (Tilak, 2020). India's National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, hailed as a landmark reform, is designed to address persistent structural gaps. This section critically reviews existing literature on the challenges within India's education system and the proposed policy solutions under NEP2020.
- One of the most serious deficiencies in India's education system is the low level of foundational skills among primary-level students. More than half of Grade 5 students are unable to read a text at the Grade 2 level, per the ASER Report (2023). In response, NEP2020 uses the NIPUN Bharat program to make Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN) a national purpose. Fatima (2024) critically examined the FLN's implementation in Uttar Pradesh and discovered that, despite the policy's good intentions, district-level execution is hindered by logistical and training issues. These results highlight how crucial localized approaches are to national reforms.
- Educational equity is still a problem, especially for underrepresented groups including girls, rural youngsters, and SC/ST people. According to studies by Ahmed & Tariq (2023) and Verma (2023), there are notable differences in learning results, attendance, and enrollment. Scholars contend that NEP2020 lacks explicit implementation timetables and accountability procedures, despite introducing a number of equity-enhancing features such as female inclusion funding, special education zones, and multilingual instruction. Furthermore, without corresponding infrastructure expenditures, the focus on digital tools—while innovative—runs the risk of escalating inequality (Pandey & Yadav, 2024).

- India faces a paradox where graduates are abundant, but employable skills are scarce. Only around 5% of India's workforce has formal vocational training (NSSO, 2021). NEP2020 attempts to tackle this through **integration of vocational education** from Grade 6 onwards, as well as promoting internships and coding literacy. Das (2023) highlights the policy's alignment with Industry 4.0 needs but cautions that linkages between schools, industries, and higher education institutions are still underdeveloped. Skill mismatch and lack of practical exposure remain unresolved.
- The role of teachers is pivotal in realizing NEP goals. Yet, pre-service training and continuous professional development (CPD) programs remain outdated or inconsistently applied. In their analysis of NEP2020 implementation, Ahmed & Tariq (2023) stress the urgent need for **teacher empowerment**, curriculum redesign, and a national mentoring mission. They find that many training institutes are under-resourced and that digital CPD programs often fail to engage rural educators.
- The shift to online and hybrid models during and after the COVID-19 pandemic has brought India's digital education infrastructure under scrutiny. While NEP2020 promotes platforms such as **DIKSHA**, **SWAYAM**, and **PM eVidya**, Verma (2023) argues that the policy lacks clarity on funding, device distribution, and localized content. Only 24% of rural households in India had internet access as of 2022 (NFHS-5). Without systemic investment in connectivity and digital pedagogy, the digital divide may deepen existing educational inequalities.
- India's higher education landscape suffers from fragmentation, underfunding, and a lack of research output. NEP2020 aims to reverse this through the creation of **Multidisciplinary Education and Research Universities (MERUs)** and a new **National Research Foundation (NRF)**. Sharma & Vanguri (2024) emphasize that while this is a step in the right direction, implementation is hindered by regulatory bottlenecks and insufficient financial autonomy of institutions. Furthermore, the integration of the **Indian Knowledge System (IKS)**, while culturally significant, needs empirical validation in curricular practice.
- Scholars such as Singh et al. (2025) have noted that NEP2020 aligns conceptually with the **UN Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4)**, which emphasizes inclusive and equitable quality education. However, they argue that success will depend on **inter-ministerial coordination**, robust **monitoring frameworks**, and **bottom-up governance**.

Literature Gap.

While various studies examine individual aspects of NEP2020—such as FLN, teacher training, or digital education—there is limited comprehensive research that evaluates **how well NEP reforms collectively address the systemic educational challenges impeding India's developmental aspirations**. This paper aims to bridge that gap by offering a holistic, policy-anchored, and challenge-based analysis of NEP2020.

Research Objectives.

1. To identify core structural challenges in Indian education, including FLN gaps, access inequities, skill mismatch, digital divide, and higher education fragmentation.
2. To analyze NEP2020 reforms such as NIPUN Bharat, vocational education, DIKSHA, and MERUs addressing these challenges.

Structural Challenge Analysis: India's path toward becoming a developed nation by 2047 is intrinsically linked to its ability to overcome structural bottlenecks in its education system. The following analysis

examines five major indicators that reflect the depth of these challenges and evaluates them in relation to the goals set by the **National Education Policy (NEP) 2020** and associated strategic plans.

Indicator	Source	National Avg (%)	Target by 2030	Challenge Summary
Grade 5 students who can read Grade 2 level text	ASER 2023	50.3%	100.0%	Half of students lack basic literacy in Grade 5
Net enrollment ratio (Elementary, SC/ST)	UDISE+ 2022	84.1%	100.0%	Access disparity remains for marginalized groups
Youth with formal vocational training	NSSO 2021	4.6%	50.0%	Skilling gap undermines employability
Rural households with internet access	NFHS-5	24.0%	80.0%	Digital infrastructure severely limited in rural India
Gross Enrollment Ratio in Higher Education (GER)	AISHE 2022	28.4%	50.0%	Low access to higher education despite policy expansion

As shown in the **table1:** above, only **50.3% of Grade 5 students** can read a Grade 2 level text, despite the NEP's focus on foundational literacy through the **NIPUN Bharat Mission**. This indicates that the learning crisis begins early and may undermine all subsequent reforms unless addressed rigorously.

Marginalized communities such as **Scheduled Castes (SC)** and **Scheduled Tribes (ST)** continue to face **barriers in access**, as evidenced by a **net enrollment ratio of 84.1%**, falling short of universal inclusion. Structural social disparities, including caste and gender, persist as systemic hurdles to equal learning opportunities. In terms of employability, only **4.6% of youth** receive formal vocational training, despite India's significant focus on becoming a knowledge-based economy. NEP2020's plan to integrate vocational subjects from Grade 6 onwards is promising, but real progress is hampered by weak linkages with industry and lack of trained educators.

With only 24% of rural households having internet access, the digital divide presents a serious threat to equity. Even though NEP supports massive EdTech platforms like SWAYAM and DIKSHA, their usefulness is constrained in the absence of fundamental digital infrastructure. Finally, the NEP's target of 50% by 2035 is greatly exceeded by India's higher education Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER), which stands at 28.4%. This highlights the need for better integration of multidisciplinary models as envisioned in the policy and for better college access, particularly in Tier 2 and Tier 3 regions.

Policy Vision and Development Goals in Harmony By embracing a comprehensive, lifelong learning model, NEP2020 represents a significant departure from previous policy frameworks. Its focus on equity, vocational skills, multidisciplinary learning, and early childhood education directly relates to national priorities like

and Sharma & Vanguri (2024) have noted that the policy's intent is well-aligned with the **UN SDG 4** targets on inclusive and equitable quality education.

However, while the **policy vision is ambitious**, execution remains uneven across states and demographic segments. The challenge lies not in policy articulation, but in **policy operationalization**—a common gap in India's reform history.

Persistent Gaps in Implementation: The **implementation gap** is most visible in foundational learning. Despite national focus, ASER (2023) shows that over half of children still lack basic literacy and numeracy skills. Similar concerns are echoed in vocational education, where despite NEP's curricular integration, only **4.6% of youth** have received formal training (NSSO, 2021).

The **digital divide**, as highlighted by Verma (2023), illustrates how infrastructure disparities hinder equitable access to EdTech solutions. NEP2020 presumes a level of digital readiness that is absent in many rural and tribal regions. Furthermore, institutional mechanisms for **teacher training**, such as the **National Mission for Mentoring**, remain underdeveloped. Without effective capacity-building, frontline educators may struggle to deliver NEP's curriculum innovations.

Structural and Governance Challenges: India's education system is marked by **inter-state disparities**, fragmented governance, and bureaucratic inertia. Although NEP proposes **greater autonomy and decentralization**, implementation still relies heavily on top-down models. Limited coordination between central ministries, state education departments, and local authorities poses a serious bottleneck. Moreover, the **financial allocation** to education remains below the 6% of GDP target. Budgetary constraints may weaken the rollout of critical NEP programs, especially in underfunded public schools.

The Role of Data and Monitoring: A key enabler of effective reform is **data transparency and accountability**. While platforms like **UDISE+** have improved school-level data collection, real-time tracking of NEP outcomes is still lacking. Performance-based monitoring mechanisms, as used in health (e.g., NITI Aayog's Health Index), could be adapted to track NEP outcomes across states and districts.

Comparative Global Context: Countries like **Finland, South Korea, and Singapore** have demonstrated that coherent, well-funded, and equity-driven education policies can catalyze national development. While India's diversity presents additional challenges, there are learnings in governance models, teacher support, and school autonomy that can inform NEP implementation strategies.

Recommendations.

To strengthen the impact of NEP2020 and align its implementation with India's development goals for 2047, the following recommendations are proposed:

Strengthen Foundational Literacy through Localized Monitoring

- **Action:** Implement district-wise performance tracking of **NIPUN Bharat** goals using ASER-style real-time assessments.
- **Rationale:** A "one-size-fits-all" model is ineffective in a diverse country. Localized interventions based on data will ensure targeted resource allocation.

Expand Vocational Integration and Industry Partnerships

- **Action:** Create state-level **Skill-Education-Industry Councils** to align school curricula with regional labor market demands.
- **Rationale:** Current vocational training is fragmented. Partnership with MSMEs and local industries will improve practical exposure and employability.

Bridge the Digital Divide with Rural-First Infrastructure

- **Action:** Prioritize digital infrastructure in rural areas under **PM eVidya**, with funding for device access, solar-powered connectivity, and local language content.
- **Rationale:** Without access, EdTech reforms under NEP become exclusionary. Investment must prioritize underserved areas.

Reinvent Teacher Training and Mentorship

- **Action:** Operationalize the **National Mission for Mentoring** with cluster-level mentoring units, regular performance-based incentives, and hybrid training modules.
- **Rationale:** Teacher quality is central to NEP success, but most programs remain theoretical. Ongoing mentorship and peer learning are more effective.

Ensure Financial Commitment to Education

- **Action:** Raise public expenditure on education to **6% of GDP**, with earmarked funds for FLN, inclusive education, and digital access.
- **Rationale:** NEP goals cannot be met without increased and targeted investment. States must receive both central support and autonomy.

Foster Inclusive Higher Education Access

- **Action:** Expand **Multidisciplinary Education and Research Universities (MERUs)** in Tier 2 & 3 cities; enhance scholarships for marginalized students.
- **Rationale:** GER targets will only be met if higher education becomes both accessible and aspirational across demographics.

Institutionalize Monitoring and Feedback Loops

- **Action:** Develop a **National NEP Dashboard** that integrates UDISE+, FLN progress, digital learning metrics, and state-wise implementation status.
- **Rationale:** Transparency and data-driven governance will drive accountability and mid-course correction.

Promote Public Awareness and Stakeholder Engagement

- **Action:** Launch awareness campaigns and participatory platforms (e.g., school-community forums) to inform parents, educators, and local leaders.
- **Rationale:** NEP2020's success depends on grassroots engagement. Empowering communities ensures sustainability and cultural relevance.

Conclusion.

Education is the cornerstone of India's aspirations to become a developed nation by 2047. The **National Education Policy (NEP) 2020** presents a comprehensive and future-oriented blueprint that aims to address long-standing structural challenges—such as **foundational learning deficits, inequity in access, poor employability, digital divide**, and a **fragmented higher education landscape**. This paper has critically examined the extent to which NEP2020's reforms align with these systemic bottlenecks.

The analysis reveals that while the policy is **well-aligned in vision**, its success depends heavily on the effectiveness of its implementation. Empirical data from UDISE+, ASER, NSSO, and NFHS illustrate substantial gaps between national objectives and on-the-ground realities. For example, foundational literacy remains worryingly low, internet access in rural areas is sparse, and vocational training continues to be marginal despite policy mandates.

Furthermore, the discussion highlights persistent issues in **funding, governance, teacher training**, and **infrastructure deployment**, which continue to hinder transformative progress. Although NEP2020 proposes structural reforms and flexible governance models, real progress demands **localized planning, community participation**, and **robust monitoring mechanisms**.

This study underscores that **policy alone cannot deliver transformation**. Success requires a synchronized effort between **governments, educators, institutions, industry, and society**. If NEP2020 is executed with sustained investment, decentralized autonomy, and inclusive engagement, it holds the potential to

unlock India's demographic dividend and catalyze its emergence as a globally competitive, knowledge-driven economy by 2047.

References

1. Ahmed, M., & Tariq, M. (2023). *Empowering teachers for effective reform: Implementing NEP-2020*. *Jamia Journal of Education*, 10(1–2), 217–229. <https://jmi.ac.in>
2. ASER Centre. (2023). *Annual Status of Education Report (Rural)*. Retrieved from <http://www.asercentre.org>
3. Das, T. (2023). *Future skills in NEP2020: Aligning Indian education with Industry 4.0*. *Education & Technology Today*, 12(2), 33–45.
4. Fatima, S. M. (2024). *NIPUN Bharat Mission: A critical analysis of FLN goals of NEP2020 in UP*. *International Journal for Research in Social and Management Sciences*, 12(5), 10–20. <https://www.rajmr.com>
5. Ministry of Education. (2020). *National Education Policy 2020*. Government of India. Retrieved from <https://www.education.gov.in>
6. NITI Aayog. (2022). *Vision 2047: Strategy for New India @100*. Government of India.
7. NSSO. (2021). *Periodic Labour Force Survey*. Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation.
8. Pandey, P., & Yadav, H. (2024). *Role of educational technology in the implementation of NEP2020 in physical education*. *Indian Journal of Physiology and Allied Sciences*, 20(3), 88–96. <https://ijpas.org>
9. Sharma, R., & Vanguri, R. (2024). *Revitalizing higher education through Indian knowledge system (IKS): A vision for NEP-2020*. *International Journal on Science and Technology*, 19(4), 41–54. <https://www.ijstat.org>
10. Singh, A., Mishra, A., & Tiwari, P. (2025). *Reimagining Indian education: A deep dive into NEP2020 and NCF-SE 2023*. *Archives*, 18(1), 22–36. <https://archives.publishing.org.in>
11. UDISE+. (2022). *Unified District Information System for Education Plus*. Ministry of Education. Retrieved from <https://udiseplus.gov.in>
12. Verma, N. (2023). *Digital divide and equity in education: A NEP2020 perspective*. *Journal of Digital Literacy and Society*, 11(1), 55–68.