



Beyond the Policy Document: Making the NEP Work for Every Child

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1. Background

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 is a transformative document aimed at fundamentally reshaping education in India, ensuring every school and child benefits from its vision. To turn this vision into reality, the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) 2023 was created as a guiding tool for implementing the changes outlined in the NEP. Together, the NEP 2020 and NCF 2023 provide a clear roadmap to reform India's education system in alignment with the policy's goals.

The NEP was designed with a long-term perspective, considering the country's needs for the next 20 years. While some changes can be implemented immediately, others will unfold gradually over time. Ultimately, the success of the NEP will be measured by its impact on classroom practices and whether it reaches every child. With the NCF now in place, the hope is that it will drive real transformation in teaching

and learning across schools.

The NEP was built on two guiding principles.

1. First, all reforms must be aspirational, reflecting what we want for ourselves, our children, and our society. However, aspirations must be grounded in reality. If policies and reforms are disconnected from real classroom conditions, they will never be successfully implemented.
2. The second guiding principle is that every educational reform - whether in textbooks, teaching-learning materials, teacher education frameworks, or training programmes—must be educationally sound.

Recognising the fundamental changes the policy introduces to drive transformation is crucial. Among the key areas it highlights is universal access to high-quality Early Childhood Care and Education, ensuring all children receive meaningful learning experiences before Grade 1. This early

foundation is essential for creating a level playing field and giving every child an equal start in their education journey.

Early Childhood Care and Education lays the foundation for a level playing field, giving every child an equal start in their education journey

Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN) is another key focus, aiming to ensure all children achieve basic reading and math skills by Grade 3, as these are essential for future learning. The policy also emphasises the use of the mother tongue as the medium of instruction in early education, while ensuring high-quality teaching of all languages. Prioritising core concepts for deeper understanding and moving away from textbook-centric learning has been stressed as well.

The policy proposes a clear shift towards a multidisciplinary and holistic approach, moving beyond rigid subject streams

to offer students diverse learning opportunities—including vocational, physical, and arts education. Experiential learning is another core area, focusing on activity-based methods over rote memorisation. This transformation calls for a fundamental shift in pedagogy to support deeper, more engaging learning experiences.

To align education with a child's developmental needs, the NEP proposes a new 5+3+3+4 curricular and pedagogical structure, covering early childhood through the end of secondary school. Each stage brings a pedagogical shift tailored to students' cognitive and developmental growth (detailed in Annexure). The curriculum is expected to promote gender equality, social responsibility, and a spirit of service, while equipping students with essential skills to thrive as lifelong learners in a rapidly changing world.

The policy also recommends reducing high-stakes testing by making board assessments more comprehensive, skill-based, and less reliant on rote learning. The NEP's aims are rooted in the vision of the Indian Constitution and are brought to life in the



Efforts must be made to emphasise physical education for all, which is currently lacking

classroom through a carefully designed process of developing the curriculum framework, syllabus, and textbooks.

Key steps in the Implementation of the Policy

1. Developing State Curriculum Frameworks (SCF) aligned with the National Curriculum

The Framework for School Education includes local adaptations of the National Curriculum Framework (NCF). While the NCF provides a national roadmap, State Curriculum Frameworks (SCFs) must be tailored to meet state-specific needs. However, SCFs should align with the NCF to ensure quality, equity, access, and inclusivity, while allowing flexibility in priorities.

At the heart of these efforts is the principle of alignment with learning standards, which connect curricular goals, competencies, and learning outcomes. The NCF outlines their purpose in detail, and aligning all reforms with these standards is crucial for achieving meaningful change. Since SCFs will directly influence syllabi, textbooks, and teacher training, it is vital that States develop them swiftly, using the NCF as a foundation.

Contextualisation for stakeholders

SCFs must reflect teachers' classroom realities, incorporating local languages, cultural references, and examples. They should guide school leaders in aligning school culture and practices with the broader educational vision. Additionally, SCFs must offer clear, state-specific guidance to textbook and syllabus writers and help education administrators highlight state-specific needs and challenges to inform policy decisions.

Collaborative approach

SCF development should involve departments of culture, language, tribal

affairs, and skill development to ensure local relevance. States must determine specifics such as languages to be included in the curriculum and state-specific environmental and social engagement for early education.

SCFs must align with the NCF's learning standards to connect curricular goals with competencies and outcomes. This alignment ensures meaningful reforms in curriculum, textbooks, and teacher training, driving effective classroom change.

2. Textbooks

Textbooks play a crucial role in bringing the NEP's vision to life, driving change at the ground level. As states develop textbooks, they must balance aspirational goals with practical realities. Teaching should move beyond textbook-centric approaches, as over-reliance on textbooks often leads to neglecting the broader curriculum, limiting deeper engagement and learning.

Each textbook should be carefully crafted to enhance learning standards for its specific subject and level. Aligning teaching methods, materials, and classroom experiences ensures meaningful, measurable outcomes.

A key focus in textbook development is content selection. Rather than overloading books with excessive material, states should distill information to its essentials, enabling clear understanding without overwhelming students. Textbooks should be engaging—

something children want to read. This can be achieved through simple, inviting language, a clear layout, and captivating illustrations. The content should be light, accessible, and enjoyable, moving away from dense text.

Textbooks should also integrate pedagogy and assessment, guiding both teaching and learning while maintaining a focus on learning standards. States can adopt NCERT textbooks where appropriate, with modifications to reflect local culture and context.

3. Universal Early Childhood Care and Education

The policy aims to implement a high-quality, play-based curriculum for children aged three to six through an expanded network of early childhood education centres, including Anganwadis and preschools. The National Curriculum Framework for the Foundational Stage (NCF-FS) offers detailed guidelines to ensure consistency in curricular frameworks across Anganwadis and schools. There is a focused effort on investing in teacher recruitment and teaching-learning materials to support play-based learning.

4. Recruitment of teachers

States must ensure appropriate number of teachers in every school for quality education. This requires long-term teacher planning, transparent recruitment, and fair transfer policies. With art, physical education, and vocational education introduced from Grade 6, States must plan for recruiting specialised teachers and master trainers, as this will take time. A potential approach is to hire master trainers to work with a group of schools in local arts, vocational skills, and physical education for Grades 6–9.

5. Strengthening school culture

A strong school culture is essential for realising the NEP's vision, ensuring that education equips children with real-world values and skills. Schools should integrate principles like sustainability, compassion, equity, and inclusion into daily practices. States must take concrete steps to build a supportive school culture that promotes holistic learning and empowers teachers.

Supporting teachers

Teacher training programmes should be need-based, allowing teachers the autonomy to adapt their pedagogical approaches to student needs. States should strengthen teacher recruitment, training, and career progression policies, supported by governance mechanisms for continuous professional development (CPD). Mentorship programmes should connect experienced educators with new teachers.



Need-based, continuous professional development is essential for teacher growth.

Supporting school leadership

School principals need support in creating an inclusive culture, improving school processes, and encouraging creativity in teaching and learning. They should be given greater autonomy to manage their schools, with the necessary resources.

Capacity-building programmes should align leadership with NEP goals. Sufficient funds, infrastructure, and materials must be allocated to effectively support these initiatives

6. Assessments

The NEP envisions shifting school assessments from rote memorisation to competency-based learning, evaluating critical thinking, conceptual understanding, and real-world application. States must work to reduce exam pressure and make assessments more inclusive, flexible, and competency-based.

States should make efforts to reform Board exams immediately. The goal should be to make board assessments more comprehensive, skill-based, and less dependent on rote learning. Exams should focus on core concepts and essential competencies, not excessive content.

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7. Other Areas

States must maintain a strong focus on achieving Foundational Literacy & Numeracy (FLN), as it is critical for future learning and should be prioritised for all children. Collaboration with various departments e.g. women and child development and others is essential for smooth implementation.

Adequate funding, aligned with the priorities set in the State Curriculum Framework (SCF), is crucial. Mechanisms should be established for transparent, need-based distribution of funds across schools and districts. Investment in teacher recruitment and training is vital, including resources for hiring specialised teachers (art, vocational, physical education) and supporting continuous professional development.

Additionally, resources must be allocated for infrastructure, teaching-learning materials, technology integration for holistic education, and the creation of robust governance frameworks to ensure efficient and purposeful use of funds.



Every child deserves access to resources that spark curiosity and hands-on learning

Conclusion

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 offers a transformative vision for India's education system, but its success relies on effective implementation at the State and school levels. Developing State Curriculum Frameworks (SCFs) is key to ensuring that policies become meaningful classroom practices.

Achieving this vision requires a collective effort from all stakeholders—political leaders, bureaucrats, school administrators, and teachers—who must translate policy into action and drive real change. This includes expanding quality early childhood education, recruiting and training teachers, designing engaging textbooks and learning materials, improving school environments, fostering a supportive school culture, and shifting assessments to focus on competency-based learning.

States must ensure adequate funding, efficient resource allocation, and strong governance to support these reforms. Collaboration across departments is crucial to overcoming challenges and driving lasting improvements. The success of the NEP will be measured by its impact on every child's learning experience. Achieving this vision requires sustained commitment, but with coordinated efforts, the NEP's goals can become a reality for all.

Annexure

The National Education Policy (NEP) and the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) introduce a new 5+3+3+4 structure for school education, aligning it with the developmental stages of children from ages 3 to 18. This structure aims to create a more age-appropriate, engaging, and effective learning experience.

| Foundational Stage (Ages 3 -8, Pre-School and Grades 1-2) | Preparatory Stage (Ages 8–11, Grades 3–5) | Middle Stage (Ages 11–14, Grades 6–8) | Secondary Stage Phase 1 (Ages 14–18, Grades 9–12) | Secondary Stage Phase 2 (Ages 16 -18, Grades 11 and 12) |
|--|---|---|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emphasis on play-based learning to develop cognitive, social, and motor skills. • Introduction of pre-literacy and numeracy, ensuring a strong foundation for future learning. • No formal textbooks or assessments up to Grade 2—learning is guided through play, observation, and hands-on activities. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transition from purely play-based to a mix of experiential and formal learning. • Subjects introduced: Two languages, Mathematics, Art, Physical Education, and "The World Around Us" (an interdisciplinary subject combining Science, Social Science, and Environmental Studies). • Light textbooks are introduced, but learning remains activity-based and experiential. • Some formal assessments start, focusing on ensuring foundational literacy and numeracy. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shift to subject-specific learning with specialist teachers. • Core subjects: Three languages (incl native), Mathematics, Science, Social Science, Art, Physical Education, and Vocational Education. • Vocational courses introduced in Grade 6, promoting hands-on skills alongside academic learning. • Emphasis on experiential learning, abstract thinking, and practical application. • Formative assessments throughout, with summative assessments at the end of each year. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deeper subject specialization begins, with disciplines emerging within broad subjects (e.g., Physics, Chemistry, and Biology within Science). • Introduction of interdisciplinary subjects e.g. Grade 9: "Individual and Society", focusing on ethics and human interaction. • Flexibility in subject choices, moving away from rigid Arts, Science, and Commerce streams | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Choice-Based Learning with Breadth Requirement: • Students select four subjects but cannot choose all subjects from a single discipline. • They must take at least two subjects from different domains such as Science and Math, Social Sciences & humanities and Hands on learning e.g. Arts, Voc Ed, PE • Balanced Approach: While allowing depth in chosen subjects, the structure ensures breadth across disciplines, promoting holistic education. |

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