



---

## **Educational Decentralisation in India: From Kothari Commission to New Education Policy, 2020**

**Rajnish Kumar**

Research Scholar, National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration, New Delhi

---

**DOI : <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.16880023>**

---

### **ARTICLE DETAILS**

**Research Paper**

**Accepted:** 30-07-2025

**Published:** 10-08-2025

**Keywords:**

*Educational  
decentralisation,  
improvement, mechanism*

---

### **ABSTRACT**

Educational decentralisation refers to the systematic transfer of authority, responsibility, and resources from central educational authorities to lower levels of governance such as regional, district, school, or community bodies. This shift enables local stakeholders, including school management committees, teachers, parents, and local government officials, to actively participate in decision-making processes regarding curriculum planning, school budgeting, staff recruitment, infrastructure development, and pedagogy. The primary aim is to make education more responsive to local needs, enhance transparency, and foster a sense of ownership among communities. Despite its promise, educational decentralisation poses several challenges, especially in contexts with weak institutional capacities or deep socio-economic inequalities. Local authorities often lack the necessary training, resources, and infrastructure to effectively carry out their expanded responsibilities. There is also the risk of elite capture, where powerful local interests dominate decision-making, undermining equity and inclusion. In some cases, decentralisation may widen disparities between well-resourced and underprivileged areas if not backed by equitable financial support and oversight mechanisms. Moreover, decentralisation can sometimes lead to fragmented policies and a lack of standardisation in quality. Therefore, for decentralisation to be meaningful, it must be accompanied by robust capacity-building,



clear delineation of roles, adequate funding, and strong monitoring systems. When implemented thoughtfully, educational decentralisation can lead to a more democratic, accountable, and efficient education system that truly meets the needs of its learners.

---

## **Introduction:**

### **Kothari Commission Recommendations for Educational Decentralisation**

The recommendations made by the Kothari Commission in the mid-1960s provided a significant boost to the decentralization of education in India. Under the direction of Dr. Daulat Singh Kothari, the Kothari Commission, officially called the Education Commission, was founded in 1964. Its main goal was to evaluate India's educational system as a whole and offer suggestions for improvement. The Indian education system encountered a number of difficulties in the early years following independence, such as differences in relevance, quality, and accessibility. These problems were partly caused by the centralized structure of educational governance, which ignored the various demands of various communities and regions in favor of national decision-making. The Kothari Commission acknowledged decentralization as being essential to addressing these issues. It underlined how crucial it is for local autonomy and participation to be part of decision-making processes in order to meet the particular educational needs of various communities around the nation. J. P. Naik, one of India's foremost educational thinkers, analysed the recommendations in the context of educational planning. He supported the Commission's emphasis on local participation and regional autonomy in educational administration, noting that decentralisation could lead to more relevant and context-sensitive education, particularly in diverse regions of India. B.M.B. Buch, an educational researcher, appreciates the decentralisation aspect of the Kothari Commission's recommendations. He highlighted how decentralisation could foster greater democracy and participation in the educational process. Buch suggested that decentralising educational planning would allow for more localised decision-making, empowering communities to meet their own educational needs and priorities. G.L. Golembiewski is an expert in public administration who applied organizational theory to evaluate the Kothari Commission approach to decentralisation. He emphasised the importance of local participation in educational management, noting that such participation could create a more inclusive system, especially in rural and marginalised areas.

The Kothari Commission was constituted in 1964 under the chairmanship of Professor Daulat Singh Kothari. This commission recommended the establishment of District Education Boards (DEBs). The



aim was to decentralize educational administration.. The purpose of these boards was to act as a bridge between the Local and State governments, enabling a more sophisticated comprehension of the district-level educational requirements. The Commission recommended community involvement in Education. This commission emphasized the importance of local communities being involved in the administration and planning of educational programs. It promoted the establishment of School Management Committees (SMCs) in order to foster community involvement in decision-making and guarantee that educational policies took into account local and cultural quirks. The Commission recommended for **“Empowerment of Panchayati Raj Institutions,”** giving focus on local self-government organizations, or Panchayati Raj Institutions, more authority to play a bigger role in education because it understood the value of local self-governance. This would make it possible to coordinate and execute educational policies that are specifically designed to meet the needs of each region efficiently. **Flexible Curriculum and Evaluation Systems-** The commission suggested creating a curriculum that was more adaptable to different cultural contexts and regional variances. It suggested that independent boards be established for school exams to provide evaluation systems with some degree of regional flexibility.

**Impact and Difficulties:** The decentralization of education in India was significantly impacted by the Kothari Commission's recommendations. The creation of DEBs and the focus on community involvement helped to make educational governance more locally focused. Nonetheless, obstacles, including bureaucratic resistance, unequal resource distribution, and differing degrees of state commitment, hampered the successful execution of these reforms. While some regions made headway, others found it difficult to fully adopt the decentralization model. Subsequent educational reforms have attempted to achieve a balance between centralization and decentralization by building on the foundation established by the Kothari Commission over time. J.P. Naik acknowledged that while decentralisation was necessary for improving efficiency and responsiveness to local needs, administrative capacity at the local level was often inadequate. He suggested that the lack of adequate infrastructure, trained personnel, and funding could hinder the effectiveness of decentralisation (Naik, J.P.). Buch was critical of the slow pace of implementation of decentralised, particularly in rural areas. He pointed out that without proper institutional frameworks and coordination between central and state governments, decentralisation could lead to inequitable distribution of resources and services. Rajni Kothari himself was cautious about the political dimensions of decentralisation. He warns that in regions with strong political influence and social hierarchies, decentralisation could be co-opted by local elites, thus perpetuating inequality rather than reducing it. C.G. L. Golembiewski, an expert in public administration, argues that decentralisation requires a balance of power between local bodies and state authorities. Without clear lines of authority



and accountability, decentralisation can reduce the effectiveness of the education system and create administrative confusion. He emphasised the need for clear guidelines and monitoring systems to ensure that local authorities remained accountable. E.A. R. Desai, a Sociologist, warned that decentralisation alone would not be sufficient to overcome social inequalities in education. He argued that decentralisation must be accompanied by reforms in the social structure and a commitment to redistributing resources to ensure that rural and disadvantaged communities benefit from the education system. Michael Young, a prominent educationist, critiqued the Kothari Commission's emphasis on local control of education. He cautioned against fragmentation and lack of uniformity in the education system. Young pointed out that excessive decentralisation might lead to a lack of coordination between local bodies, regional imbalances, and a decline in quality due to varying educational standards across different regions. He recommended that decentralisation should be accompanied by a centralised quality control mechanism to ensure equity and maintain the national standard. However, K.K. Aziz noted that decentralisation needed to be carefully designed to prevent regional disparities from worsening and said that without sufficient oversight, wealthier and more politically influential regions might be able to monopolise resources, leaving poorer areas behind.

In conclusion, the Kothari Commission's recommendations, which recognized the value of local context and community involvement, marked a major step towards decentralizing education in India. Despite ongoing difficulties, the commission's foundational work has shaped later educational policies by highlighting the necessity of a more decentralized and community-focused approach to guarantee inclusive and high-quality education for all. The nation's educational development in India depends on continuous efforts to improve and implement decentralized educational governance.

### **Decentralisation through the 1986 Education Policy**

India experienced a turning point in its educational history at the beginning of the 1980s. The environment was marked by issues like unequal access, subpar instruction, and a curriculum that was frequently disconnected from the various needs of society. The Indian government responded by creating the National Policy on Education (NPE) in 1986, which brought about a significant paradigm shift in education by decentralizing the system in addition to addressing these issues. This article explores the subtleties of the 1986 NPE and how it greatly influenced the development of a more diverse and locally focused educational system. The 1986 NPE was developed with the need to reform the educational system and the quickly changing socioeconomic environment in mind. Recognizing the distinct needs of India's diverse population and the value of local participation in decision-making processes, the policy



aimed to decentralize educational governance. Increasing access, guaranteeing quality, and coordinating education with societal demands were among the main goals.

J.P. Naik, one of the leading educationalists in India, saw the 1986 policy as a step towards addressing regional disparities and promoting community involvement in education. Naik supported the policy emphasis on decentralisation. He highlighted that the implementation of these decentralisation initiatives remained problematic due to bureaucratic hurdles, insufficient capacity at the local level, and the persistence of inequalities between urban and rural areas. He argued that decentralisation without adequate training, financial support, and political will would fail to achieve its objectives. Dreze and Gazdar(1997) said that one of the primary aims was to empower local communities and strengthen local governance in the education sector(Dreze & Gazdar, 1997). According to R. Chaudhary(2003), one of the major reforms of the 1986 PNE was the increased role of local communities in educational management. The Commission involved PRIs in decision-making related to the school. This was part of a broader strategy to promote ‘community participation’ and ‘bottom-up governance.’ He highlighted that the policy aimed to ensure that the education system was more aligned with local needs, which is particularly important in India’s diverse and rural settings(Chaudhary, 2003). G.G. Kingdon discusses how decentralisation and fiscal responsibility were central to improving the education system, but also points out that local bodies often lacked the financial resources to capacity to fully implement the policy. The challenges of equitable resource distribution remain a concern, with poorer regions struggling to generate enough funds for education(Kingdon,2007).

### Key recommendations

**The 1986 Education Policy recommended establishing “District Institutes of Education and Training (DIETs)”**. DIETs are the pillars of the decentralization movement, and were created to function as district-level centers for curriculum development, teacher preparation, and educational research. These institutions played a key role in developing local knowledge, which allowed teachers to modify curricula to meet the unique requirements and cultural contexts of their areas. The Education Policy recommended for **“Strengthening Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs)”**. The policy recognized the critical role that local self-governance plays and promoted the active participation of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) in the planning and management of education. The goal of this decentralization approach was to give local organizations more authority to decide on matters like resource allocation, teacher appointments, and infrastructure development. Understanding how important it is for communities to be involved in education, the 1986 NPE **promoted the establishment of School**



**Management Committees (SMCs).** SMCs, which are made up of parents, educators, and community leaders, were created with the intention of facilitating grassroots collaborative decision-making and encouraging a sense of accountability and ownership for school-related matters. **Educational Institutions' Autonomy-** The policy supported educational institutions' autonomy by giving schools and colleges more control over administrative procedures, curriculum development, and assessment techniques. The goal of placing such a strong emphasis on institutional autonomy was to promote creativity and adaptability in meeting local needs. **Vocationalization of Education-** the 1986 NPE introduced the idea of vocationalization as a way to close the knowledge gap between education and work. This entailed incorporating career-oriented courses into general education programs so that students could gain real-world experience in line with local job openings.

**Impact and Challenges-** the 1986 NPE's decentralization measures had a significant effect on India's educational system. Localized curriculum planning was made easier, and teacher professional development was improved with the establishment of DIETs. Participation in the community through SMCs created a feeling of community ownership and promoted cooperative learning. Nevertheless, difficulties surfaced during the implementation stage. Significant obstacles included differences in state commitment levels, bureaucratic roadblocks, and unequal resource distribution. Decentralization's efficacy frequently depended on how much local government accepted its expanded role in educational governance. In summary, the 1986 National Policy on Education is regarded as a turning point in the development of India's educational landscape. The policy aimed to establish a model that was more community-driven, inclusive, and responsive by promoting decentralization. The 1986 NPE's guiding principles continue to influence India's educational reforms despite ongoing obstacles, highlighting the necessity of ongoing efforts to strengthen decentralization and guarantee high-quality education for all. Future endeavors in India are guided by the legacy of the 1986 NPE as it navigates the complex path towards educational progress.

### **73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments**

India, the World's largest democracy, has embarked on a transformative journey towards decentralised governance with the enactment of the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments in 1992. These landmark amendments, aimed at revitalising grassroots democracy, have ushered in a new era of local governance by empowering elected representatives in rural and urban areas. Historical Contexts: Before the enactment of the 73rd and 74th amendments, local governance in India was characterised by centralisation and bureaucratic control, which often resulted in inefficiency, corruption, and alienation of



citizens from the decision-making process. Recognizing the need to strengthen democracy at the grassroots level, the Indian government undertook comprehensive reforms to empower Panchayati Raj Institutions in rural areas and Urban Local Bodies in urban areas. Key Provisions of the Amendments: 73rd Amendment (Panchayats): Mandated to establishment of Panchayats at the village, intermediate (block), and district levels in every state. Provided for the reservation of seats for Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), and women, ensuring their representation in local bodies. Outlined the functions of Panchayats, including rural development, social justice, economic empowerment, and natural resource management. Empowered Panchayats with fiscal, administrative, and planning authority to promote grassroots democracy and participatory governance. Similar to the 73rd Amendment, it mandated the creation of Urban Local Bodies at the municipal, intermediate (ward), and district levels in every state. Provided for the reservation of seats for SCs, STs, and women, promoting inclusive participation in urban governance. Defined the functions of ULBs, encompassing urban planning, infrastructure development, public health, sanitation, and environmental conservation. Granted ULBs fiscal, administrative, and planning powers to address the diverse needs of urban populations and promote sustainable development.

Impacts of Amendments: The 73rd and 74th Amendments led to the election of grassroots leaders, empowering them with decision-making authority and administrative responsibilities. Local representatives gained autonomy in planning and implementing development projects, thereby addressing the unique needs and aspirations of their communities. The reservation of seats for marginalised groups, including SCs, STs, and women, ensured their representation in local bodies, fostering inclusive governance and social empowerment. Decentralisation facilitated efficient delivery of public services, including education, healthcare, water supply, sanitation, and infrastructure development. Local governments became more responsive to citizens' needs and concerns, promoting accountability, transparency, and citizen engagement in governance processes. The amendments paved the way for innovative initiatives such as participatory budgeting, community-driven development, and social audit mechanisms, enhancing the quality and effectiveness of service delivery at the grassroots level. The reservation of seats for marginalised groups, particularly women, led to a significant increase in their political representation and participation in decision-making processes. Women's participation in local governance challenged traditional gender norms and stereotypes, empowering them economically, socially, and politically. The 73rd and 74th Amendments played a significant role in promoting gender equality, social justice, and inclusive development by ensuring the meaningful participation of marginalised communities in local governance structures.



**Challenges and Opportunities:** Despite the transformative impact of the 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments, several challenges persist in realising the full potential of centralized governance in India. **Inadequate financial resources-** many local bodies face financial constraints, limiting their ability to undertake development projects and deliver essential services effectively. **Administrative Capacity Constraints-** Capacity building initiatives are needed to enhance the administrative and managerial capabilities of local representatives and officials, ensuring efficient governance and service delivery. **Political interference-** Political interference and patronage often undermine the autonomy and effectiveness of local bodies, hindering their ability to serve as vibrant centers of democratic governance. **Uneven Implementation-** There is considerable variation in the implementation of decentralisation across states and regions, highlighting the need for standardised guidelines, a monitoring mechanism, and capacity building initiatives. However, amidst these challenges, there are also significant opportunities to strengthen decentralised governance in India. **Leveraging Technology-** The widespread adoption of digital technologies and e-governance solutions can enhance transparency, accountability, and citizen engagement in local governance processes. **Strengthening Fiscal Autonomy-** Empowering local bodies with greater fiscal autonomy and revenue-raising powers can enable them to mobilise resources, finance development projects, and meet the diverse needs of their constituents. **Promoting Participatory Governance-** Facilitating greater citizen participation, particularly among marginalised communities, can foster inclusive decision-making processes and strengthen social cohesion at the grassroots level. **Enhancing Inter-Governmental Coordination-** Promoting synergy and collaboration between different tiers of government, including central, state, and local bodies, is essential for effective policy coordination, resource allocation, and service delivery.

### **Decentralisation through the Twelfth Five-Year Plan of Niti Aayog**

The goal of NITI Aayog's twelfth Five-Year Plan is to completely overhaul the Indian education system. Decentralization is considered a way to accomplish a number of important goals. The plan seeks to support specialized educational solutions that cater to the particular needs of diverse communities by giving local entities more authority over decision-making. Variations in language, culture, and socioeconomic status are all part of this. Decentralization promotes neighborhood communities' active involvement in the educational process. It seeks to create a collaborative approach in which community leaders, educators, and parents are integral to the development of educational policies and practices. **Effective Resource Distribution-** the strategy acknowledges the significance of optimal resource allocation. It seeks to improve the efficacy and efficiency of spending on education by empowering local



governments to distribute funds according to their unique needs. **Empowering Educational Institutions-** by giving them more autonomy, decentralization aims to empower colleges and schools. This involves making decisions about things like developing infrastructure, hiring teachers, and designing curricula.

**Strategies for Implementation:** The 12th Five-Year Plan suggests various tactics for the successful implementation of educational decentralization in order to meet these goals. **Capacity Building-** it's critical to increase the ability of regional institutions. In order to improve the abilities of local administrators, educators, and community leaders in managing educational resources and decision-making, training and support must be given. **Technological Integration-** the strategy acknowledges how technology helps to enable decentralized learning. It promotes the use of digital platforms for monitoring, data management, and communication in order to guarantee smooth coordination between national and local organizations. **Policy Framework-** to direct the decentralized education system, a strong policy framework is necessary. The plan places a strong emphasis on the necessity of precise rules and regulations that uphold accountability and quality standards while empowering local authorities. **Monitoring and Evaluation-** to gauge the effects of decentralization, regular monitoring and evaluation procedures are suggested. This includes performance evaluations, data gathering, and feedback loops to make sure the plan's goals are being reached. **Possibilities and Challenges- Decentralization** presents several obstacles in addition to its enormous potential to revolutionize Indian education. It is imperative to guarantee that local entities possess the requisite capability and resources to effectively discharge their duties. Achieving a balance between accountability and autonomy is also crucial to preventing the abuse of authority that has been assigned to you. Nonetheless, there are a lot of advantages to educational decentralization. It could encourage creativity, diversity, and a feeling of community among nearby communities. In order to establish a more equitable and responsive educational system, the 12th Five-Year Plan seeks to match education with the unique needs of each region. Strengthening the Panchayati Raj institution was the idea of Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru. It came into reality after the 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments. By the 73rd constitutional amendment, local governments were established at the Panchayat level, block level, and district level. And by the 74th constitutional amendment, ward-level and district-level local bodies were established for decentralization of government and the decision-making process. National Institute for Transforming India (NITI Aayog's) 12th Five-Year Plan suggested the decentralization of power, decision-making process, and community involvement. And suggested the empowering of educational institutions by giving them autonomy, a



decentralized process of decision-making in developing infrastructure, hiring teachers, and designing curricula.

Educational decentralisation under the National Education Policy (NEP), 2020, represents a transformative approach to shifting power and responsibility from centralised authorities to more localised governance structures in education. The policy acknowledges that decisions made closer to the point of implementation tend to be more effective, context-specific, and responsive to the needs of learners. It promotes the devolution of authority to states, districts, blocks, and most importantly, to schools and local communities. One of the key proposals is the creation of *School Complexes*, clusters of schools managed together under a common administrative and academic structure, aimed at sharing resources, ensuring better governance, and improving learning outcomes. NEP 2020 also strengthens the role of School Management Committees (SMCs), empowering parents and local stakeholders to actively participate in school planning, monitoring, and management, thereby promoting greater accountability and ownership at the grassroots level.

Moreover, NEP 2020 decentralises curriculum and pedagogical decisions by encouraging flexibility and innovation at the local and school levels. While there will be national guidelines and standards set by bodies like NCERT and SCERTs, schools and teachers are given the autonomy to adapt curriculum content and teaching methods according to regional contexts, languages, and learner needs. This bottom-up approach ensures that education is not only equitable and inclusive but also culturally relevant and learner-centric. Decentralisation under NEP is also supported by capacity building, digital tools, and robust data systems to ensure informed decision-making at all levels. Overall, NEP 2020 reimagines educational governance by placing trust in local stakeholders, thereby fostering a more collaborative, transparent, and responsive educational ecosystem across the country.

### References-

- Kothari Commission Report, Government of India.
- Education Policy, 1986, Government of India.
- Twelfth Five Year Plan, NITI Aayog, GOI.
- New Education Policy, Government of India, 2020.
- J.P.Naik, Education Commission and After. Allied Publishers, 1979.
- B.M.B. Bauch, Surveys of Research in Education, NCERT.
- Golembiewski, Organizational theory or development administration.



- E.A.R Desai “Social Background of Indian Nationalism.”
- Dreze and Gazdar(1997)
- Chaudhary(2003)
- Kingdon,2007
- 73rd and & 74th Constitutional amendments document.