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## An Appraisal of Pedagogical Challenges in Implementing NEP 2020

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### ABSTRACT

The National Education Policy 2020 envisions a comprehensive transformation of India's education system by promoting holistic and learner-centric education, multidisciplinary approaches, academic flexibility, skill orientation, and inclusiveness. Through wide-ranging reforms across school and higher education, the policy seeks to enhance educational quality, ensure equity and access, and strengthen India's global competitiveness in the knowledge economy. The pedagogical vision of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 marks a significant departure from India's long standing examination oriented and rote learning based educational practices. Envisaging a learner centred, competency based, experiential, and multidisciplinary approach, NEP 2020 seeks to transform the philosophy, content, and methods of teaching learning across all levels of education. While this vision aligns with global educational reforms and the evolving demands of the twenty-first century, its pedagogical implementation presents a range of complex and deeply rooted challenges. *This paper critically examines the major pedagogical constraints encountered in translating the ideals of NEP 2020 into classroom practice.* It argues that entrenched teaching cultures, limited teacher autonomy, and inadequate professional preparation continue to impede the shift towards active and inquiry based learning. The persistence of rigid curricula, overloaded syllabi, and traditional assessment systems further undermines efforts to promote

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competency based evaluation and formative assessment practices. Additionally, the paper highlights challenges arising from multilingual classrooms, digital divides, and disparities in institutional resources, which complicate the adoption of experiential and technology enabled pedagogies. The transition from teacher centred instruction to learner centred engagement also demands a fundamental reorientation of teachers' roles, attitudes, and classroom practices - an aspect insufficiently addressed through existing training mechanisms. By situating these pedagogical challenges within India's broader socio, economic and institutional context, the article underscores the gap between policy intent and pedagogical reality. It concludes by emphasizing the need for sustained teacher development, curricular flexibility, and systemic support to ensure that the transformative pedagogical goals of NEP 2020 are effectively realized.

The National Education Policy 2020 marks a historic and transformative shift in India's educational landscape. Envisioned as a comprehensive reform framework, it seeks to reorient the system toward flexibility, multidisciplinary learning, skill development, inclusivity, and a strong grounding in Indian knowledge systems and values. By replacing rote based, examination-centric approaches with competency based, experiential, and learner centred pedagogy, NEP 2020 aspires to align Indian education with the demands of the 21st century while preserving the country's rich cultural and intellectual heritage. It introduces sweeping reforms across school and higher education, including curricular restructuring, the 5+3+3+4 school framework, holistic assessment, academic bank of credits, institutional restructuring, and the promotion of research and innovation.

However, the transformative vision of NEP 2020 is accompanied by complex and multifaceted implementation challenges. Structural barriers such as inadequate infrastructure, regional disparities, digital divides, and financial constraints significantly hinder uniform execution across states. Administrative challenges include coordination gaps between central and state governments, limited institutional autonomy, bureaucratic inertia, and insufficient capacity building mechanisms. Pedagogically, the shift toward multidisciplinary and competency-based education requires extensive teacher training, curriculum redesign, and a fundamental change in classroom culture tasks that demand sustained commitment and resources. Given India's vast socio-economic diversity, ensuring equitable



and consistent implementation remains a formidable task. This article critically examines the pedagogical hurdles confronting NEP 2020 and analyzes how these challenges may dilute its transformative potential if left unaddressed.

### **NATIONAL EDUCATION POLICY (NEP) 2020)**

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 marks a historic and transformative milestone in India's educational journey. Approved by the Government of India in 2020, it replaces the earlier National Policy on Education and presents a comprehensive framework to align India's education system with the aspirations and demands of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The policy envisions an education system that is holistic, inclusive, multidisciplinary, flexible, and rooted in Indian culture and values, while simultaneously striving for global standards of excellence. It aims not merely at incremental reform but at systemic transformation across school and higher education.

One of the most significant structural reforms introduced by NEP 2020 is the replacement of the traditional 10+2 system with a 5+3+3+4 curricular and pedagogical structure. This new design corresponds to the cognitive and developmental stages of children: the Foundational Stage (five years, including three years of pre-school and Grades 1–2), the Preparatory Stage (Grades 3–5), the Middle Stage (Grades 6–8), and the Secondary Stage (Grades 9–12). By integrating Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) into the formal schooling framework, the policy acknowledges the critical importance of the early years in shaping cognitive, emotional, and social development. Recognizing that foundational learning is the bedrock of all future education, NEP 2020 declares universal foundational literacy and numeracy as an urgent national mission, seeking to ensure that every child achieves basic reading, writing, and arithmetic skills by Grade 3.

The policy also initiates a paradigm shift in pedagogy. Moving decisively away from rote memorization and exam-centric instruction, it promotes competency-based learning that emphasizes conceptual understanding, critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving abilities. Experiential learning, inquiry-based approaches, discussion-oriented classrooms, and collaborative projects are encouraged to make learning engaging and meaningful. Students are to be viewed as active participants in the learning process rather than passive recipients of information. In line with this shift, assessment reforms form a central pillar of NEP 2020. The policy recommends transforming examinations into tools for learning rather than mere mechanisms of filtering and ranking. Board examinations will be redesigned to test core competencies and application of knowledge, while formative and continuous evaluation will gain prominence to reduce stress and encourage deeper understanding.



Language policy constitutes another significant dimension of NEP 2020. The policy strongly advocates multilingualism and recommends that, wherever possible, the medium of instruction until at least Grade 5 and preferably until Grade 8 should be the mother tongue or regional language. This approach is supported by extensive research indicating that children grasp concepts more effectively when taught in their home language. At the same time, the policy maintains flexibility by promoting the study of multiple languages and strengthening India's rich linguistic diversity. By doing so, NEP 2020 seeks to foster both cognitive development and national integration, while preserving cultural heritage.

In the sphere of higher education, NEP 2020 proposes sweeping reforms aimed at creating a multidisciplinary, flexible, and research oriented ecosystem. Institutions are encouraged to evolve into large multidisciplinary universities and colleges that integrate arts, sciences, social sciences, vocational education, and professional disciplines. The rigid separation between streams is to be dismantled, enabling students to choose combinations of subjects across disciplines. The policy introduces flexible undergraduate programs of three or four years with multiple entry and exit options, supported by an Academic Bank of Credits (ABC) that digitally stores academic credits earned by students. This system facilitates lifelong learning and academic mobility. Furthermore, the establishment of a single higher education regulator excluding medical and legal education is proposed to streamline governance, enhance transparency, and ensure uniform quality standards.

Teacher education and professional development receive considerable emphasis under NEP 2020. Recognizing teachers as the cornerstone of educational reform, the policy mandates that by 2030 the minimum qualification for school teachers will be a four year integrated B.Ed. degree. Continuous professional development, merit-based career progression, transparent recruitment processes, and improved service conditions are highlighted as essential for motivating teachers and enhancing instructional quality. By elevating the status and preparation of teachers, the policy seeks to ensure effective implementation of its ambitious goals. Equity and inclusion lie at the heart of NEP 2020's vision. The policy aspires to bridge persistent social and gender gaps in education through targeted support for disadvantaged groups, including socio, economically backward communities, tribal populations, minorities, and persons with disabilities. Special Education Zones are proposed to address region specific challenges and ensure equitable access to quality education. Financial assistance, open schooling systems, and inclusive curricula are envisioned to reduce dropout rates and promote universal participation.



Finally, NEP 2020 underscores the transformative potential of technology in education. It encourages the development of digital infrastructure, online learning platforms, virtual laboratories, and blended learning models to expand access and enhance quality, especially in remote and underserved areas. At the same time, it recognizes the pressing need to bridge the digital divide and ensure that technological advancements do not exacerbate existing inequalities.

In essence, NEP 2020 represents a comprehensive and forward looking reform agenda designed to transform India's education system into one that nurtures knowledge, innovation, ethical values, and lifelong learning. By harmonizing tradition with modernity, and inclusivity with excellence, it seeks to prepare learners not only for meaningful employment but also for responsible citizenship in a rapidly evolving global society.

## **PEDAGOGICAL CHALLENGES IN IMPLEMENTING NEP 2020**

The pedagogical dimension of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 represents one of its most ambitious and transformative aspects. NEP 2020 seeks to fundamentally alter the philosophy, content, methods, and outcomes of teaching learning processes in India. It moves away from rote based, examination driven instruction towards competency based, learner centred, experiential, and multidisciplinary education. While this shift aligns with global best practices and the demands of the 21st century, its implementation faces profound pedagogical challenges. These challenges are deeply embedded in existing teaching cultures, teacher preparation systems, curriculum frameworks, assessment practices, language policies, and classroom realities.

### **1. Transition from Rote Learning to Competency-Based Education**

One of the central pedagogical objectives of NEP 2020 is the replacement of rote memorization with competency-based learning that emphasizes conceptual understanding, critical thinking, creativity, and problem solving. However, this transition presents several difficulties. India's education system has historically been examination oriented, with success measured primarily through marks and grades. Teachers, students, and parents alike are accustomed to content heavy syllabi and standardized examinations that reward memorization. Shifting to competency based education requires redefining learning outcomes, redesigning classroom practices, and changing deeply ingrained mindsets. Many teachers lack adequate training to design competency based lesson plans, develop higher order questioning strategies, or facilitate inquiry based learning. Moreover, large class sizes restrict individualized instruction and continuous assessment, both of which are crucial for competency based



education. In overcrowded classrooms, teachers often revert to lecture based methods, limiting opportunities for student engagement and experiential learning. Without systemic support and sustained professional development, the pedagogical vision of NEP risks remaining largely theoretical.

## **2. Curriculum Restructuring and Multidisciplinarity**

NEP 2020 promotes curricular flexibility and multidisciplinary education at all levels. In schools, it encourages reduced content load, integration of vocational education, arts, sports, and life skills. In higher education, it advocates for multidisciplinary institutions, flexible degree options, and multiple entry–exit systems. Pedagogically, this shift demands a complete reorientation of curriculum design and instructional methods. Teachers trained in single subject specializations often struggle to adopt interdisciplinary approaches. Integrating subjects such as science with social sciences, or arts with technology, requires collaborative planning and cross disciplinary competence, which is currently limited. At the school level, the lack of integrated textbooks and teaching-learning materials poses a major challenge. Teachers are expected to design interdisciplinary modules without sufficient guidance or resources. In higher education, faculty members may resist multidisciplinary teaching due to concerns over academic identity, workload, and evaluation systems. Additionally, rigid institutional structures and timetable constraints make curriculum flexibility difficult to operationalize. Without clear pedagogical frameworks and institutional support, multidisciplinary education risks becoming superficial rather than transformative.

## **3. Teacher Preparedness and Professional Development**

Teachers are the cornerstone of pedagogical reform, yet NEP 2020 implementation reveals significant gaps in teacher preparedness. The policy emphasizes continuous professional development (CPD), learner centred pedagogy, formative assessment, and digital competence. However, existing teacher education programs often fall short of these expectations. Pre-service teacher training in India remains largely theoretical, with limited emphasis on classroom based practice, reflective teaching, and innovation. In-service teachers, particularly in government schools, often lack access to high quality professional development programs. Even when training is provided, it is frequently short term, fragmented, and disconnected from classroom realities.

The introduction of new pedagogical approaches such as experiential learning, project based learning, and competency based assessment requires sustained mentoring and institutional support. Teachers also face increased workload due to curriculum redesign, assessment reforms, and



administrative responsibilities, leading to resistance or superficial adoption of reforms. Furthermore, teacher motivation and morale remain critical concerns. Without adequate incentives, recognition, and career progression opportunities linked to pedagogical innovation, teachers may view NEP reforms as additional burdens rather than opportunities for professional growth.

#### **4. Assessment and Evaluation Reforms**

NEP 2020 proposes a paradigm shift in assessment practices, moving from summative, high-stakes examinations to continuous, formative, and holistic assessment. It emphasizes assessment “for learning” rather than assessment “of learning.” While pedagogically sound, implementing such reforms is fraught with challenges. The existing assessment ecosystem board examinations, entrance tests, and competitive exams are deeply entrenched in ranking and selection mechanisms. Teachers are under pressure to prepare students for exams, often prioritizing test performance over conceptual understanding, aligning classroom assessment with holistic evaluation while maintaining compatibility with external examinations is a major pedagogical dilemma.

Teachers often lack training in designing formative assessments, rubrics, portfolios, and performance based evaluation tools. Assessing competencies such as creativity, collaboration, and ethical reasoning requires subjective judgment, which raises concerns about standardization, fairness, and reliability. In large classrooms, continuous assessment significantly increases teachers’ workload, making it difficult to provide meaningful feedback. Without adequate administrative and technological support, assessment reforms risk being implemented mechanically rather than pedagogically.

#### **5. Language Policy and Multilingual Pedagogy**

NEP 2020 strongly advocates the use of mother tongue or regional language as the medium of instruction, particularly in the foundational and primary stages. Pedagogically, this approach is supported by research showing that children learn concepts more effectively in their home language. However, its implementation presents several challenges.

- First, there is a shortage of quality teaching learning materials and textbooks in many regional and tribal languages. Translating existing content is insufficient; pedagogical materials must be culturally relevant and linguistically appropriate.
- Second, teacher proficiency in regional languages varies widely. In urban and semi urban areas, teachers may be more comfortable teaching in English, while students may come from diverse linguistic backgrounds. Teacher transfers across linguistic regions further complicate implementation.



- Third, parental aspirations often favour English medium education due to its perceived association with social mobility and employment opportunities. Resistance from parents can undermine the adoption of mother tongue based pedagogy.
- Finally, ensuring a smooth transition from regional language instruction to English or other languages at later stages requires carefully designed bilingual pedagogical strategies, which are currently underdeveloped.

## **6. Integration of Technology in Teaching Learning**

NEP 2020 recognizes technology as a powerful enabler of education, advocating for digital platforms, online resources, and blended learning models. Pedagogically, technology has the potential to personalize learning, enhance engagement, and expand access. However, several challenges limit its effective integration. Many teachers lack digital literacy and confidence in using technology for pedagogical purposes. While basic ICT training may exist, pedagogical integration such as using technology for collaborative learning, formative assessment, and differentiated instruction remains limited.

The digital divide further exacerbates inequalities. Students from disadvantaged backgrounds often lack access to devices, internet connectivity, or supportive home environments. Teachers must therefore design pedagogical approaches that accommodate both digitally connected and disconnected learners, which is extremely challenging. Additionally, over reliance on digital tools without pedagogical clarity can reduce learning to passive content consumption. Effective technology integration requires careful instructional design, which demands time, training, and institutional support.

## **7. Experiential and Vocational Learning**

NEP 2020 emphasizes experiential learning, including internships, community engagement, and vocational education from an early stage. Pedagogically, this shift aims to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and real world application. However, several challenges hinder its implementation. Teachers often lack experience in designing and supervising experiential learning activities. Establishing partnerships with local industries, artisans, and community organizations requires institutional coordination that is often absent. Assessment of experiential and vocational learning outcomes also remains unclear. Traditional evaluation methods are ill suited to measure skills acquired through hands-on learning, leading to inconsistencies and undervaluation of such experiences. Moreover, societal attitudes towards vocational education continue to associate it with lower status, affecting student



motivation and parental support. Without pedagogical strategies that integrate vocational learning with academic excellence, these initiatives may fail to achieve their intended impact.

## **8. Inclusivity and Differentiated Pedagogy**

NEP 2020 emphasizes inclusive education, catering to students with diverse abilities, backgrounds, and learning needs. Pedagogically, this requires differentiated instruction, individualized learning plans, and universal design for learning (UDL). However, implementing inclusive pedagogy remains a major challenge. Teachers often lack training in special education and inclusive teaching strategies. Large class sizes and limited support staff make individualized attention difficult. Students with disabilities, first generation learners, and socio, economically disadvantaged groups may struggle to benefit from pedagogical reforms without targeted support. Language barriers, cultural differences, and gender norms further complicate inclusive pedagogy. Without adequate resources and capacity building, inclusion risks becoming a rhetorical commitment rather than a pedagogical reality.

## **9. Resistance to Pedagogical Change**

Pedagogical reforms inevitably encounter resistance from stakeholders accustomed to existing practices. Teachers may perceive new approaches as disruptive, time consuming, or misaligned with examination requirements. Parents may distrust unfamiliar methods, fearing adverse effects on academic performance. Institutional cultures that prioritize compliance over innovation further discourage pedagogical experimentation. Without mechanisms for dialogue, feedback, and shared learning, resistance can undermine reform efforts.

## **Conclusion**

The pedagogical challenges in implementing NEP 2020 are complex, interconnected, and deeply rooted in India's educational ecosystem. While the policy articulates a progressive and learner centred vision, translating it into classroom practice requires sustained investment in teacher capacity, curriculum development, assessment reform, and institutional support. Addressing these pedagogical hurdles is essential not only for the success of National Education Policy 2020 but also for realizing the broader goal of equitable, high quality education in India. Pedagogical transformation must therefore be approached as a long-term, collaborative, and context-sensitive process rather than a one-time policy intervention.



A major challenge lies in shifting from rote-based, examination driven instruction to competency based and experiential learning. Many teachers, having themselves been trained within traditional systems, require continuous professional development to adopt new pedagogies such as inquiry based learning, critical thinking exercises, and multidisciplinary approaches. Furthermore, curriculum redesign must ensure coherence between learning outcomes, teaching methods, and assessment practices. Without alignment, reforms risk remaining superficial. Institutional constraints such as large class sizes, inadequate infrastructure, digital divides, and administrative burdens further complicate implementation. Socio, economic disparities across regions also demand flexible, localized strategies rather than uniform mandates. Ultimately, successful pedagogical reform demands strong academic leadership, robust monitoring mechanisms, and meaningful stakeholder participation. Only through sustained collaboration among policymakers, educators, institutions, and communities can the transformative vision of NEP 2020 be effectively realized in classrooms across India.

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