Five Years of NEP 2020: Tracking India's Education Reform Across States

"NEP 2020 is a roadmap to build an education system that is holistic, flexible, and aligned with the needs of the 21st century." - K. Kasturirangan, Chairperson, NEP 2020 Drafting Committee

Launched in July 2020, the National Education Policy (NEP) marked India's first comprehensive education overhaul in over three decades. Crafted after widespread consultations and designed to align with the needs of a 21st-century knowledge economy, NEP 2020 laid out an ambitious 20-year glide path to transform Indian education by 2040.

The policy sought to create a more inclusive, equitable, multidisciplinary, and learner-centric system, focused not just on literacy but on critical thinking, creativity, vocational training, and global competitiveness. With specific goals like achieving 100% Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) in school education, increasing GER in higher education to 50% by 2035, and ensuring universal foundational literacy and numeracy by 2026–27, NEP strives to reshape the Indian educational landscape from preschool to PhD.

Structured around six core pillars—Early Childhood Education (ECCE), Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN), Curriculum and Pedagogy Reform, Multilingual and Inclusive Education, Digital Learning, and Higher Education Reform—the NEP promises structural shifts like the 5+3+3+4 school system, four-year undergraduate degrees, and flexible, credit-based learning via tools like the Academic Bank of Credits (ABC). Five years into implementation, NEP remains both a visionary roadmap and a work in progress, with states adopting, adapting, or resisting its reforms to varying extents. In this article, we look at the progress, challenges, and impact of the policy over the past five years.

1.Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE)

Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 includes global indicators that measure early childhood education, specifically the participation rate of children one year before entering primary school. This indicator reflects the percentage of five-year-olds enrolled in organized learning programs. In 2020, the participation rate stood at 87.2%. The Government of India has set ambitious targets to increase this rate to 95% by 2025 and achieve universal participation (100%) by 2030. NEP's foundational focus on ECCE has

spurred promising efforts. In this new structure, early childhood care and education have been considered from age 3 onwards, and several states, such as Uttar Pradesh (among the first) have begun to roll out NEP-aligned ECCE by launching "*Bal Vatika"* centres at Anganwadis for children aged 3–6 years in a bid to scale pre-primary education in government schools. Jharkhand has committed to upgrading 16,000 Anganwadi centres into structured learning hubs by 2026. Chhattisgarh and Jammu & Kashmir are also aligning Anganwadi curricula with the National Curriculum Framework for Foundational Stage (NCF-FS), introducing play-based pedagogy and mother-tongue instruction. However, implementation quality varies significantly across states. In several northeastern and tribal regions, the lack of trained facilitators, curriculum integration, and infrastructure continues to limit ECCE outreach.

2.Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN)

Under the NIPUN Bharat Mission, states are striving to achieve universal foundational literacy and numeracy (FLN) by 2026–27, and many are making strong progress. In Uttar Pradesh, Grade 3 reading proficiency has risen from 12% in 2018 to nearly 28% in 2024. Himachal Pradesh and Gujarat have built robust monitoring systems, with Gujarat's Gunotsav 2.0 initiative leading to a 180% rise in A+ rated primary schools in just two years.

States like Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, and Telangana are demonstrating effective FLN implementation, according to the Central Square Foundation (CSF), an NGO focused on FLN, EdTech, ECE, and school governance. Haryana ensures the timely delivery of materials and uses mobile apps to monitor outcomes for over 4.69 lakh students. Telangana's Tholimettu Mission conducts classroom assessments and provides feedback through academic mentors, while Uttar Pradesh has established Vidya Samiksha Kendras (VSKs) for ongoing school monitoring.

A significant factor in these advances is NIPUN Bharat's flexible funding model, which allocates ₹500 per student and ₹150 per teacher annually for learning materials and training. States like Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, and Assam have used this support to introduce structured teacher guides, student workbooks, and hands-on training aligned with their FLN goals. The funding also enables district-level oversight, with Uttar Pradesh conducting over 4 lakh spot assessments in 2023–24, and Odisha making 57,000 classroom mentoring visits through its Cluster Resource Coordinators.

A comprehensive ASER 2024 survey assessing 649,491 children in 17,997 rural villages revealed India's most significant improvement in foundational learning in two decades. Government schools especially showed strong gains: Class 3 reading proficiency rose to 23.4% in 2024, up from 16.3% in 2022 and 20.9% in 2018. In Uttar

Pradesh, gains were even steeper: Class 3 reading jumped to 27.9%, up from 12.3% in 2018, while Class 5 reading climbed to 50.5%. Arithmetic skills also rebounded, with Class 3 subtraction proficiency increasing to 33.7% nationwide and reaching 31.6% in Uttar Pradesh. These improvements largely reflect the impact of NEP 2020 and the NIPUN Bharat mission's emphasis on foundational literacy and numeracy. At least 15,728 (80%) of surveyed schools received government directives for FLN implementation; over 75% had trained FLN teachers; and more than 85% of Class 1 and 2 classrooms had access to TLM (Teaching-Learning Material) beyond textbooks. By early 2025, all States and Union Territories were implementing FLN programmes, with Vidya Pravesh rolled out in 33 states/UTs, NISHTHA FLN teacher training completed in 33, FLN resources developed in 27–28, and Academic Task Forces established in 35.

The NEP and NIPUN Bharat Mission have successfully highlighted the importance of foundational literacy and numeracy (FLN), with states adopting and scaling teacher training programs accordingly. While the training has raised awareness, many teachers lack opportunities for discussion, practice, and adaptation, limiting effective use of teaching-learning materials (TLMs). Post-training support is often inadequate, and teaching remains driven by syllabus completion rather than FLN goals. Despite these challenges, the heightened visibility of FLN and recent improvements in foundational learning—reflected in ASER data—mark significant progress.

3.Curriculum and Pedagogy Reform

NEP's move toward competency-based learning, experiential pedagogy, and reduced rote learning has spurred significant curriculum reforms in over 23 states/UTs, especially at the secondary level. Institutions like Delhi University and Lucknow University have revised syllabi to encourage interdisciplinary education and flexible assessments. The Odisha government has formed a 16-member committee to align the state curriculum framework (SCF) with the NEP 2020 and the National Curriculum Framework (NCF). Similarly Maharashtra Government announced the phased adoption of NEP-aligned curriculum beginning with Class I in the 2025–26 school year and progressively extending through all grades by 2028–29. Meanwhile, Madhya Pradesh has introduced context-driven curriculum reforms by launching vocational and employment-oriented programs. Over 10,000 educational institutions are implementing NEP-aligned curriculum models, including new coding labs in more than 220 Sandipani schools, and undergraduate courses in artificial intelligence, data science, cloud computing, and biotechnology, reflecting a shift from traditional rote learning to relevant skills-based instruction.

However, progress is mixed. Rajasthan, for example, has seen delays in teacher upskilling and textbook redesign. Meanwhile, Karnataka, which had led NEP's rollout in 2021, withdrew from NEP in 2023. The Congress-led government cited concerns over one-size-fits-all reforms and announced a new State Education Policy (SEP) to replace NEP in the 2024–25 academic session. While existing NEP cohorts will complete their programs, new undergraduate admissions will follow the SEP framework.

4.Multilingual, Holistic & Inclusive Learning

Multilingual and inclusive pedagogies have seen fragmented implementation. Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh have initiated bilingual teaching modules and local curriculum adaptations, especially in tribal regions. Sandipani Vidyalayas, earlier known as 'CM Rise Schools' in MP, are integrating holistic learning models and inclusive infrastructure. The Punjab government, aligning with NEP 2020's three-language policy, has introduced multilingual education in state-run schools. In early grades, Punjabi remains the primary medium of instruction, supported by the option to learn Hindi and English. Optional foreign languages such as French, Sanskrit, German, and Urdu are offered at the senior secondary level. This inclusive approach promotes cultural pride and equips students with linguistic versatility suited for both national and global engagement. DIKSHA (Digital Infrastructure for Knowledge Sharing) is a national digital platform launched by the Ministry of Education, Government of India in 2017. It is designed to support school education by providing e-learning resources, teacher training materials, and digital tools for students, teachers, and school administrators. The portal now offers digital content in 36 languages, along with nearly 954 Indian Sign Language (ISL) videos for Classes 1–5 and accessible learning material streamed via DTH television channels. The NEP's commitment to Universal Design for Learning (UDL) ensures that children with special needs participate fully in regular classrooms with support aids, ramps, teaching resources, and trained educators.

However, West Bengal, Kerala, and Tamil Nadu have firmly rejected NEP's language provisions, particularly the three-language formula, citing federal and cultural autonomy. These states continue with state-specific curricula and policies, choosing selective alignment over wholesale adoption.

5.Digital Education and Technology Integration

NEP's emphasis on tech-enabled learning found rapid momentum post-COVID. Government platforms like DIKSHA have recorded over 50 million users and 3.5 billion views by 2024. Universities like Delhi University and BAOU (Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Open University) have built robust online dashboards and learner management systems. In Uttar Pradesh, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath inaugurated 43 CM Model

Composite Schools and 66 CM Abyudaya Composite Schools. He also launched ICT labs across over 5,200 schools, smart classrooms in more than 7,400 schools, and distributed 51,667 tablets to teachers. In addition, he announced the launch of digital libraries in 503 PM SHRI schools. The CM underlined the transformative impact of Operation Kayakalp on improving infrastructure and boosting enrollment, and urged teachers to take their roles seriously and maximize every moment in the classroom. The launch of the Nipun Plus assessment app and digital SCERT-developed books further reinforces UP's commitment to tech-enabled learning aligned with NEP's goals. The Maharashtra government has launched the Majhi E-Shaala, an offline digital learning initiative in 67 schools across the Maoist-affected Gadchiroli district for the 2025–26 academic year. In partnership with Maharashtra Prathamik Shikshan Parishad, Pratham Infotech Foundation, and LTIMindtree, the program sets up classrooms with smart TVs, projectors, and pre-loaded digital kits. Each school designates 'Young Instructors'—students trained to assist their classmates in lessons. The initiative includes teacher training, structured lesson scheduling, and ongoing cluster- and district-level monitoring. Principals oversee lesson completion before exams, and Pratham Infotech staff conduct regular site visits to ensure progress and troubleshoot issues. Similarly, in Delhi, the government plans to install nearly 19,000 smart blackboards in classrooms over five years, backed by ₹900 crore funding, to enable experiential and personalised learning in Classes IX–XII. The rollout also includes digital libraries and language labs offering English, French, and German, all in line with NEP 2020 objectives.

At the national level, the DIKSHA platform has become a central pillar of NEP's digital framework. In all, 3,520 textbook-based ISL videos have been recorded; out of these, 597 textbook-based ISL videos are uploaded on DIKSHA. A 10,000-word ISL dictionary has been uploaded on DIKSHA, and 3,474 audiobook chapters have been developed.

Yet, many institutions, especially in Bihar, Haryana, and Rajasthan, still face acute infrastructure bottlenecks—limited devices, poor internet connectivity, and a lack of digital literacy among teachers and students. These disparities limit the scalability of NEP's digital ambitions.

6.Higher Education Reform, Vocational Training & Credit Mobility

The NEP aims to make higher education more flexible, skill-oriented, and globally competitive. Reforms include the Multiple Entry/Exit System (MEES), four-year UG degrees, and the Academic Bank of Credits (ABC).

According to a 2025 QS I-GAUGE report:

- Only 36% of institutions have adopted MEES,
- A mere 14% have hired “Professors of Practice” to bring in industry expertise.

However, states like Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, and Uttar Pradesh are making steady headway:

- Maharashtra has introduced AI and vocational training in 144 institutions,
- Odisha and UP have rolled out ABC and four-year UG programs,
- Jammu & Kashmir has implemented NEP fully across higher education since 2022.

In contrast, Karnataka’s exit from NEP implies a rollback of four-year degree programs, with legal scrutiny now underway on the constitutional validity of such withdrawal.

While NEP 2020 set broad, transformative goals—including a 50% Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) by 2035 and universal vocational exposure by 2025—its measurable impact remains modest and uneven. GER has risen to 28.3% as of 2024 (up from 27.3% in 2020–21), but dropout rates and transition inefficiencies—especially between secondary and higher secondary levels—continue to limit further gains.

Similarly, vocational integration and employability efforts have had localized successes but fall short of scale. NEP-aligned institutions have seen a rise in innovation metrics, such as patent filings and improved QS Asia rankings, but weak industry-academia collaboration and low global engagement restrict their broader impact. A large share of HEIs still lack the autonomy or infrastructure needed for full NEP alignment.

To accelerate progress under the NEP, India must invest heavily in improving school retention and boosting secondary completion rates, ensuring that more students transition successfully into higher education. Expanding foundational literacy programs, particularly in underserved regions, is essential to create a strong base for lifelong learning. Strengthening collaboration between universities and industry will be key to making higher education more relevant and employment-focused. At the same time, broadening access to vocational training and internship opportunities will equip students with practical skills aligned with workforce demands. It is also crucial to address persistent gender and regional disparities in access to quality education.

By mid-2025, the NEP has shown encouraging signs in both ambition and structural reform. Yet, converting this early momentum into long-term transformation will require more than intent—it demands consistent political will, adequate funding, and seamless coordination across all levels of government. Without systemic alignment and timely course correction, the policy's bold targets may remain aspirational. As India charts its path toward educational transformation, the following words from the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* remind us of the deeper purpose of learning *"Tamaso mā jyotir gamaya" Upanishad ("Lead me from darkness to light")* — a call to move from ignorance to enlightenment, from stagnation to progress.