

Reimagine, Integrate and Transform: Nep 2020 and The National Curriculum Framework

Dr. Debasis Mohapatra

Assistant Professor, Department of Odia, Regional Institute of Education, Ncert, Bhubaneswar, Odisha.

Abstract

Education systems across the world are undergoing significant transformation in response to technological change, changing patterns of work, social diversity, environmental concerns and the growing importance of lifelong learning. In India, the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 represents a major policy framework for restructuring education with an emphasis on holistic development, foundational learning, competency development, flexibility, multidisciplinary learning, inclusion, Indian languages and knowledge traditions. The National Curriculum Framework for School Education (NCF-SE) 2023 translates several of these broad policy aspirations into curricular and pedagogical directions for school education. The present conceptual research article examines the relationship between NEP 2020 and NCF-SE 2023 through the three interconnected ideas of reimagine, integrate and transform. It analyses how the two frameworks seek to move Indian education beyond content accumulation and examination-oriented learning towards competency-based, experiential, multidisciplinary and learner-centred education. Particular attention is given to curricular integration, the changing role of teachers, assessment reform, multilingualism, Indian knowledge systems, vocational education, technology and inclusive education. The article argues that the significance of these reforms lies not merely in changing syllabi or textbooks but in transforming the entire educational ecosystem. At the same time, successful implementation requires teacher preparedness, institutional capacity, appropriate assessment practices, contextual adaptation and sustained academic support. The article concludes that NEP 2020 and NCF-SE 2023 provide an important framework for rethinking the purposes, processes and experiences of school education, but their transformative potential will depend substantially on how effectively policy intentions are translated into classroom practice.

Keywords: NEP 2020, National Curriculum Framework, NCF-SE 2023, curriculum reform, holistic education, competency-based education, multidisciplinary learning, assessment, teacher education, educational transformation

Introduction

Education is not a static process. It evolves in response to changes in society, culture, technology, economy and human aspirations. A curriculum designed primarily for memorisation and reproduction of information may not adequately prepare learners for a world characterised by rapid technological change, complex social problems, interdisciplinary knowledge and uncertain career pathways. Consequently, curriculum reform has become an important component of educational transformation.

In India, the National Education Policy 2020 provides a comprehensive vision for restructuring the education system. It places emphasis on holistic development, foundational literacy and numeracy, competency-based learning, multidisciplinary education, vocational exposure, multilingualism,

technology integration, inclusion and the development of knowledge, skills, values and dispositions. The policy also envisages the development of new National and State Curriculum Frameworks to support curricular transformation. Education.gov.in¹

The National Curriculum Framework for School Education 2023 (NCF-SE 2023) subsequently provides a curricular framework for translating the broader vision of NEP 2020 into school education. It conceptualises curriculum more broadly than the mere content of textbooks. It includes educational goals, curricular content, pedagogy, assessment, school culture and the overall experiences of learners. The framework explicitly connects curricular reform with the transformation of students' learning experiences. The relationship between NEP 2020 and NCF-SE 2023 can therefore

be understood as one between educational vision and curricular operationalisation. NEP 2020 establishes a broad direction for educational reform, while NCF-SE 2023 provides a more detailed framework for curriculum, pedagogy and assessment at the school level.

Against this background, the present article uses the conceptual triad “Reimagine, Integrate and Transform” to examine the emerging educational landscape.

Objectives of the Study

The article has the following objectives:

1. To examine the major curricular ideas emerging from NEP 2020 and NCF-SE 2023.
2. To analyse the shift from conventional content-oriented education towards competency-based and holistic learning.
3. To examine the significance of curricular integration and multidisciplinary learning.
4. To analyse changing expectations from teachers, learners and educational institutions.
5. To identify major opportunities and challenges associated with curriculum transformation.
6. To suggest measures for strengthening the implementation of the curricular vision.

Methodology

The study adopts a qualitative conceptual and document-analysis approach. The primary documents examined are the National Education Policy 2020 and the National Curriculum Framework for School Education 2023 issued by the Government of India. Relevant official materials concerning implementation initiatives have also been considered.

The analysis focuses on recurring themes in the policy and curriculum documents, including:

- curricular goals;
- holistic development;
- competency-based education;
- multidisciplinary learning;
- experiential pedagogy;
- assessment reform;
- multilingual education;
- Indian knowledge systems;

- vocational education;
- technology;
- inclusion; and
- teacher development.

The study does not claim to measure classroom implementation empirically. Rather, it interprets the policy and curriculum framework to identify their implications for the future of school education.

NEP 2020: Reimagining the Purpose of Education

One of the fundamental contributions of NEP 2020 is its attempt to reconsider what education should accomplish. Education is not presented merely as the acquisition of information or preparation for examinations. Instead, the policy places emphasis on the development of knowledge, skills, values, competencies and responsible citizenship.

The policy proposes a restructuring of school education into the 5+3+3+4 curricular and pedagogical structure, corresponding broadly to the foundational, preparatory, middle and secondary stages. This structure seeks to align educational experiences with children's developmental characteristics rather than treating schooling as a uniform process across all age groups.

This approach encourages a shift from the question: “How much content has the learner covered?”

towards questions such as:

“What can the learner understand, apply, create and communicate?”

Such a shift has important implications for curriculum design. Learning outcomes need to incorporate conceptual understanding, application, problem-solving, communication, creativity, collaboration and values alongside subject knowledge.

The policy also emphasises reducing the content burden and creating opportunities for critical thinking, discussion, inquiry, analysis and experiential learning. Consequently, reimagining education requires a reconsideration not only of *what* students learn but also *how* they learn and *why* they learn it.

NCF-SE 2023: From Policy Vision to Curriculum Framework

The NCF-SE 2023 represents an important step in translating the vision of NEP 2020 into school curriculum. According to the framework, curriculum encompasses much more than subject content or

textbooks. It includes the goals, plans, arrangements and practices that shape students' experiences in school. This broader understanding has considerable significance.

If curriculum is understood only as a prescribed list of chapters, curriculum reform can become a process of changing textbooks while leaving classroom practices largely unchanged. However, if curriculum encompasses pedagogy, assessment, school culture and learner experiences, transformation becomes a systemic process.

NCF-SE 2023 therefore places the teacher and school environment within the larger curriculum ecosystem. It recognises that curricular aspirations must eventually be translated into actual classroom experiences. The framework also seeks greater coherence between national curricular aspirations and state-level educational contexts. Since education is a concurrent subject in India's constitutional framework, curriculum transformation necessarily involves interaction among national institutions, states, schools, teachers and local communities.

Reimagine: Rethinking Teaching and Learning

The first component of the proposed framework is **Reimagine**.

Reimagining education means questioning established assumptions about teaching, learning and assessment. The traditional classroom often places the teacher at the centre, with students expected to listen, memorise and reproduce information. The emerging curricular vision gives greater importance to learner participation, exploration, inquiry and application.

From Rote Learning to Conceptual Understanding

A major curricular challenge has historically been the tendency to associate educational achievement with the ability to reproduce information. NEP 2020 seeks greater emphasis on conceptual understanding, critical thinking and application.

This does not mean that factual knowledge becomes irrelevant. Rather, knowledge becomes the foundation for higher-order thinking. Students need opportunities to connect facts, interpret information, ask questions, investigate problems and apply concepts in unfamiliar situations.

Experiential Learning

Experiential learning provides opportunities for learners to connect classroom concepts with their surroundings and everyday experiences.

Projects, field observations, experiments, discussions, simulations, local studies, art activities and community-based learning can help learners understand that knowledge is not restricted to textbooks.

The official implementation material associated with NEP 2020 also highlights play-based, discovery-based and experiential approaches at different stages of schooling.

The Learner as an Active Participant

Reimagined education positions learners as active participants in the learning process. The classroom becomes a space for questioning, collaboration, exploration and reflection.

Such a model also requires teachers to move beyond the exclusive role of information providers. Teachers increasingly function as facilitators, mentors, designers of learning experiences and assessors of student progress.

Integrate: Connecting Knowledge, Skills and Experience

The second component is **Integrate**.

One of the most significant features of the new curricular vision is the movement away from rigid disciplinary boundaries. NEP 2020 advocates greater flexibility and multidisciplinary learning, while NCF-SE 2023 provides curricular directions intended to support this broader approach.

Integration Across Subjects

Many real-world problems cannot be understood through a single discipline.

For example, climate change can be examined through:

- science, to understand environmental processes;
- mathematics, to analyse data;
- geography, to examine spatial patterns;
- economics, to study resource use;
- language, to communicate findings; and
- civics, to examine collective responsibility.

Such integration enables learners to see relationships among different areas of knowledge.

7.2 Integration of Academic and Vocational Learning

Another important dimension is the relationship between academic and vocational education. NEP 2020 gives greater importance to vocational exposure and seeks to reduce the rigid separation between academic and vocational pathways.

Official implementation material notes efforts to integrate vocational education with general academic education and provide students with exposure to work environments and different career possibilities.

This approach can help students understand the dignity and value of different forms of work while developing practical competencies.

Integration of Arts and Sports

Education becomes more holistic when arts, sports and other forms of creative expression are integrated into students' educational experiences.

Art can contribute to imagination, expression and cultural understanding. Sports can contribute to physical development, cooperation, discipline and resilience. Their curricular integration therefore challenges the assumption that only conventional academic subjects constitute “serious” education.

Integration of Local and Global Knowledge

Curriculum transformation also involves connecting learners with their local environment while preparing them for a global society.

Local history, ecology, crafts, languages, occupations, cultural practices and community knowledge can provide meaningful contexts for learning. At the same time, learners need exposure to global scientific, technological and social developments.

The challenge is therefore not simply choosing between “traditional” and “modern” knowledge, but creating meaningful relationships between different forms of knowledge.

Indian Knowledge Systems and Cultural Context

NEP 2020 gives importance to Indian languages, cultural knowledge and Indian knowledge traditions. This direction is reflected in the curricular emphasis on connecting education with India's intellectual, cultural and social heritage.

Integration of Indian knowledge systems into curriculum can provide learners with opportunities to explore mathematics, astronomy, medicine, philosophy, literature, agriculture, architecture, environmental practices, arts and other knowledge

traditions in appropriate historical and contemporary contexts.

However, curricular integration should be undertaken through academically rigorous approaches. Cultural knowledge should be examined through evidence, context and critical inquiry rather than presented merely as unquestionable tradition.

A balanced curriculum can therefore allow students to appreciate India's intellectual heritage while developing scientific temper, critical thinking and openness to diverse perspectives.

Transform: Changing the Culture of Assessment

The third component is **Transform**.

Curriculum cannot be transformed without transforming assessment. If classroom teaching becomes competency-based but examinations continue to reward memorisation, teachers and students are likely to remain examination-oriented.

NEP 2020 calls for assessment reform with greater emphasis on competencies and holistic development. The NCF-SE 2023 similarly positions assessment as an important component of the learning process rather than merely a mechanism for ranking students.

Assessment for Learning

Assessment can serve at least three interconnected purposes:

1. determining what learners have understood;
2. identifying learning gaps; and
3. providing feedback for further learning.

This requires greater use of formative assessment, observation, projects, portfolios, discussions, practical tasks and other methods alongside conventional examinations.

Competency-Based Assessment

A competency-based assessment asks students to apply knowledge rather than simply reproduce it.

For instance, instead of asking students only to define water pollution, an assessment could ask them to examine a local water-related problem, analyse available information and propose evidence-based measures.

Such assessment requires students to demonstrate understanding, reasoning and application.

Holistic Progress

The broader educational vision also requires attention to students' development beyond

examination marks. Academic knowledge, creativity, communication, collaboration, values and other competencies need meaningful consideration. The challenge is to develop assessment practices that remain reliable and manageable while capturing a broader range of learning.

Transforming the Role of the Teacher

Curriculum reform ultimately reaches the classroom through teachers.

NCF-SE 2023 explicitly recognises the importance of teachers in bringing curricular changes into practice and presents the framework with attention to teachers' realities. This has several implications.

First, teachers need a strong understanding of the new curricular philosophy. Knowing the terminology of competency-based education is insufficient. Teachers need opportunities to design lessons, activities and assessments around competencies.

Second, teacher professional development needs to be continuous. Official implementation initiatives under NEP 2020 include NISHTHA and other professional-development programmes intended to strengthen teacher capacities.

Third, teachers require institutional support. A teacher cannot implement project-based or experiential learning effectively if classroom time, resources, assessment expectations and administrative structures remain entirely examination-driven.

Thus, teacher empowerment should be regarded as a central condition of curriculum transformation rather than an additional activity.

Multilingualism and Language Education

Language is closely connected with learning, identity and participation. NEP 2020 places significant emphasis on multilingualism and learning in students' home or familiar languages, particularly during the foundational stages.

Multilingual education can provide cognitive, cultural and pedagogical opportunities. It can also support greater participation by learners who may otherwise experience difficulty when the language of instruction is unfamiliar.

The challenge lies in implementing multilingual approaches in contexts where classrooms contain students with diverse linguistic backgrounds and where teachers and instructional materials may not be available in every language.

Therefore, successful multilingual education requires:

- appropriately prepared teachers;
- quality teaching-learning materials;
- language-sensitive pedagogy;
- flexibility at the institutional level; and
- coordination among educational authorities.

The development of bilingual and multilingual learning resources is consequently an important part of curricular transformation. Official implementation documents also identify the development of high-quality bilingual materials as an important direction.

Technology and the Digital Transformation of Curriculum

Technology has become an important component of contemporary education. NEP 2020 recognises the potential of technology for teaching, learning, assessment, teacher development and educational access.

Digital platforms can expand access to learning resources, support differentiated instruction and facilitate teacher professional development. Initiatives associated with NEP implementation include DIKSHA and PM e-VIDYA, among others. However, technology should not be treated as a substitute for effective pedagogy.

The presence of a digital device does not automatically create meaningful learning. The educational value of technology depends on how it is used.

Future curriculum development therefore needs to address not only digital literacy but also:

- information literacy;
- media literacy;
- responsible technology use;
- computational thinking;
- digital citizenship;
- cybersecurity awareness; and
- emerging AI-related competencies.

The objective should be to develop learners who can use technology thoughtfully and creatively rather than simply consume digital content.

Inclusion and Equity

A transformed curriculum must be accessible to learners from diverse backgrounds.

India's educational system includes learners differing in language, geography, socioeconomic circumstances, learning needs, abilities and cultural

contexts. Therefore, a single rigid approach cannot adequately serve every learner.

NEP 2020 emphasises equitable and inclusive education, while implementation initiatives identify accessibility, appropriate learning materials and technology-supported tools as important considerations for children with disabilities.

Curriculum transformation should consequently incorporate universal design principles, accessible resources, differentiated pedagogy and flexible assessment.

Inclusion should not be understood merely as physical access to school. Meaningful inclusion requires participation, belonging, learning and opportunities for achievement.

Major Opportunities

The NEP 2020–NCF-SE 2023 framework creates several possibilities for Indian education.

Greater Relevance

Connecting curriculum with everyday experiences can make learning more meaningful.

Development of 21st-Century Competencies

Critical thinking, communication, collaboration, creativity and problem-solving can receive greater curricular attention.

Greater Flexibility

Multidisciplinary and flexible learning can allow students to explore diverse interests.

Stronger Connection between School and Society

Community-based learning and vocational exposure can connect classroom learning with social and occupational realities.

Greater Recognition of Diversity

Multilingual and inclusive approaches can make curriculum more responsive to India's social and cultural diversity.

Technology-Supported Learning

Digital resources can supplement classroom instruction and expand access to educational materials.

Challenges in Implementation

Despite the transformative potential of the frameworks, implementation presents significant challenges.

Teacher Preparedness

Teachers require sustained professional development, mentoring and practical resources. A policy document alone cannot transform classroom practice.

Examination Culture

High-stakes examinations can encourage memorisation even when curriculum documents promote competency-based learning.

Resource Inequality

Schools differ substantially in infrastructure, teacher availability, technology and learning resources. Consequently, curricular expectations may be experienced differently across contexts.

Curriculum Overload

If new competencies, activities and interdisciplinary projects are simply added to existing content, rather than replacing or reorganising it, teachers and learners may experience greater workload.

Assessment Alignment

Curriculum, pedagogy and assessment need to move in the same direction. Misalignment between these components can weaken reform.

Contextual Adaptation

India's states and regions differ significantly. Effective implementation therefore requires contextual adaptation rather than mechanical uniformity. The NCF-SE 2023 itself recognises the role of State Curriculum Frameworks within India's federal structure.

Suggestions for Effective Implementation

The following measures can strengthen the transition from policy to practice:

1. **Strengthen teacher professional development:** Training should be continuous, practice-oriented and connected to teachers' actual classroom challenges.
2. **Align assessment with competencies:** Examination and assessment

- systems should reward understanding, application, reasoning and problem-solving.
3. **Reduce unnecessary content load:** Curriculum reform should prioritise depth of learning over excessive coverage.
 4. **Promote interdisciplinary planning:** Schools can create opportunities for teachers from different subjects to collaboratively design learning experiences.
 5. **Develop contextual learning materials:** Textbooks and digital resources should incorporate local examples, languages, environments and community knowledge where appropriate.
 6. **Strengthen inclusive infrastructure:** Schools should ensure accessible learning environments and appropriate resources for learners with diverse needs.
 7. **Use technology purposefully:** Digital tools should be selected on the basis of pedagogical value rather than technological novelty.
 8. **Encourage school-community partnerships:** Local professionals, artisans, institutions and community members can contribute to experiential and vocational learning.
 9. **Support State-level adaptation:** State and local contexts should be considered while implementing national curricular aspirations.
 10. **Monitor implementation through evidence:** Research should examine what happens in classrooms rather than measuring implementation solely through administrative indicators.

Discussion

The ideas of reimagine, integrate and transform provide a useful conceptual lens for understanding the relationship between NEP 2020 and NCF-SE 2023.

Reimagine involves reconsidering the purpose of education, the nature of learning and the role of the learner.

Integrate involves connecting subjects, knowledge systems, skills, values, vocational learning, arts, sports and real-life experiences.

Transform involves changing the structures and practices through which education is delivered,

including pedagogy, assessment, teacher development, technology and school culture.

These three processes are interdependent.

A school cannot genuinely transform assessment without reimagining learning. It cannot successfully implement multidisciplinary education without integrating teacher expertise and curriculum content. Similarly, experiential learning cannot become sustainable without transforming teacher preparation and institutional culture.

The NCF-SE 2023's broader conception of curriculum is particularly important in this context. By including the experiences and environment of the learner within the meaning of curriculum, it moves the discussion beyond textbook revision towards systemic educational change.

Thus, curriculum reform should be viewed as an ecosystem rather than a document.

Conclusion

NEP 2020 and NCF-SE 2023 represent an important phase in the continuing evolution of Indian education. Their significance lies not simply in introducing new subjects, textbooks or pedagogical terminology but in encouraging a reconsideration of the purpose and experience of schooling.

The idea of Reimagine, Integrate and Transform captures three central dimensions of this process. Reimagining requires a shift from passive reception of information towards meaningful, competency-oriented learning. Integration requires connections among disciplines, skills, values, local knowledge, vocational education, arts, technology and lived experiences. Transformation requires corresponding changes in pedagogy, assessment, teacher development, school culture and educational governance.

The success of these reforms will ultimately depend on the relationship between policy ambition and classroom reality. Teachers require preparation and professional autonomy; schools require resources and institutional support; assessment systems require alignment with curricular goals; and implementation must remain sensitive to India's linguistic, cultural, geographical and socioeconomic diversity.

The most important question, therefore, is not whether a new curriculum framework has been introduced, but whether learners' actual experiences are changing. If curriculum reform

succeeds in making learning more meaningful, inclusive, multidisciplinary, experiential and connected to life, NEP 2020 and NCF-SE 2023 can contribute significantly to the transformation of Indian school education.

The journey from policy to practice is necessarily gradual. It requires reflection, experimentation, evidence and continuous improvement. In this sense, reimagining education is the beginning, integration is the process, and transformation is the continuing goal.

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