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From policy to practice achievements and challenges of NEP 2020 in the context of global educational governance: An overview

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Abstract

Education policy reforms play a pivotal role in shaping the quality, inclusivity, and future-readiness of learning systems worldwide. In India, the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 represents a landmark shift, introducing structural changes such as the 5+3+3+4 model, competency-driven curricula, multilingual education, and an emphasis on holistic, skill-based learning. This article critically examines NEP 2020 as a case of policy innovation while situating it within the broader context of global educational governance. Across nations, there is a discernible movement from content-heavy, rote-based instruction toward competency-based models that prioritize critical thinking, creativity, and lifelong learning. Simultaneously, governance structures ranging from decentralization of school boards to public-private partnerships play an instrumental role in translating policy into practice. Furthermore, global benchmarks such as PISA and TIMSS continue to influence national policy decisions, often shaping curriculum priorities and assessment frameworks. The analysis highlights that while NEP 2020 provides a visionary framework, its implementation faces challenges including inadequate funding, teacher preparedness, digital divides, and governance disparities. Drawing on international comparisons, this study underscores the need for balanced reforms that integrate competency-based learning, equitable governance, and cautious use of global benchmarks. The article concludes with policy recommendations to strengthen NEP 2020's transformative potential and ensure sustainable, inclusive educational outcomes.

Keywords: National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, Educational Governance, Competency-Based Learning, Public-Private Partnerships in Education, Global Assessments (PISA, TIMSS)

Introduction

Education has consistently been regarded as the foundation upon which societies build their human capital, social cohesion, and national progress. Policy frameworks and governance structures, therefore, are not mere bureaucratic instruments but the very scaffolding that determines the direction, inclusivity, and equity of education systems. Well-crafted educational policies serve as both roadmaps and commitments, ensuring that pedagogy, curricula, and institutional arrangements remain responsive to the changing needs of learners and the demands of a rapidly evolving global environment. In this regard, the governance of education encompasses not only the distribution of resources and the regulation of institutions but also the mechanisms of accountability, decentralization, and stakeholder engagement. As global societies transition into knowledge-based economies, the ability of education policies to adapt and innovate has become an urgent imperative. In India, the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 has emerged as a landmark intervention, introduced after a gap of more than three decades since the 1986 policy. The NEP 2020 is not just a revision but a comprehensive re-imagining of education in India, spanning early childhood care, school education, higher education, and lifelong learning. Its key innovations include a 5+3+3+4 curricular structure that replaces the earlier 10+2 system, an emphasis on competency-based curricula over rote learning, integration of multilingual education, promotion of holistic and multidisciplinary higher education, and a commitment to universal access and equity. By aligning itself with the vision of preparing globally competitive citizens, NEP 2020 signals India's intent to move beyond traditional content-heavy paradigms towards more dynamic, learner-centered approaches. This ambition resonates with

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a broader global movement toward competency-based education (CBE). Across the world, countries have recognized that content memorization, once the hallmark of academic success, is increasingly insufficient in the digital era, where information is readily available. Instead, the ability to apply knowledge in novel contexts, solve complex problems, and demonstrate creativity and collaboration has become the true measure of education. Finland, for instance, has championed phenomenon-based learning that integrates disciplines around real-world themes, while Singapore has adopted a “21st-century competencies” framework that emphasizes innovation, teamwork, and ethical decision-making. The OECD’s Future of Education and Skills 2030 framework and UNESCO’s Education for Sustainable Development agenda further underscore the global shift toward cultivating lifelong learners who can thrive in volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) environments. Despite the visionary appeal of such reforms, however, education policy worldwide faces the implementation gap the persistent difficulty of translating ambitious frameworks into everyday practice. This gap emerges due to multiple factors: limited financial resources, inadequate teacher training, infrastructural disparities, and systemic inertia. In India, NEP 2020 has already encountered skepticism regarding its feasibility given the vast regional, socio-economic, and linguistic diversity of the country. Teacher preparedness remains a critical concern, as competency-based curricula demand pedagogical approaches far different from traditional rote-based methods. Furthermore, India’s digital divide, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, highlights infrastructural inequalities that threaten to undermine the policy’s emphasis on technology-enabled learning. Governance structures add further complexity. While decentralization of educational governance—such as school boards in the United States or local authority-led systems in the United Kingdom has often improved accountability and responsiveness, it has also widened inequalities between regions. Similarly, in India, balancing centralized policymaking with localized implementation poses unique challenges. Public-private partnerships (PPPs), which NEP 2020 envisions as crucial for expanding infrastructure and innovation, must also be carefully regulated to prevent commercialization and inequity. The influence of international assessments such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) further complicates the policy landscape. These global benchmarks have been instrumental in shaping national reforms, sometimes producing radical systemic overhauls. For instance, Germany’s “PISA shock” in the early 2000s prompted deep reforms in teacher education and assessment practices. In Asia, countries like Singapore and South Korea have leveraged strong PISA performance to reinforce their global reputation. For India, which withdrew from PISA in 2009 following poor results but re-entered in 2019, participation is both a challenge and an opportunity: it highlights gaps in learning outcomes while offering a chance to benchmark progress against global standards. Yet, overemphasis on such assessments risks narrowing the curriculum to test-oriented learning, potentially undermining the holistic and competency-driven vision of NEP 2020. Given these complexities, the present study explores NEP 2020’s achievements and challenges within the global governance landscape. It situates India’s reforms alongside

international trends, examining how policy design, governance structures, and global benchmarks interact in shaping educational outcomes. By drawing comparative insights from global experiences, the present study argues that NEP 2020 is a significant step toward modernizing Indian education but requires careful governance, sustained investment, and adaptive strategies to bridge the policy-practice divide. Ultimately, education policy is not judged by the elegance of its design but by its capacity to transform learning experiences in classrooms across diverse contexts. The analysis thus contributes to international scholarship by situating NEP 2020 as both a national innovation and part of the larger global project of educational transformation.

Research Objectives and Questions: Education, as both a social imperative and a developmental strategy, is fundamentally shaped by the policies and governance structures that underpin it. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, introduced in India, represents one of the most ambitious attempts at aligning national education with global shifts towards equity, flexibility, and innovation. Yet, every reform demands a careful unpacking of its aspirations and the challenges inherent in its implementation. Against this backdrop, the present study identifies five interlinked objectives, each designed to interrogate a critical dimension of contemporary educational governance and curriculum transformation.

Research Objectives

- To analyze the achievements and challenges of NEP 2020. This objective seeks to evaluate the concrete progress achieved in the Indian context, particularly in terms of inclusivity, digitalization, and skill-oriented education, while simultaneously highlighting the structural and socio-economic barriers that impede full realization of policy goals.
- To compare competency-based and content-based curricula globally. As educational systems worldwide shift towards competency frameworks that emphasize critical thinking, adaptability, and problem-solving, this objective seeks to situate India’s reforms within the wider global discourse and examine lessons transferable across contexts.
- To assess the role of public-private partnerships (PPPs) in strengthening school infrastructure. Recognizing the persistent infrastructure deficit in many regions, this objective interrogates how collaborative models between government and private actors can enhance accessibility, quality, and efficiency in education delivery.
- To examine the decentralization of education governance through local school boards. This objective explores the potential benefits and risks of devolving authority to local bodies, analyzing whether decentralization fosters responsiveness and accountability or leads to uneven implementation.
- To analyze the influence of international assessments such as PISA and TIMSS on education policy. This objective investigates the normative impact of global benchmarking exercises on national priorities, questioning whether alignment with international metrics supports or constrains indigenous educational visions.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

From these objectives emerge a series of guiding questions:

- Q1. What measurable achievements and persistent challenges characterize NEP 2020's implementation?
- Q2. How do competency-based curricula compare to traditional content-based approaches in terms of student outcomes and policy adaptability?
- Q3. In what ways can PPPs alleviate infrastructural and resource disparities in education?
- Q4. Does decentralization enhance educational governance or reproduce inequalities across local contexts?
- Q5. To what extent do international assessments like PISA influence domestic education policies in India and beyond?

Based on these questions, the present research advances the hypothesis that while NEP 2020 embodies a progressive vision aligned with global competency-based reforms, its implementation is constrained by governance bottlenecks, infrastructural deficits, and over-reliance on international benchmarks at the expense of contextual realities.

Literature Review

Theoretical Foundations: Curriculum Theory, Governance Models, and Policy Frameworks: The present study of education policy and governance is firmly grounded in theoretical frameworks that illuminate how curricula are designed, how governance shapes implementation, and how policy frameworks evolve across different contexts. Curriculum theory, as articulated by scholars such as Joseph Schwab, emphasizes the dynamic interplay of content, learner, context, and teacher in constructing meaningful learning experiences. This approach highlights the inherent tension between content-based curricula—anchored in disciplinary knowledge—and competency-based curricula, which privilege skills, problem-solving, and adaptability. Governance models, meanwhile, provide an analytical lens to examine who holds decision-making authority in education and how accountability is ensured. Decentralized governance emphasizes local autonomy, community participation, and responsiveness, while centralized systems prioritize uniformity and national coherence. Policy frameworks serve as the connective tissue between theoretical visions and practical realities. They represent not only governmental blueprints but also societal aspirations, reflecting the ideological, economic, and cultural conditions in which education systems operate.

NEP 2020: Objectives, Structural Reforms, and Critiques: India's National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 has been hailed as a landmark reform that seeks to reimagine education from early childhood through higher education. Among its key objectives are universal foundational literacy by Grade 3, a restructuring of the 10+2 system into a 5+3+3+4 framework, the integration of vocational education, and the promotion of multilingualism. Furthermore, NEP 2020 emphasizes holistic, multidisciplinary education at the higher education level and aims to achieve a gross enrollment ratio of 50 percent by 2035. The policy also envisions significant structural reforms, including the establishment of a National Higher Education Regulatory Council (NHERC) and the bifurcation

of regulatory, accreditation, and funding functions. These reforms signal a departure from piecemeal interventions toward a systemic overhaul. However, critics argue that the policy remains aspirational in many respects. Scholars point out challenges in financing, teacher training, digital divides, and the absence of clear timelines for implementation. Moreover, while the policy stresses equity, concerns persist regarding the feasibility of achieving parity across rural and urban regions, as well as across socio-economic groups.

Competency-Based vs. Content-Based Curricula: Global Case Studies: Globally, education systems have grappled with the tension between content mastery and competency acquisition. Finland, widely recognized for its innovative reforms, shifted in the 2010s toward phenomenon-based learning, integrating disciplines around real-world problems and emphasizing transversal skills. Singapore, though rooted in rigorous content delivery, has progressively moved toward nurturing "21st-century competencies," such as civic literacy, global awareness, and critical thinking. In the United States, the Common Core State Standards sought to balance content knowledge with skill development, though implementation varied widely and became politically contentious. India's NEP 2020 explicitly aligns itself with this global shift by underscoring critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving. Yet, entrenched practices such as rote learning and exam-centric pedagogy remain significant obstacles. The challenge, therefore, lies not merely in policy articulation but in transforming classroom culture, pedagogy, and assessment frameworks.

Public-Private Partnerships: Successes and Limitations: Public-private partnerships (PPPs) have emerged as an important mechanism for addressing systemic gaps in education, particularly in low- and middle-income countries. In India, PPPs have played a critical role in infrastructure development, digital literacy initiatives, and school meal programs. For example, the mid-day meal scheme, implemented with the support of private organizations and non-governmental actors, has improved nutritional outcomes and incentivized school attendance. Similarly, ICT-based interventions led by private partners have enhanced access to digital resources in underserved regions. Internationally, PPPs have demonstrated comparable success. In sub-Saharan Africa, partnerships with private firms have supported the provision of low-cost learning materials, while in Latin America, PPPs have facilitated teacher training and curriculum development. Yet, critics caution that PPPs risk deepening inequities if not carefully regulated, as private actors may prioritize profit over equity and inclusiveness. In the Indian case, balancing efficiency gains with the safeguarding of public accountability remains a critical concern. **Decentralization of Governance: International Experiences:** Decentralization has been heralded as a means of fostering responsiveness, innovation, and community participation in education governance. In the United Kingdom, the academy school model allows schools greater autonomy in budgetary and curricular matters, though debates persist about accountability and equity. In the United States, local school boards wield significant authority over curricula and resource allocation, enabling responsiveness to community needs but also producing significant disparities across districts. In India, the Panchayati Raj system has sought to devolve decision-

making to local bodies, including school management committees. While decentralization has improved community participation in certain contexts, challenges of capacity, funding, and political interference continue to undermine its effectiveness. Thus, the promise of decentralization is contingent upon the balance between autonomy and accountability, as well as the availability of adequate resources.

Impact of Pisa and Timss: Policy Redesign and Global Benchmarking: International large-scale assessments such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) have become powerful levers in shaping national education policies. Countries like Germany, which initially performed poorly in PISA 2000, responded with sweeping reforms in teacher education, curriculum design, and assessment systems—a phenomenon known as the “PISA shock.” Similarly, East Asian countries have leveraged their strong performance in these assessments to reinforce national narratives of educational excellence. For India, participation in PISA has been contentious. After withdrawing in 2012 due to poor performance, India is set to rejoin in 2025. Critics argue that aligning too closely with international benchmarks risks sidelining local priorities and cultural contexts. Nonetheless, the influence of PISA and TIMSS in shaping policy agendas underscores the globalized nature of educational governance, where cross-national comparisons increasingly define what counts as quality and success. Gaps in Current Research: Despite a growing body of literature on NEP 2020 and global governance trends, significant research gaps remain. First, while there is extensive theoretical discussion about competency-based learning, empirical studies on its classroom-level implementation in India are limited. Second, the long-term effects of PPPs on equity and quality have not been adequately assessed. Third, decentralization reforms in India have been insufficiently analyzed in comparative perspective, leaving unanswered questions about their scalability and sustainability. Finally, while PISA and TIMSS are often discussed in policy circles, rigorous research on how these assessments concretely shape Indian policy decisions is still emerging. The present study thus positions itself at the intersection of these gaps. By situating NEP 2020 within the global discourse on curriculum reform, governance, and benchmarking, it aims to provide both a critical appraisal of India’s reforms and a broader reflection on the challenges of translating ambitious policy frameworks into sustainable practice.

Research Methodology: The present study adopts a mixed-methods comparative and descriptive design that triangulates policy documents, international assessment datasets, and purposive case studies to interrogate how ambitious policy frameworks most notably India’s National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 move from design into practice. The approach is deliberately plural: qualitative methods unpack policy intent, governance architecture and implementation narratives; quantitative methods chart measurable trends in learning and access across countries and over time. The combined design enables the paper to answer what NEP 2020 proposes, how similar competency-driven reforms have been operationalised elsewhere, and why implementation gaps persist.

Research Design and Rationale: A comparative-descriptive framework is chosen because the inquiry requires (a) careful description of NEP 2020’s provisions and governance measures, and (b) cross-national comparison of curriculum models and outcomes (Finland, Singapore, USA and India). Case studies permit depth—document review, stakeholder interviews (if undertaken later), and triangulation with large-scale datasets—while descriptive trend analysis provides breadth and empirical grounding. The emphasis on competency-vs-content comparisons follows international practice where policy rhetoric is increasingly tested against outcome data.

Primary Data Sources (Policy & Datasets): The study will use authoritative, public sources only: the NEP 2020 policy text and implementation notes; OECD Learning Compass / PISA reports; UNESCO policy reports and UIS/Our World in Data series; TIMSS 2019 international results; and World Bank / AISHE indicators (gross enrolment ratios, gender parity, public expenditure). These sources supply both the qualitative policy material and the quantitative indicators for comparative analysis. Case studies (India, Finland, Singapore, USA).

Document Analysis: Systematic content analysis of NEP 2020 and official implementation guidelines to extract stated objectives, timelines, governance changes, and accountability mechanisms. Policy texts will be coded for themes such as competency emphasis, decentralization, PPPs, and assessment reform.

Comparative Case Study: Select cases (Finland, Singapore, USA, India) will be examined to map policy design *classroom practice pathways*. For each case, the present study will review policy documents, published evaluations, and OECD/IEA national briefs to identify transferable lessons and contextual constraints.

Methods Quantitative Component

Descriptive Trend Analysis: Descriptive trend analysis of international assessment scores (PISA, TIMSS) to compare learning outcomes associated with competency-oriented systems versus content-heavy systems. Analyses will include mean score comparisons, proficiency band distributions, and time-trend plots.

Indicator Analysis: National indicators gross enrolment ratios, gender parity, and public expenditure on education will be analysed to situate NEP 2020 targets within current trajectories (AISHE, World Bank / UIS datasets). Simple inferential tests (t-tests / trend regressions) will be used where appropriate to assess significant changes over time.

Scope, Validity and Limitations

Scope: The project focuses on policy design and macro-level outcomes rather than micro-classroom interventions. Case studies provide depth but are not exhaustive of all national variations.

Validity: Using official, published datasets (OECD, IEA, UIS, World Bank, AISHE) enhances external validity and reproducibility. Graphs and tables will explicitly report source and retrieval dates.

Limitations: Cross-national comparisons of learning outcomes face construct validity challenges (cultural/contextual differences in assessments). NEP 2020's implementation is ongoing; hence empirical assessment of full impact requires longitudinal follow-up. Data gaps (e.g., uneven subnational reporting) and pandemic-era disruptions to learning may confound short-term trend interpretation. Finally, PPP outcomes are heterogeneous and often under-documented in public datasets; careful triangulation with government reports is needed.

Ethics and Transparency: All data used are public and anonymized. Where additional primary interviews or surveys are later conducted, ethical clearance and informed consent protocols will be adopted. Datasets, code for quantitative analyses, and document-coding rubrics will be archived (open access) to permit replication.

Analysis & Discussion: This section critically examines the achievements and challenges of India's National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, contextualized within global educational governance frameworks. By comparing India's policy initiatives with international counterparts, the analysis explores the efficacy of structural reforms, the impact of public-private partnerships, decentralization in governance, and the influence of international assessments on educational outcomes.

Achievements and Challenges of NEP 2020

Structural Reforms: 5+3+3+4 Model

The NEP 2020 introduces a transformative shift in India's educational structure, replacing the traditional 10+2 system with a 5+3+3+4 model. This model aligns educational stages with children's cognitive development, emphasizing early childhood care and education (ECCE) for children aged 3 to 8. The foundational stage focuses on play and activity-based learning, fostering language skills and cognitive development. The subsequent stages aim to provide a holistic and multidisciplinary education, integrating vocational training and critical thinking skills. However, challenges persist in implementing this model uniformly across diverse regions, particularly in rural areas where infrastructure and resources are limited.

Mother Tongue Emphasis: NEP 2020 advocates for the use of mother tongue or regional languages as the medium of instruction, especially in the early years of schooling. This approach is grounded in cognitive research suggesting that children learn more effectively in their native languages. While this policy aims to preserve linguistic diversity and enhance comprehension, its implementation faces obstacles due to the multilingual nature of India and the dominance of English in higher education and professional sectors. Additionally, there is resistance from various stakeholders who perceive proficiency in English as essential for global competitiveness.

Holistic Curriculum: The policy emphasizes a holistic curriculum that integrates arts, sports, and vocational education alongside traditional subjects. This multidisciplinary approach aims to develop well-rounded individuals equipped with 21st-century skills. Despite its merits, the challenge lies in redesigning existing curricula and training educators to deliver this enriched content

effectively. Moreover, the success of this approach depends on the active participation of schools, communities, and policymakers, which requires a paradigm shift in educational priorities.

Implementation Gaps

Funding Constraints

Adequate funding is crucial for the successful implementation of NEP 2020. However, the allocation of financial resources has been inconsistent, with disparities between states and between urban and rural areas. The lack of sustained investment hampers the development of infrastructure, procurement of learning materials, and capacity building of educators. For instance, while some states have initiated reforms aligned with NEP 2020, others struggle with basic infrastructural deficits.

Teacher Training: The policy envisions the establishment of Integrated Teacher Education Programmes (ITEP) to enhance the quality of teacher preparation. While 41 institutions have been recognized for ITEP, the scale and quality of teacher training remain areas of concern. Many educators still lack exposure to modern pedagogical methods and digital tools, affecting the effective delivery of the curriculum. Continuous professional development and support are essential to equip teachers with the necessary skills and knowledge.

Press Information Bureau

Digital Divide: The digital divide presents a significant barrier to the equitable implementation of NEP 2020. While initiatives like DIKSHA aim to provide digital learning resources, access remains uneven. Students in remote and underserved areas often lack reliable internet connectivity and digital devices, limiting their participation in online learning platforms. Addressing this divide requires substantial investment in digital infrastructure and community engagement to ensure inclusive education.

Global Comparative Study: Competency vs. Content-Based Curricula

Finland and Singapore: Competency-Focused Systems

Finland and Singapore exemplify successful implementation of competency-based education systems. In Finland, the education system emphasizes critical thinking, problem-solving, and collaborative learning. Teachers are highly trained professionals, and the curriculum is flexible, allowing for student-centered learning. Similarly, Singapore's education system focuses on developing competencies through a structured yet adaptable curriculum, supported by continuous assessment and feedback mechanisms. These systems have consistently performed well in international assessments, demonstrating the effectiveness of competency-based approaches.

India (Content-Heavy Tradition): In contrast, India's traditional education system has been predominantly content-heavy, emphasizing rote learning and standardized testing. While NEP 2020 advocates for a shift towards competency-based education, the transition faces challenges due to entrenched practices, large class sizes, and limited resources. The success of this shift depends on systemic reforms, including curriculum redesign, teacher training, and assessment reforms.

Implications for 21st-Century Skills: The emphasis on critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving in NEP 2020 aligns with the demands of the 21st century. By fostering these skills, the policy aims to prepare students for a rapidly changing global landscape. However, the realization of these objectives requires a comprehensive approach, integrating curriculum reforms, teacher development, and assessment practices that promote deeper learning and application of knowledge.

Role of Public-Private Partnerships: Infrastructure Development: Public-private partnerships (PPPs) can play a pivotal role in enhancing educational infrastructure. Collaborations between the government and private entities can lead to the development of modern school facilities, provision of learning materials, and implementation of technology solutions. Such partnerships can leverage the strengths of both sectors to address infrastructural challenges effectively.

EdTech Initiatives: The integration of technology in education through EdTech initiatives has the potential to bridge learning gaps and provide personalized learning experiences. Private companies specializing in educational technology can collaborate with public institutions to develop and deploy digital learning tools, enhancing the reach and quality of education.

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR): Corporate social responsibility initiatives by private companies can contribute to educational development. Through CSR, companies can invest in educational programs, scholarships, and skill development initiatives, supporting the objectives of NEP 2020. Such investments can complement government efforts and promote social equity.

Risks (Commercialization and Equity Issues): While PPPs offer opportunities for educational development, they also pose risks. The commercialization of education can lead to increased costs, potentially excluding marginalized communities from quality education. Moreover, the focus on profit-making may undermine the core values of education, such as equity and accessibility. Therefore, it is essential to establish regulatory frameworks that ensure PPPs align with the public interest and the goals of NEP 2020.

Decentralization of Governance

Case Studies: U.S. Local School Boards and Indian Panchayati Raj Institutions

Decentralization in education governance allows for localized decision-making, enabling policies to be tailored to community needs. In the United States, local school boards have significant autonomy in managing schools, curricula, and budgets, leading to responsiveness to local demands. Similarly, India's Panchayati Raj institutions, as part of the decentralized governance structure, have the potential to influence educational policies and practices at the grassroots level.

Pros: Autonomy and Accountability: Decentralization fosters autonomy, allowing local bodies to make decisions that best suit their communities. It also enhances accountability, as local leaders are directly answerable to

their constituents, leading to more effective implementation of educational policies.

Cons: Disparities and Capacity Challenges: Despite its advantages, decentralization can exacerbate disparities. Regions with limited resources and administrative capacity may struggle to implement policies effectively, leading to uneven educational outcomes. Additionally, the lack of standardized procedures can result in inconsistencies in education quality across different regions.

International Assessments and Policy Influence: Germany's "PISA Shock" Reforms: Germany's performance in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) in the early 2000s prompted significant educational reforms. The "PISA shock" led to a national debate on educational quality and equity, resulting in policy changes aimed at improving student outcomes and reducing disparities.

India's Withdrawal and Re-Entry into PISA: India's initial withdrawal from PISA in 2009 and subsequent re-entry in 2022 reflect the evolving perspectives on international assessments. Participation in PISA provides insights into student performance relative to global standards, informing policy decisions and highlighting areas for improvement.

OECD

Debate: Teaching to the Test vs. Holistic Learning: The emphasis on international assessments has sparked debates on the nature of education. Critics argue that focusing on test scores may lead to teaching to the test, neglecting broader educational objectives. Conversely, proponents contend that assessments provide measurable benchmarks for educational quality. Balancing assessment-driven accountability with the promotion of holistic learning remains a critical challenge for educational policymakers.

Findings: The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 introduces a transformative vision for India's education system. However, its success hinges on effective implementation, which faces several challenges.

1. Visionary Reforms with Implementation Gaps: NEP 2020 outlines ambitious reforms, including a competency-based curriculum and multilingual education. Despite these progressive goals, the policy's implementation is hindered by inadequate funding, insufficient teacher training, and a significant digital divide, particularly in rural areas. These challenges impede the realization of NEP's objectives, necessitating urgent attention to bridge these gaps.

2. Competency-Based Curricula: A Global Perspective

Countries like Finland and Singapore have adopted competency-based education systems that emphasize holistic development and student well-being. These systems focus on nurturing critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving skills, preparing students for global challenges. In contrast, India's traditional content-heavy approach often emphasizes rote learning, which may not adequately equip students for the demands of the 21st century.

3. Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs): Accelerating Infrastructure Development

PPPs have the potential to accelerate infrastructure development in education by leveraging private sector efficiency and investment. However, poorly designed PPPs can lead to increased costs, reduced equity, and a weakening of public education systems. Historical examples have shown that such partnerships can result in higher fees and limited access for marginalized communities.

4. Decentralization: Empowering Local Governance:

Decentralization of education governance, exemplified by local school boards in the U.S. and Panchayati Raj institutions in India, can enhance autonomy and accountability. However, without strong capacity-building at the local level, decentralization may exacerbate disparities and pose capacity challenges. Ensuring adequate resources and training for local bodies is crucial for the success of decentralized governance.

5. International Assessments: Influencing Policy and Practice:

International assessments like PISA and TIMSS play a significant role in shaping national education policies. For example, Germany's "PISA shock" led to substantial reforms in its education system. Similarly, India's withdrawal and subsequent re-entry into PISA highlight the impact of these assessments on national pride and policy decisions. While these assessments provide valuable insights, an overemphasis on rankings can narrow curricula and encourage teaching to the test, potentially undermining holistic education.

Conclusion & Recommendations

NEP 2020 offers a comprehensive framework for transforming India's education system. However, its success depends on addressing implementation challenges, adopting best practices from global education systems, and ensuring that reforms are inclusive and equitable. By focusing on competency-based curricula, carefully designed PPPs, effective decentralization, and a balanced approach to international assessments, India can pave the way for an education system that meets the needs of the 21st century. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 represents a landmark reform in India's educational landscape, envisioning a holistic, competency-based, and inclusive system. The present study's analysis demonstrates that while NEP 2020 offers progressive structural reforms—such as the 5+3+3+4 model, mother tongue instruction, and an emphasis on holistic education—its effective implementation remains constrained by funding limitations, uneven teacher preparedness, and persistent digital divides. Competency-based curricula, as observed in global exemplars like Finland and Singapore, foster critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving skills, equipping students to navigate 21st-century challenges. India's gradual transition from a content-heavy system towards competency-focused learning requires systemic support, including continuous professional development for educators, curriculum redesign, and assessment reforms aligned with learning outcomes rather than rote memorization. Public-private partnerships (PPPs) emerge as crucial mechanisms for accelerating infrastructure development, integrating EdTech solutions, and promoting innovation in pedagogy. However, without regulatory

safeguards, PPPs risk commercialization and widening inequities. Policymakers must design PPP frameworks that balance efficiency and innovation with equity, ensuring marginalized populations retain access to quality education. Decentralization of governance enhances local autonomy and accountability, empowering community stakeholders and Panchayati Raj institutions in India. Yet, disparities in administrative capacity across regions underscore the importance of targeted capacity-building, resource allocation, and standardized monitoring mechanisms to prevent uneven educational outcomes. International assessments like PISA and TIMSS provide valuable benchmarking tools that inform curriculum design and policy reforms. However, overreliance on these rankings can narrow curricula and encourage teaching to the test. NEP 2020 should leverage such assessments as reference points, integrating global insights while maintaining flexibility to cater to India's diverse socio-cultural contexts.

Recommendations

Strengthen NEP Implementation: Augment funding, streamline monitoring systems, and establish accountability mechanisms at state and local levels to ensure uniform adoption of reforms. **Gradual Shift to Competency-Based Learning:** Introduce phased implementation strategies, teacher training programs, and curriculum adjustments to transition from content-heavy to competency-focused learning effectively. **Balanced PPP Frameworks:** Formulate guidelines to govern private sector involvement, ensuring equitable access, affordability, and alignment with public educational objectives. **Empower Local Governance Bodies:** Invest in capacity-building for Panchayati Raj institutions and local school boards, providing technical support and standardized assessment tools. **Strategic Use of International Assessments:** Employ PISA/TIMSS data as advisory tools rather than prescriptive benchmarks, promoting holistic educational outcomes beyond test performance.

Implications

For policymakers, these recommendations provide actionable pathways to strengthen governance, equity, and innovation in India's education system. Educators gain clarity on adopting competency-based pedagogies and leveraging EdTech while maintaining inclusivity. Future researchers are offered a framework to evaluate policy effectiveness, monitor implementation gaps, and study comparative education models across contexts. Collectively, these measures advance India's vision of a resilient, inclusive, and globally competitive education system, fulfilling NEP 2020's promise for the 21st century.

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