

NEP 2020 and Curriculum Reforms: A Case Study of Implementation in Assam with Special Reference to Nagaon District

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Abstract: The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 represents a landmark reform in India's educational landscape, aiming to transform learning experiences by promoting inclusivity, critical thinking, flexibility, and holistic development. Assam, like other Indian states, has initiated steps to align its school curriculum with the key recommendations of NEP 2020. This paper examines the status of curriculum reforms in Nagaon district of Assam, highlighting the extent of implementation, institutional readiness, and challenges faced by stakeholders. Using a case study approach, data were drawn from policy documents, field observations, and stakeholder interactions. The study reveals that while efforts are being made to integrate competency-based learning, mother-tongue instruction at the primary level, and skill-oriented subjects, issues such as teacher preparedness, infrastructural limitations, and lack of awareness among rural communities continue to hinder smooth implementation. The findings suggest that stronger capacity-building programs, localized curriculum design, and continuous monitoring are necessary to achieve the envisioned goals of NEP 2020 in Assam.

Keywords: - National Education Policy 2020, Curriculum Reform, Assam Education, Nagaon District, Case Study, School Education, Policy Implementation

INTRODUCTION

The introduction of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 marked a paradigm shift in India's educational framework, replacing the NEP 1986 after more than three decades. Rooted in principles of equity, inclusivity, and 21st-century skills, the policy emphasizes restructuring curriculum and pedagogy to foster creativity, critical reasoning, and lifelong learning (MHRD, 2020). Among its key features are the 5+3+3+4 curricular structure, the promotion of multilingualism, integration of vocational education,

and a renewed focus on foundational literacy and numeracy.

In the context of Assam, the Government has begun introducing reforms aligned with NEP 2020, particularly in areas such as curriculum redesign, teacher training, and school restructuring. The state's unique socio-linguistic diversity makes the implementation process both challenging and significant. Nagaon district, being one of the most populous and educationally active regions of Assam, provides an ideal case for understanding how national-level reforms translate into local realities.

While policy documents highlight a clear vision, the ground-level implementation often encounters barriers such as inadequate infrastructure, limited digital resources, and the need for professional development among teachers. Additionally, rural schools in Nagaon face challenges of overcrowded classrooms, language barriers, and limited parental engagement, which directly impact the efficacy of reforms.

This paper seeks to examine the implementation of NEP 2020 curriculum reforms in Nagaon district, focusing on:

1. The current status of curriculum alignment with NEP 2020 guidelines.
2. Institutional and teacher preparedness for policy adoption.
3. Challenges and opportunities in the district-level implementation process.

By situating the study within a regional context, the paper aims to contribute to broader discussions on how curriculum reforms can be effectively localized to meet the diverse educational needs of Indian states like Assam.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The present case study seeks to analyze the implementation of NEP 2020 curriculum reforms in Assam with special reference to Nagaon district. The specific objectives are:

1. To examine the extent of alignment of the school curriculum in Nagaon district with the key recommendations of NEP 2020.
2. To assess the level of preparedness of schools and teachers for the adoption of curriculum reforms.
3. To identify the challenges faced in implementing NEP 2020 at the district level, particularly in rural and semi-urban schools of Nagaon.
4. To analyze the perceptions of stakeholders (teachers, administrators, and parents) regarding the effectiveness of curriculum reforms.
5. To suggest measures and policy interventions for strengthening the implementation of NEP 2020 in Assam, based on lessons from the Nagaon case study.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

1) National policy frame: NEP 2020, NCF-2023, and FLN

The National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020) proposes a competency-based curriculum and a new 5+3+3+4 curricular–pedagogical design spanning ages 3–18, with strong emphasis on multilingualism, experiential learning, and assessment reform. The National Curriculum Framework for School Education (NCF-2023) operationalizes these shifts, guiding states on stage-wise learning outcomes, integration of art and vocational education, and the transition to competency-based assessments. Parallely, the NIPUN Bharat Mission centers foundational literacy and numeracy (FLN) for all learners by the end of Grade 3, providing national benchmarks and implementation support

2) Assam's policy translation: SCERT and Samagra Shiksha Axom

In Assam, the State Council of Educational Research and Training (SCERT) leads curricular adaptation aligned to NEP 2020, including textbook and material development, quality-assurance handbooks, and readiness packages for early grades. These initiatives

aim to embed competency-based pedagogy, formative assessment, and contextualized learning materials across elementary stages. Samagra Shiksha Axom (SSA) functions as the state's implementation arm, anchoring teacher professional development, school strengthening, and monitoring systems necessary for NEP roll-out.

3) FLN in Assam: NIPUN Axom

Assam's NIPUN Axom (state implementation of NIPUN Bharat) targets FLN from pre-primary to Grade 3 with structured teacher training, class-ready learning resources, and periodic monitoring. State-issued program notes and resource kits highlight grade-wise outcomes, classroom routines, and remedial protocols—key levers for NEP-consistent early learning reforms. Emerging studies and case reports on NIPUN (including those referencing Assam) discuss gains and persistent gaps in teacher capacity, classroom time-on-task, and formative assessment practices—issues central to district-level implementation research.

4) Quality assurance and assessment: Gunotsav in Assam

Gunotsav, Assam's large-scale school quality initiative (since 2017), combines self-evaluation and external evaluation to track learning outcomes, infrastructure, and community participation. Multiple rounds (2017, 2018, 2022) have produced granular evidence on foundational learning levels and school processes, informing NEP-aligned interventions such as remedial planning and teacher support. Recent empirical and review papers link Gunotsav's assessments with improved targeting of academic support but also note variation across rural/urban and resource-constrained settings—salient considerations for any Nagaon-focused case analysis.

5) Teacher education and preparedness

NEP-aligned reforms depend on teacher preparedness. Assam's updates to D.El.Ed curriculum and SCERT's Handbook for Education Officers emphasize classroom-based assessment, inclusive education, and stage-appropriate pedagogy. The literature underscores that sustained in-service mentoring, school-based support, and assessment literacy are

critical to translate policy to practice—especially in resource-limited blocks.

6) Early commentary and policy discourse specific to Assam

Opinion and policy commentary from Assam’s media and think-pieces—published soon after NEP 2020—flagged implementation challenges such as integrating ECCE into schools, reorganizing stages, and reconciling curriculum load with local languages and teacher availability. These early analyses provide context for current district-level realities and help frame research questions on institutional readiness and stakeholder perceptions.

Synthesis and gaps

Cumulatively, national frameworks (NEP-2020, NCF-2023, NIPUN Bharat) set clear direction, while Assam’s SCERT/SSA instruments (NIPUN Axom resources, Gunotsav cycles, handbooks, revised D.El.Ed) constitute the state’s implementation backbone. However, the literature still leaves district-granular evidence underexplored—particularly on: (a) the depth of curricular alignment in classrooms; (b) teacher assessment practices post-training; (c) language-of-instruction transitions in early grades; and (d) school-community engagement in semi-urban and

rural clusters. A Nagaon-specific case study can thus contribute missing, ground-level insights to the Assam evidence base.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a convergent mixed-method case study design to investigate the implementation of NEP 2020 curriculum reforms in Nagaon district of Assam. Quantitative data were collected through learner assessments, structured surveys, and observation rubrics, while qualitative data were gathered via interviews and focus group discussions. This design ensured triangulation of findings across multiple stakeholders and data sources.

Sampling Strategy

The study adopted a multistage stratified sampling technique. Schools were stratified by location (urban/semi-urban vs. rural blocks) and by educational stage (Foundational/Preparatory vs. Middle). Within each stratum, schools were selected using probability proportional to size (PPS) from the UDISE+ 2023–24 database.

Table 1: Sample Design

Stratum	Blocks/Wards Covered	Schools Selected	Participants	Rationale
Urban (Nagaon town wards)	4 wards	8 schools	320 students, 64 teachers	Represents semi-urban context with better infrastructure
Rural (Kampur, Raha, Rupohi, Dhing blocks)	4 blocks	16 schools	640 students, 128 teachers	Captures resource constraints and rural challenges
Total	–	24 schools	~960 students, ~192 teachers	Balanced coverage of district

Note: Head-teachers and parents/SMC members were also included for qualitative probes in each school.

Participants

- Students: Grades II–III (FLN focus) and Grade VI (competency-based tasks).
- Teachers: Language and mathematics teachers handling sampled grades.
- School Leaders: Head-teachers/academic in-charges.

- Parents/SMC members: To capture perceptions of reforms and awareness of NEP 2020.

Instruments and Tools

All instruments were designed with reference to NIPUN Bharat guidelines, NCF-2023 learning outcomes, and NIPUN Axom (SSA Assam) directives.

Table 2: Instruments Used in the Study

Tool	Target Group	Key Domains	Source/Framework Alignment
FLN Assessment (Grades II–III)	Students	Language: decoding, fluency, comprehension; Numeracy: number sense, operations, word problems	NIPUN Bharat learning ladders; NIPUN Axiom kits
Competency Tasks (Grade VI)	Students	Problem-solving, application-based math, comprehension & reasoning	NCF-2023 Stage-wise Outcomes
Classroom Observation Rubric	Teachers/Classrooms	Pedagogy, use of mother tongue, formative assessment, inclusivity	SCERT Assam training modules; NCF-2023 pedagogy guidance
Teacher Survey	Teachers	NEP orientation, training received, TLM use, assessment practices	SCERT/SSA professional development modules
School Process Checklist	Head-teachers	Scholastic, co-scholastic, infrastructure, community participation	Gunotsav domains
FGD/Interview Guides	Parents, SMC, Teachers	Perceptions of NEP 2020, awareness of FLN, challenges in implementation	SSA community engagement guidelines

Data Collection Procedures

1. Permissions & Coordination: Approvals obtained from DEEO and BEOs of Nagaon.
2. Enumerator Training: Field investigators trained for two days on FLN assessment administration, observation scoring, and bias minimization.
3. School Visits:
 - Day 1: Head-teacher survey + classroom observation.
 - Day 2: Student assessments + teacher survey + parent/SMC FGD.
4. Data Capture: Quantitative data via Google Forms/OMR; qualitative data through audio-recorded FGDs and verbatim interview notes.

Data Analysis Plan

- Descriptive statistics for FLN scores, competency outcomes, and observation ratings.
- Indices: Curricular Alignment Index, Teacher Preparedness Index.
- Comparisons: Rural vs. urban using t-tests/ χ^2 .
- Regression: Multivariate models linking FLN/competency outcomes with teacher preparedness and school process indicators.
- Qualitative data: Thematic coding aligned with NCF-2023 pedagogy and SSA Assam priorities.

Ethical Considerations

Informed consent was obtained from parents/guardians, child assent was secured, and confidentiality maintained through anonymization. The study adhered to SSA Assam fieldwork guidelines and followed child protection norms.

MAJOR FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The analysis of data collected from schools, teachers, students, and community stakeholders in Nagaon district revealed several patterns regarding the implementation of NEP 2020 curriculum reforms.

1. Curricular Alignment and Classroom Practices

- A majority of schools reported partial integration of NEP 2020 recommendations, such as activity-based learning and competency-driven lesson planning.
- Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN) tasks were introduced in early grades, but classroom practices often remained rote-based, particularly in mathematics.
- Mother-tongue instruction (Assamese/Bengali in most schools) was practiced in early classes, but transitions to English at higher grades created learning discontinuity.

2. Teacher Preparedness and Training

- Around 70% of teachers surveyed had undergone orientation programs under SCERT Assam and NIPUN Axiom, but many lacked confidence in translating training into classroom pedagogy.
- Teachers demonstrated awareness of competency-based assessment, yet continued to rely heavily on traditional summative tests.
- In rural schools, teacher shortages and multi-grade teaching diluted the effectiveness of training and reform adoption.

3. Student Performance on FLN and Competency Tasks

- FLN assessments (Grades II–III) showed that students performed relatively well in basic decoding and number recognition, but struggled with reading comprehension and application-based word problems.
- Grade VI students displayed partial competency in problem-solving tasks but often failed in higher-order reasoning, suggesting limited progress towards the NEP goal of critical thinkings.

4. School Processes and Gunotsav Linkages

- Evidence from the Gunotsav process checklist indicated improvement in school management and community participation, especially in urban clusters.
- However, rural schools exhibited wide disparities in infrastructure (digital tools, TLMs, library access), hampering reform implementation.
- Monitoring reports were available but lacked systematic follow-up to ensure corrective action.

5. Community and Parental Engagement

- Parents in urban areas showed greater awareness of NEP 2020 reforms and valued skill-based education, while rural parents were mostly unaware of curriculum shifts.
- Community participation through School Management Committees (SMCs) was formally present but functionally weak in many rural schools.

6. Urban–Rural Divide

- Urban schools were ahead in integrating ICT-based learning, competency-driven assessment, and teacher training.
- Rural schools lagged due to resource shortages, poor internet connectivity, and inadequate teacher support systems.

7. Perceptions of Stakeholders

- Teachers viewed NEP 2020 as a progressive reform, but cited time constraints, large class sizes, and lack of materials as major barriers.

- Head-teachers emphasized the need for continuous capacity-building programs rather than one-off workshops.
- Parents expressed concerns about language policy changes, fearing that English-medium transitions could marginalize children from vernacular backgrounds.

Synthesis of Findings

Overall, the study indicates that Nagaon district is at an early stage of NEP 2020 implementation. There is policy-level alignment (via SCERT Assam, NIPUN Axom, and Gunotsav frameworks), but classroom-level translation remains inconsistent. Teacher preparedness, resource disparities, and community awareness are critical factors influencing reform success.

DISCUSSION, EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS, AND SUGGESTIONS

Discussion

The findings from the Nagaon district reveal that while Assam has taken commendable steps to translate the vision of NEP 2020 into practice through initiatives such as NIPUN Axom, SCERT training modules, and Gunotsav, the implementation remains uneven across contexts.

1. Curricular Alignment vs. Classroom Reality

Although curriculum materials are gradually shifting towards competency-based learning, actual classroom teaching continues to be dominated by rote practices. This gap highlights the challenge of moving from policy prescriptions to pedagogical transformation. Similar implementation bottlenecks were noted in studies on NEP adoption in other states (NCERT, 2023).

2. Teacher Preparedness and Professional Development

Teacher readiness emerged as a critical bottleneck. Despite receiving training, teachers in rural Nagaon often lacked the confidence and support to apply competency-based and activity-oriented pedagogy. This aligns with prior research that suggests sustained mentoring and school-based professional learning

communities are more effective than one-off workshops (SCERT Assam, 2022).

3. Foundational Learning Challenges

The FLN assessments showed that while students can handle basic decoding and arithmetic, they lag in comprehension and application. This reflects broader national concerns flagged by ASER 2022 reports, which highlight learning deficits despite high enrollment. In the Nagaon context, this indicates that NEP 2020's foundational literacy goals require urgent attention to avoid compounding learning gaps in higher grades.

4. Urban–Rural Divide

The urban–rural gap observed in Nagaon mirrors national inequities in infrastructure, digital access, and teacher availability. Urban schools, supported by better connectivity and exposure, are moving faster towards NEP-aligned reforms. Rural schools, however, remain constrained, raising concerns about equity and inclusive implementation.

5. Community Engagement

Parental awareness and SMC participation were minimal in rural schools, weakening accountability and ownership of reforms. NEP 2020 explicitly calls for greater community participation; hence this finding underscores the need for stronger grassroots-level sensitization.

Educational Implications:-

Based on the above findings, several educational implications emerge:

1. Curriculum Reform Requires Continuous Support
 - Merely introducing new textbooks or guidelines is insufficient. Schools require ongoing monitoring and mentoring to ensure that reforms are practiced in classrooms.
2. Teacher Professional Development as the Pivot
 - Teachers are central to NEP 2020 reforms. Investments in in-service mentoring, peer learning groups, and DIET-led support mechanisms can significantly enhance classroom-level adoption.
3. Strengthening Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN)

- Early-grade learning deficits can derail the NEP vision. District-level baseline assessments and remedial frameworks need to be systematically implemented.

4. Addressing Equity Gaps

- Rural schools require targeted resource allocation—digital infrastructure, teacher appointments, and language-sensitive materials—to avoid widening the achievement gap with urban schools.

5. Community and Parental Mobilization

- Effective reform demands awareness-building campaigns for parents and local communities, emphasizing the importance of FLN, competency-based learning, and multilingual education.

6. Policy Feedback Loop

- Mechanisms such as Gunotsav should not merely be evaluative but should serve as feedback loops that inform SCERT and SSA Assam about the ground realities of reform adoption.

Suggestions:-

Based on the study, the following suggestions are put forward:

For Policy Makers and SCERT Assam

- Develop localized curriculum materials contextualized to Nagaon's linguistic and socio-economic background.
- Integrate continuous teacher mentoring models rather than relying solely on periodic training.
- Ensure convergence of Gunotsav results with teacher training and resource allocation.

For School Leaders and Teachers

- Foster school-based learning communities where teachers can share experiences, lesson plans, and peer feedback.
- Introduce micro-level innovations, such as learning corners, activity-based kits, and formative assessment tools to bridge gaps in FLN.
- Adopt multilingual pedagogy in early grades with smooth transitions to English, reducing discontinuities in learning.

For Community and Parents

- Conduct awareness programs at village/ward levels to inform parents about NEP 2020 reforms and the importance of foundational learning.
- Strengthen School Management Committees (SMCs) by offering structured orientation on their roles in monitoring and supporting curriculum reforms.

For Future Research

- Longitudinal studies are needed to track the impact of NEP 2020 reforms on student learning outcomes over time.
- Comparative research across districts of Assam could highlight best practices and scalable strategies for statewide implementation.

Conclusion of the Section:-

The discussion reaffirms that while NEP 2020 provides a progressive blueprint, its success in Assam—especially in districts like Nagaon—depends on teacher preparedness, infrastructural support, equity-driven policies, and community participation. Effective reform is not simply a matter of policy introduction but of sustained practice, local adaptation, and continuous feedback.

The present case study on the implementation of NEP 2020 curriculum reforms in Nagaon district of Assam highlights both the promise and challenges of educational transformation at the grassroots. While policy-level frameworks such as NCF 2023, NIPUN Bharat, NIPUN Axom, and Gunotsav have provided clear direction, their translation into effective classroom practice is still in its formative stage.

The study found that schools in Nagaon are gradually introducing competency-based learning, foundational literacy and numeracy initiatives, and activity-oriented pedagogy, yet these practices remain inconsistent across urban and rural contexts. Teacher preparedness, infrastructural limitations, and low parental awareness emerged as significant barriers to effective reform.

Nevertheless, the findings also underline opportunities for progress. Teachers and school leaders expressed openness to reform, and urban schools demonstrated encouraging adoption of NEP-driven practices. If complemented with continuous capacity building, localized curriculum support, resource allocation, and community sensitization, the district can move

steadily towards realizing the holistic goals of NEP 2020.

In conclusion, the case of Nagaon demonstrates that policy success depends not only on vision but on sustained implementation mechanisms. Strengthening teacher mentoring, bridging the urban–rural divide, and empowering parents and communities are essential for ensuring that the aspirations of NEP 2020—equitable, inclusive, and competency-driven education—are meaningfully realized in Assam and beyond.

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