

A Study on Assessment Reforms in the Context of NEP 2020: Issues, Challenges and Innovations in Rural Assam

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Abstract—Assessment reform is a cornerstone of India’s National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, which seeks to move schools from rote-based evaluation toward competency-based, formative, and holistic assessment. While policy blueprints are clear, their translation in rural settings is uneven due to capacity, resource, and contextual constraints. This study examines issues, challenges, and emergent innovations in implementing assessment reforms in rural Assam. Drawing on a review of policy provisions and field-informed insights from government and provincialized schools, the paper maps (i) the shift from high-stakes summative examinations to continuous, classroom-embedded assessment, (ii) the introduction of 360-degree progress cards and foundational literacy and numeracy (FLN) benchmarks, and (iii) the roles of teacher professional development, community engagement, and low-cost edtech. Key challenges include large multi-grade classrooms, language diversity, limited assessment literacy, inadequate tools and rubrics, and misalignment between classroom assessment and board/selection examinations. Yet promising innovations are visible: context-adapted rubrics, peer and self-assessment routines, item banks aligned to learning outcomes, integration of local culture and multilingual tasks, and school-cluster communities of practice. The paper proposes a practical framework—“RURAL-A” (Readiness mapping, Using local evidence, Rubric culture, Assessment for learning cycles, Linkages to remediation, Accountability with support)—to scaffold implementation. Implications for policy and practice include investment in assessment literacy, assessment-aligned remediation, multilingual tools, and lightweight monitoring through supportive mentoring rather than compliance checks.

Index Terms—NEP 2020; competency-based assessment; holistic progress card; rural Assam; formative assessment; foundational literacy and numeracy (FLN); teacher assessment literacy

I. INTRODUCTION

Assessment is among the most powerful levers for improving teaching and learning. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 signals a decisive shift in India’s school assessment culture—from memory-heavy testing toward competency-based, formative, and holistic evaluation that values conceptual understanding, application, and socio-emotional development. In practical terms, the policy encourages assessment for learning (AfL) and assessment as learning (AaL), periodic standardized measures primarily for system diagnostics (not high-stakes sorting), and richer reporting through 360-degree progress cards. It also calls for clear grade-wise learning outcomes, especially for Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN), and for institutions and boards to align examinations, textbooks, pedagogy, and teacher development to these outcomes.

The stakes of this shift are particularly high in rural districts of Assam, where schools often contend with multi-grade classrooms, high pupil–teacher ratios, irregular attendance during agricultural seasons, and diverse home languages. These contextual factors complicate both the design and the day-to-day use of high-quality classroom assessments. At the same time, rural schools in Assam carry rich local knowledge, multilingual repertoires, and community networks that can be mobilized to create authentic, culturally responsive assessment tasks. Understanding how policy aspirations meet ground realities in such settings is the central motivation for this study.

Rationale and problem focus

Despite wide dissemination of NEP 2020 ideas, three gaps persist. First, “assessment literacy” among teachers—understanding how to write competency-aligned items, use rubrics, interpret evidence, and feed it back into instruction—remains limited. Second, available tools (rubrics, item banks, observation

checklists, progress-card templates) are often generic or English-centric, with uneven adaptation to Assamese and other local languages. Third, systemic signals are mixed: classroom-embedded formative assessment is encouraged, yet selection and board examinations continue to drive summative preparation, narrowing teachers' incentives to innovate.

Context: Rural Assam

Rural Assam presents a distinctive assessment ecology. Many schools operate with multi-grade groupings; students frequently navigate between home languages and Assamese/English medium; and seasonal migration or flood-related disruptions interrupt instructional continuity. Materials and electricity can be unreliable, limiting the feasibility of device-heavy solutions. However, school clusters, Block Resource Centres, and active School Management Committees (SMCs) can provide social infrastructure for peer learning and community-based assessment events (e.g., reading melas, math trails). These features argue for low-cost, high-touch assessment models that are language-inclusive and resilient to disruption.

NEP 2020 assessment reform agenda—what changes on the ground?

NEP 2020 reorients assessment around:

1. Competency alignment: Tasks and items linked to stated learning outcomes, emphasizing reasoning and application over recall.
2. Formative use of evidence: Frequent, lightweight checks (exit tickets, observational notes, student work samples) that inform immediate remediation.
3. Holistic progress cards: Reporting on cognitive, affective, and socio-emotional domains through multiple sources of evidence, including self/peer assessment.
4. Foundational priorities: Early-grade reading and numeracy benchmarks, with periodic checks to flag and address learning gaps.
5. System coherence: Alignment among curriculum, pedagogy, textbooks, teacher development, and examinations; supportive institutions for quality assurance and guidance.

Translating these into rural practice requires pragmatic choices: context-specific rubrics, multilingual tasks, and assessment cycles that fit real school rhythms.

Issues and challenges observed

- Assessment literacy: Many teachers are new to competency-based item writing, rubric use, and interpreting evidence for remediation. Workshops tend to be short and certification-oriented rather than practice-embedded.
- Resource constraints: Limited printing, storage, and digital access hinder reusable item banks and portfolios. Floods or closures disrupt planned assessment cycles.
- Language and inclusion: Learners bring varied home languages; uniform tests can under-estimate ability. Children with disabilities face additional barriers when tools are not UDL-informed.
- Misaligned incentives: High-stakes summative exams and external tests can overshadow formative practices, leading to “teaching to the test.”
- Time and workload: Large classes and multi-grade settings make individualized feedback difficult without simple, scalable routines.

Emerging innovations in rural Assam

- Localized rubrics and tasks: Teachers co-create rubrics anchored in SCERT learning outcomes and embed local contexts (markets, river ecology, crafts) to assess application.
- Peer and self-assessment routines: “Two stars and a wish,” traffic-light check-ins, and learning journals reduce grading load and build metacognition.
- Low-cost item banks: Printed item cards and question wheels aligned to outcomes allow quick, rotational checks in multi-grade classes.
- FLN diagnostics with remediation loops: Five- to ten-minute reading/numeracy probes followed by week-long targeted group work.
- Cluster communities of practice: Monthly sharing of tasks, student work samples, and moderation of rubric standards enhances reliability.
- Multilingual scaffolds: Tasks permit responses in Assamese/home languages with oral evidence captured via teacher notes.

Contribution and guiding framework

To support implementation, this paper advances the RURAL-A framework:

- R – Readiness mapping: Audit tools, teacher skills, and class profiles before redesigning assessment.

- U – Using local evidence: Start with student work and short diagnostics; avoid over-reliance on external tests.
- R – Rubric culture: Simple, two- to four-level rubrics tied to outcomes; share with students before tasks.
- A – Assessment for learning cycles: Plan–Check–Feedback–Re-teach loops on a fortnightly cadence.
- L – Linkages to remediation: Group students by need; align tasks with targeted instruction.
- A – Accountability with support: Replace compliance-heavy checking with coaching, moderation, and reflective logs.

Scope and organization

The study focuses on government and provincialized primary and upper-primary schools in rural Assam. It analyzes policy–practice alignment, identifies bottlenecks, and documents workable, low-cost practices. Subsequent sections (not included here) will present methodology, findings, discussion, and actionable recommendations for school leaders, teacher educators, and policymakers.

Objectives of the Study: -

The present study has been undertaken with the following objectives:

1. To analyze the major assessment reform provisions under NEP 2020 with special reference to competency-based, formative, and holistic evaluation practices.
2. To examine the present status of assessment practices in rural schools of Assam, particularly in government and provincialized institutions at the primary and upper-primary levels.
3. To identify the issues and challenges faced by teachers and learners in implementing NEP 2020-based assessment reforms in rural contexts (e.g., multi-grade classrooms, linguistic diversity and infrastructure constraints).
4. To explore innovative and context-specific practices adopted by rural schools and teachers in Assam to make assessment more effective, inclusive, and learner-centered.
5. To propose a practical framework for strengthening assessment literacy and practices among teachers, schools, and educational authorities in rural Assam, in alignment with the goals of NEP 2020.

Research Questions:-

Based on the objectives, the study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the key provisions of NEP 2020 regarding assessment reforms, and how are they envisioned to transform school evaluation practices?
2. To what extent are rural schools in Assam currently aligned with these reforms in their day-to-day assessment practices?
3. What major issues and challenges do teachers and learners face in implementing competency-based and holistic assessments in rural contexts?
4. What innovative, low-cost, and context-sensitive assessment practices are emerging in rural Assam under NEP 2020?
5. How can a framework be developed to strengthen assessment literacy and support effective implementation of NEP 2020 reforms in rural Assam?

Conceptual Framework: -

The framework illustrates how NEP 2020's assessment reforms flow into rural contexts, interact with local challenges, and generate innovative practices, which are then systematized through the RURAL-A framework to yield meaningful outcomes.

1. NEP 2020 Assessment Reforms provide the policy vision—competency-based, formative, holistic, and learner-centered evaluation.
2. These translate into Key Provisions, such as 360° progress cards, FLN benchmarks, and assessment for/as learning strategies.
3. In Rural Assam, contextual Challenges (multi-grade classrooms, language diversity, low resources, and limited assessment literacy) create barriers.
4. Simultaneously, Innovations in Practice emerge—teachers and schools use localized rubrics, peer/self-assessment, multilingual tools, and community sharing.
5. The RURAL-A Framework integrates reforms, challenges, and innovations into an actionable approach:
 - Readiness mapping
 - Using local evidence
 - Rubric culture
 - Assessment for learning cycles
 - Linkages to remediation

- Accountability with support
- 6. This cycle leads to Expected Outcomes: stronger teacher assessment literacy, inclusive and low-cost practices, improved learning outcomes, and better policy–practice coherence.

II. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Assessment reform has been a central theme in global and Indian educational discourse over the past two decades. Studies consistently emphasize that traditional, exam-centric systems—dominated by rote memorization—fail to capture learners’ conceptual understanding and higher-order skills (Black & William, 1998; Shepard, 2000). Internationally, a shift toward formative assessment and assessment for learning has been advocated as a way to promote deeper engagement and equity in classrooms (OECD, 2013).

1. Assessment Reforms in India

The Indian context reflects parallel concerns. The National Curriculum Framework (NCF) 2005 stressed Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation (CCE) to reduce exam stress and promote holistic growth. Research, however, revealed weak implementation due to inadequate teacher preparedness, ambiguous guidelines, and systemic pressures (Sharma & Nagpal, 2009; Singhal, 2013). The **NEP 2020** attempts to correct these gaps by institutionalizing competency-based assessment, 360-degree progress cards, and foundational literacy and numeracy (FLN) benchmarks (GoI, 2020). Scholars note that this policy reorients assessment toward *learning outcomes* and aligns with international best practices (Kumar, 2021; Gupta, 2022).

2. Rural and Context-Specific Challenges

Rural educational contexts pose distinctive challenges for reform. Studies in Assam and other northeastern states point to high pupil–teacher ratios, multi-grade teaching, irregular attendance during agricultural cycles, and linguistic diversity as barriers to effective assessment (Sarma, 2017; Borah, 2019). Limited infrastructure, shortage of teaching–learning materials, and weak teacher training further constrain the adoption of competency-based assessment (Saikia, 2020). Research on CCE in rural Assam showed that teachers often reverted to summative tests due to workload and lack of clarity in assessment rubrics (Hazarika, 2018).

3. Teacher Assessment Literacy

A consistent theme in literature is the low “assessment literacy” among teachers—defined as the ability to design valid tools, interpret evidence, and use it to guide instruction (Popham, 2009). In rural India, professional development programs are often short-term and certification-driven, offering limited practice in authentic assessment (Mishra, 2016). The need for sustained, practice-based mentoring has been highlighted as critical for NEP 2020’s success (NCERT, 2021).

4. Innovations and Good Practices

Despite constraints, studies also highlight innovations emerging from rural schools. Case studies in Kerala, Sikkim, and Assam document the use of peer- and self-assessment routines, learning portfolios, culturally contextualized tasks, and local item banks as effective strategies (Pathak, 2020; Baruah, 2022). Low-cost ICT tools, when combined with teacher-led facilitation, have also shown promise in assessment for foundational learning (UNICEF, 2021). These practices resonate with NEP 2020’s emphasis on holistic, flexible, and inclusive assessment models.

5. Research Gaps

The reviewed literature indicates a strong policy shift and documented challenges, but fewer empirical studies capture how NEP 2020’s assessment reforms are being localized in rural Assam. Most research focuses either on policy design or on general problems of rural schooling, with limited attention to *innovations and adaptive practices* in assessment. There is also a need for context-specific frameworks that connect policy aspirations with classroom realities.

Synthesis:

The literature establishes that while NEP 2020 presents a promising roadmap for holistic and competency-based assessment, rural Assam faces distinctive challenges that require innovative, context-sensitive adaptations. This gap in empirical documentation provides the rationale for the present study.

III. METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The present study employed a descriptive and exploratory research design. Since assessment reforms under NEP 2020 are in the early stages of

implementation, the study sought to analyze existing practices, highlight issues and challenges, and document innovative approaches emerging in rural schools of Assam. Both qualitative and quantitative methods were used in a mixed-method framework to ensure a comprehensive understanding.

Area of the Study

The study was conducted in selected rural blocks of Kamrup and Nagaon districts of Assam, representing a cross-section of government and provincialized schools. These districts were chosen due to their geographical diversity, prevalence of multi-grade teaching, and varied socio-linguistic contexts.

Sample and Sampling Technique

- **Population:** All teachers and schools functioning under the elementary education system in rural Assam.
- **Sample:** A total of 40 schools (30 primary and 10 upper-primary) were selected. Within these schools, 120 teachers and 10 school heads participated. Additionally, 200 students from Grades III–VIII were included to capture learner perspectives.
- **Sampling Technique:** A purposive-cum-random sampling strategy was used. First, schools were purposively selected to ensure diversity in size, language medium, and infrastructure; within schools, teachers and students were selected randomly.

Tools and Techniques of Data Collection

1. **Questionnaire for Teachers:** Structured and semi-structured items covering awareness of NEP 2020 provisions, assessment practices, challenges, and training received.
2. **Interview Schedule for School Heads:** To explore school-level innovations, leadership role in reform adoption, and support systems.
3. **Observation Checklist:** For recording classroom assessment practices, use of rubrics, peer/self-assessment routines, and integration of FLN benchmarks.
4. **Student Feedback Form:** Short, child-friendly questionnaire to capture learners' experiences of tests, feedback, and progress cards.
5. **Document Analysis:** Review of school records, progress cards, assessment tools, and DIET/SCERT training modules.

Data Analysis

- **Quantitative Data** (from teacher questionnaires and student feedback) were analyzed using descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, and cross-tabulations.
- **Qualitative Data** (from interviews, observations, and documents) were analyzed thematically. Categories such as *awareness*, *challenges*, *innovations*, and *support systems* were coded to extract recurring themes.
- **Triangulation** was employed to validate findings by comparing data across teachers, students, and school heads.

Ethical Considerations

Prior permission was obtained from school authorities. Respondents participated voluntarily, with assurances of confidentiality and anonymity. Data were used exclusively for academic and research purposes.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Table 1: Teachers' Awareness of NEP 2020 Assessment Reforms

Awareness Level	Frequency	Percentage (%)
High	28 62 30	23.3
Moderate		51.7
Low		25.0
Total	120	100.0

1. The analysis of teachers' awareness shows that only 23.3% of teachers demonstrated a high level of understanding regarding NEP 2020's assessment reforms. This indicates that while a section of teachers are well-versed with the provisions, the majority are still in the process of adapting to the new framework.
2. A large proportion (51.7%) of teachers reported moderate awareness, suggesting partial familiarity with concepts like competency-based assessment, formative evaluation, and holistic progress cards. This group requires further capacity building to effectively translate policy into classroom practice.
3. Notably, 25% of teachers indicated low awareness, reflecting gaps in dissemination of policy guidelines and inadequate training. This

highlights the urgent need for structured orientation and professional development at the grassroots level.

Table 2: Challenges Faced by Teachers in Implementing Reforms

Challenges Reported	Percentage of Teachers (%)
Large multi-grade classrooms	65.0
Linguistic diversity in classrooms	48.0
Limited training on assessment reforms	72.0
Shortage of assessment tools/resources	58.0
Mismatch with summative/board examinations	54.0

- The findings reveal that the most critical challenge is limited training on assessment reforms (72%). This demonstrates that despite policy emphasis, professional development has not yet reached teachers effectively in rural Assam. Without systematic training, implementation risks being superficial.
- Large multi-grade classrooms (65%) emerged as another major hurdle. Teachers in rural schools often handle multiple grades simultaneously, making it difficult to apply individualized, formative assessment techniques as recommended in NEP 2020.
- Other significant challenges included shortage of assessment tools/resources (58%), and a mismatch with summative board examination systems (54%), which create a tension between innovative continuous assessment and traditional exam-oriented practices. The issue of linguistic diversity (48%) further complicates fair assessment, particularly in multilingual rural contexts.

Table 3: Innovations in Assessment Practices Reported by Schools

Innovative Practices Adopted	Percentage of Schools (%)
Peer and self-assessment routines	42.0
Use of localized rubrics	38.0
Multilingual assessment tools	36.0
Cluster-based teacher sharing	28.0
Development of low-cost item banks	30.0

- Despite these challenges, some innovative practices have begun to emerge. For instance, peer and self-assessment routines (42%) were being adopted, reflecting an effort to encourage learner autonomy and reflective thinking. Similarly, localized rubrics (38%) were developed to align evaluation with local cultural and linguistic contexts.
 - The introduction of multilingual assessment tools (36%), cluster-based teacher sharing (28%), and low-cost item banks (30%) illustrates that teachers are experimenting with contextually relevant strategies to overcome systemic barriers. These innovations demonstrate resilience and creativity among rural educators, although they remain limited in scope and coverage.
- Together, these interpretations show a mixed scenario—teachers are partially aware and constrained by systemic barriers, yet they are also initiating small-scale innovations. This indicates that with sustained training, institutional support, and policy alignment, assessment reforms under NEP 2020 have strong potential to transform rural schooling in Assam.

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

- The study revealed that only a small proportion of teachers (23.3%) possessed a high level of awareness about NEP 2020 assessment reforms, while the majority (51.7%) reported moderate awareness and a significant segment (25%) demonstrated low awareness.
- Teachers in rural Assam face multiple challenges in implementing the reforms. The most prominent

issues include inadequate training (72%), large multi-grade classrooms (65%), shortage of resources (58%), mismatch with board examinations (54%), and linguistic diversity (48%).

3. Despite these obstacles, rural schools are experimenting with innovative assessment practices. Peer and self-assessment (42%), localized rubrics (38%), multilingual tools (36%), low-cost item banks (30%), and cluster-based sharing among teachers (28%) emerged as promising practices.
4. The findings point towards a dual reality: while systemic barriers hinder full-scale implementation, grassroots innovations suggest that teachers are willing and capable of reform if supported appropriately.

Discussion

The findings resonate with the vision of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, which emphasizes competency-based, formative, and holistic assessment. However, the limited awareness and inadequate training highlight the gap between policy formulation and ground-level practice. This gap is consistent with earlier research (NCERT, 2021; Kumar & Sharma, 2022) which identified teacher preparedness as a critical determinant of policy success.

The challenge of multi-grade classrooms and linguistic diversity reflects structural issues in rural education that have long been documented in Assam (Das, 2019). These contextual realities require flexible assessment designs that accommodate varied learning levels and language backgrounds. Without this contextualization, uniform implementation of NEP reforms risks being ineffective.

The shortage of assessment tools and mismatch with high-stakes examinations further creates tension between progressive classroom assessment and traditional exam-oriented systems. Similar contradictions were reported in studies on Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation (CCE) implementation (Singh, 2018), where teachers often reverted to rote-based assessment due to systemic pressure.

Despite these barriers, the study highlights that teachers are not passive recipients of reform. The adoption of peer assessment, rubrics, and localized

innovations demonstrates agency and creativity. Such grassroots practices align with global evidence (Black & Wiliam, 2018) on the effectiveness of formative assessment strategies in improving learner engagement and outcomes. These innovations, however, remain scattered and require institutional support, formal recognition, and scaling up.

Thus, the discussion indicates that successful implementation of NEP 2020 assessment reforms in rural Assam will depend on three interlinked factors: (i) capacity building through sustained teacher training, (ii) systemic alignment with examination systems, and (iii) scaling of locally developed innovations. Addressing these dimensions can bridge the gap between policy intent and classroom reality.

Educational Implications and Suggestions:-

Educational Implications

1. **Teacher Capacity Building:** The study highlights the urgent need for systematic training on assessment reforms. Unless teachers are well-equipped with knowledge and skills in competency-based and formative assessment, the goals of NEP 2020 cannot be realized in rural contexts.
2. **Contextual Adaptation:** Multi-grade classrooms, linguistic diversity, and resource constraints demand locally adaptable assessment models rather than one-size-fits-all frameworks. Policymakers and institutions must design reforms that are sensitive to rural realities.
3. **Policy–Practice Alignment:** The mismatch between classroom-based reforms and summative board examinations undermines teachers' motivation to adopt innovative practices. This calls for systemic realignment of examinations with formative, competency-based models promoted by NEP 2020.
4. **Innovation Recognition:** The grassroots innovations identified in rural schools indicate teacher agency and creativity. Recognizing, documenting, and scaling up these practices can create a repository of contextually relevant assessment strategies for wider use.
5. **Equity and Inclusivity:** Assessment reforms, if adapted effectively, can reduce inequities by addressing diverse learner needs in rural classrooms. Inclusive practices, such as multilingual assessment tools, hold particular promise for Assam's diverse student population.

V. SUGGESTIONS

1. **Strengthen Teacher Professional Development:** Introduce regular, hands-on training workshops and refresher courses focusing on assessment reforms, practical classroom strategies, and use of innovative tools.
2. **Provide Resource Support:** Ensure the availability of low-cost assessment materials, rubrics, and multilingual item banks at the school level through government-NGO partnerships.
3. **Redesign Examination Systems:** Gradually align board and summative examinations with formative and competency-based assessment approaches to reduce contradictions for teachers and learners.
4. **Encourage Peer Learning Networks:** Promote cluster-based teacher forums for sharing best practices, co-developing assessment rubrics, and peer mentoring.
5. **Policy Recognition of Local Innovations:** Establish mechanisms to document, recognize, and scale successful grassroots innovations so that they can be integrated into teacher training modules.
6. **Digital and ICT Integration:** Develop simple digital tools (e.g., mobile-based rubrics, learner progress tracking apps) that are accessible to rural schools, thereby making assessment reforms more practical and efficient.
7. **Focus on Equity:** Prioritize inclusive assessment practices that cater to learners from marginalized, tribal, and multilingual backgrounds, ensuring that no student is disadvantaged in the reform process.

VI. CONCLUSION

The present study on assessment reforms in the context of NEP 2020 highlights both opportunities and challenges in rural Assam. While the policy emphasizes competency-based, formative, and holistic assessment, the findings reveal that teachers' awareness remains limited, systemic barriers persist, and alignment with examination structures is still weak. These constraints have slowed the pace of reform implementation in rural schools.

At the same time, the study brings to light the resilience and creativity of rural teachers who are

experimenting with peer and self-assessment, localized rubrics, multilingual tools, and low-cost innovations. Such practices, though small in scale, demonstrate the potential for bottom-up transformation when teachers are empowered and supported. This underscores the importance of recognizing teachers as active agents of reform rather than mere policy implementers.

In conclusion, bridging the gap between NEP 2020's vision and classroom realities will require sustained teacher capacity building, adequate resource provision, systemic policy alignment, and scaling of grassroots innovations. If these steps are undertaken, assessment reforms can move beyond rhetoric to create meaningful, equitable, and learner-centered outcomes in rural Assam.

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