

NATIONAL EDUCATION POLICY (NEP) 2020

The NEP 2020 is a policy drafted by the Indian government to raise education standards. It is the third such policy, arriving 34 years after the previous NEP, and the first under a BJP-led government. The broad policy prioritizes foundational literacy and numeracy for primary school-aged children, citing evidence from surveys—such as ASER—regarding poor learning outcomes.

With its emphasis on building basic reading and math skills, the NEP validates much of Pratham's pioneering work. Our Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) approach has been internationally recognized for improving children's literacy and numeracy skills in a matter of weeks. The policy also encourages states and local entities to explore strategies for a multifaceted, integrated learning approach. While challenges are anticipated, the NEP's vision for achieving foundational literacy by 2025 is laudable.

Six highlights that pertain to our work.

#1 - A new pedagogical and curricular structure for schools

The most significant change is an increase from 12 years to 15 years of schooling. Currently, India follows a **10 (grades 1-10) + 2 (grades 11-12)** structure. This will be replaced by a **5 (early childhood education and grades 1-2) + 3 (grades 3-5) + 3 (grades 6-8) + 4 (grades 9-12)** model that will incorporate early childhood education.

The new structure is modeled after the cognitive developmental stages of a child and aims to achieve basic literacy and numeracy skills by grade 3. Students will only be expected to take formal examinations in grades 3, 5 and 8. Pratham's low-cost, scalable model has been rigorously tested and proven to help children achieve a strong foundation for future learning and success.



#2 - Expanding education to include early childhood

The policy calls for 12 years of schooling with three years of early childhood education. This expansion acknowledges the importance of ages 3 to 6 as a crucial stage for cognitive development in children. Pratham has long advocated for early childhood education and appreciates the government's recognition of this stage and early years (grades 1 and 2) as a continuum.

Historically, India's Anganwadis (childcare centers) have fallen under the Ministry of Women and Child Development, which is separate from the Ministry of Education, and have focused on health and nutrition. Integrating these two departments will be crucial for creating continuity between preschool and grades 1-2.

#3 - Native language as the medium of instruction

The NEP calls for a three-language policy with at least two of the three being native to India. All students in government schools will learn in their mother tongue and dominant regional language. English would only be introduced in grade 5. Pratham's core philosophy is to meet children at their own level. An important part of this is providing instruction in a language that is accessible to both the child and the caregiver.

Pratham has long been a pioneer in developing quality educational materials and presently offers content in regional languages. The challenge for both government and outside entities will be the development of content adapted to a variety of contexts as well as the training of teachers. However, this is also an excellent opportunity to cultivate a more close-knit integration between community members and educators.



#4 - Early integration of vocational education

In an effort to expose adolescents to trades and instill values such as the dignity of labor and the ethics of care, the policy aims to introduce vocational education into the mainstream curriculum. This measure is significant in bridging the skills gap. However, vocational training must not be limited to the formal sector, to which less than 9% of the workforce belongs, but should extend to the informal sector as well.

Since 2005, Pratham has addressed the needs of thousands of underprivileged youth from rural India through its vocational training program, which offers technical training, certification, job placement, and entrepreneurship opportunities. Our emphasis on practical training over classroom instruction, better prepares students to enter the workforce.

#5 - Teacher training and continuous assessment programs

The policy calls for robust teacher training and student assessment systems, leveraging technology to prepare educators adequately and track student learning outcomes. From our perspective, having worked with India's District Institute for Education and Training, we strongly advocate field-based training, which allows prospective teachers to understand the complexities they will face in real classrooms and develop the abilities necessary to adapt accordingly.

Pratham has been measuring children's learning outcomes for over a decade. This aspect of the NEP is a stepping stone to achieving a sustainable model for improving and refining education goals.



#6 - Integration of technology in education

The document views technology as an essential tool for the achievement of India's educational goals. However, as became evident from Pratham's remote learning efforts during India's lockdown, most communities lack the necessary infrastructure.

Pratham's digital initiative has focused on creating an open source learning environment, enabling access to devices, and developing contextualized and engaging content, Pratham has set up digital libraries in more than 3000 communities across 15 Indian states and has built a large repository of videos, games and applications in 11 regional languages.