

EDITOR'S NOTE

The Indian education system stands at a critical juncture, where ambitious policy reforms intersect with the complex realities of diverse classrooms, resource constraints, and deep-rooted sociocultural challenges. As the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 envisions transformative changes—from foundational literacy to competency-based learning, from digital integration to inclusive practices—empirical research becomes essential to examine how these aspirations translate into educational outcomes on the ground. This special issue brings together 11 significant studies that collectively explore the multifaceted challenges and emerging solutions in contemporary Indian education, spanning foundational learning assessment, pedagogical innovation, inclusive practices, and systemic transformation.

The research presented here addresses several critical questions: How effectively are foundational literacy and numeracy policies being implemented? What role do innovative pedagogical approaches play in enhancing learning outcomes and student well-being? How do demographic, cultural, and institutional factors shape educational experiences? What barriers impede the successful translation of progressive policies into classroom practices? Conducted across diverse contexts—from primary schools in Delhi to tertiary institutions in West Bengal, from special education interventions to science pedagogy reform—these studies offer valuable insights for educators, policymakers, and researchers navigating India's educational transformation.

The issue opens with sobering evidence of foundational learning gaps. Deepika Pradeep Chaurasiya's 'Assessment of Grade 3 Students' Concerning Foundational Literacy and Numeracy Levels and the Influence of Key Factors' exposes the realities behind India's NIPUN Bharat Mission through an assessment of 150 Grade 3 students in Delhi. While students demonstrate medium proficiency in basic oral language and numeracy, they perform poorly in reading fluency, writing, and geometric reasoning. Chaurasiya's factor analysis identifies six critical determinants—parental involvement, school engagement, learning environment, external support, teacher-peer dynamics, and feedback quality—yet reveals that working-class families often lack the educational capital needed to bridge foundational gaps.

This finding resonates with Anurupa Mukherjee and Pravat Kumar Kuri's longitudinal analysis in 'Quality of Learning in Primary Education — A District-level Comparison of Kerala and West Bengal'. Drawing on ASER data from 2006 to 2024, their study highlights a troubling paradox: despite increased primary school enrolment, learning outcomes—particularly in numeracy for Grades 3–5—have declined in both states.

While Kerala continues to outperform West Bengal, persistent inter-district disparities remain. Interestingly, Kerala's outcomes correlate strongly with private school enrolment, whereas in West Bengal, government schools appear to be driving better learning outcomes.

The collection foregrounds promising pedagogical innovations alongside persistent implementation challenges. Minakshi Malik and Chandan Adhikary's 'Perception and Attitude of Tertiary-level Students towards Infographics-embedded Teaching Strategies' presents a striking paradox in digital pedagogy. Their survey of 246 tertiary students in West Bengal reveals that over 92 per cent of students express highly positive perceptions of infographic-based teaching, yet only 40 per cent of instructors actually use such tools. Using the highly reliable PAIET scale ($\alpha = 0.97$), the study finds strong correlations between students' artistic skills and receptivity to infographic-based instruction, underscoring the disconnect between 'digital native' learners and 'digitally immigrant' educators.

The transformative potential of innovative approaches is further illustrated in Alka Dogra Sahni and Prakash Chandra Jena's 'Art Integrated Learning and Its Impact on Students' Stress and Coping Mechanism'. Their mixed-methods study of 120 Grade 11 students provides compelling empirical evidence that art-integrated learning functions as a powerful psychoeducational intervention, resulting in a 24.31 per cent reduction in student stress compared to negligible change in traditional classrooms. Through the systematic integration of visual arts, music, and drama into core subjects, students demonstrated significant improvements in task-oriented coping strategies and reductions in maladaptive behaviours, validating NEP 2020's vision of holistic education.

Shilpi Banerjee's 'Exploring Competencies from Policy to Practice' traces India's evolution from content-heavy curricula to competency-based education, charting the journey from the introduction of Minimum Learning Levels (1992) to the sophisticated competency framework of NCF-SE 2023. While this paradigm shift promises to address long-standing pedagogical concerns—such as unclear learning endpoints, overloaded content, and competition-driven assessments—Banerjee highlights a critical implementation gap. Without robust teacher training, sustained administrative support, and collaborative professional communities, the country's competency-based vision risks remaining unrealised.

This challenge is further analysed in Dipak Karmakar's 'Transforming Schools as Learning Organisations: Analysis of Leadership Practices'. Based on an extensive review of literature, the study reveals a significant paradox: while NEP 2020 envisions schools as dynamic learning organisations, most continue to function as bureaucratic institutions focused on

procedural compliance rather than creative and collaborative practices. Karmakar's integrated framework identifies three essential dimensions for transformation—strategic pathways, collaborative practices, and community-engaged processes—offering school leaders a roadmap beyond traditional administrative oversight.

The collection also examines individual learner characteristics through empirical inquiry. Mahaavitha M. and P. Nivenitha's 'Impact of Self-regulation and Self-efficacy on Academic Success Among School Students' presents counterintuitive findings from a sample of 212 students. While self-regulation emerges as a strong predictor of academic success, self-efficacy beliefs show no significant correlation with performance. This challenges conventional motivational assumptions and suggests that educational interventions may be more effective when focused on developing concrete self-regulatory skills rather than solely enhancing confidence.

Professional development as a determinant of educational change is explored in Touhidul Islam, Md. Jamal Uddin, and P. C. Agarwal's study on the 'Influence of Some Demographic Factors on the Professional Development of Secondary Teacher Educators in West Bengal', which examines how variables such as age, gender, experience, and institutional context shape educators' professional growth amid curricular transformation.

Inclusive education forms a prominent theme in M. Ramya and R. Shanthi's 'Effect of Co-Scholastic Activities and Activities of Daily Living ADL Skills in Enabling Children with Multiple Disabilities for Active Classroom Participation'. Their intervention-based study involving five children demonstrates that integrating co-scholastic activities with ADL skills enhances classroom participation. While the small sample size limits generalisability, the study contributes valuable preliminary evidence for structured, skill-based inclusive interventions.

Cultural responsiveness in pedagogy is the focus of Anubhuti Yadav and Sumit Gangwar's conceptual study, 'Culturally Responsive Pedagogy in Science Education: A Conceptual Study'. Their analysis reveals a significant disconnect between NEP 2020's advocacy of culturally responsive teaching and classroom practices that remain rooted in Western-centric and linguistically exclusionary models. Through thematic analysis, they identify five key dimensions—cultural contextualisation, identity representation, multilingual communication, teacher competencies, and social justice orientation—that must be addressed to transform science education meaningfully.

The issue concludes with Sweetly Kumari and Meenakshi Singh's 'Perception of Incivility in Higher Education Institutions: A Review', which reconceptualises incivility not merely as individual discourtesy but as a form of structural violence.

Their review demonstrates how everyday dismissals and microaggressions reflect entrenched caste hierarchies, linguistic dominance, and postcolonial power structures that systematically marginalise Dalit, Adivasi, and minority-language students. The authors argue for transformative pedagogical reforms and the dismantling of hierarchical institutional practices.

Taken together, these studies call for a fundamental recalibration of educational priorities—from an overemphasis on enrolment metrics to a focus on learning quality, from policy formulation to implementation science, and from isolated interventions to systemic transformation. The research underscores persistent gaps between educational aspirations and classroom realities, while simultaneously identifying promising pathways towards more equitable, effective, and culturally responsive educational systems. As India continues its educational transformation, the insights presented in this special issue offer vital empirical evidence for policymakers, educators, and researchers committed to bridging the policy–practice divide and ensuring that progressive educational visions translate into meaningful improvements in student learning and development.

Academic Editor