

# Re-envisioning the Teacher's Role under the National Education Policy 2020: A Paradigmatic Shift

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## Abstract

India's National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020) emphasizes a shift from content-heavy instruction to holistic; experiential and value-based learning rooted in India's cultural heritage. Central to this transformation is the teacher - envisioned not merely as a content-deliverer but as a facilitator, leader, motivator, mentor and nation-builder. This paper elaborates on the teacher's evolving role under NEP 2020 through the lens of educational reforms and Indian philosophical thought, particularly Indian Knowledge System. It asserts that NEP 2020 is deeply aligned with the ancient Indian conceptualization of the guru, combining timeless wisdom with modern educational demands. The National Education Policy 2020 is a landmark policy document that redefines the contours of Indian education after more than three decades. It reiterates that "teachers truly shape the future of our children—and, therefore, the future of our nation" (NEP 2020, Para 5.1). The policy places teachers at the centre of educational reform, calling for empowerment, autonomy and continual professional development. This vision echoes the ancient Indian ethos wherein teachers, or Gurus, were revered not just as knowledge providers, but as torchbearers of wisdom.

**Keywords:** NEP 2020, Teacher Empowerment, Indian Knowledge Systems, Guru-shishya tradition, Sanskrit Sahitya, Holistic Education, Competency-based Learning, Technology in Education, Ethics in Teaching

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The teacher's role in society has historically been of the highest regard in Indian civilization. The National Education Policy 2020, launched after a 34-year gap, recognizes this by declaring: "The teacher is the heart of the learning process." (NEP 2020, Para 5.1)

In Indian philosophical thought, the guru is considered the remover of ignorance:

गुरुर्ब्रह्मा गुरुर्विष्णुः गुरुर्देवो महेश्वरः।

गुरुः साक्षात् परं ब्रह्म तस्मै श्रीगुरुवे नमः॥

(Guru Gītā, Skanda Purāṇa (Uttara Khanda), Verse 1)

In the age of Artificial Intelligence, rapidly evolving knowledge domains and globalization, NEP (2020) reimagines the teacher as a transformational leader who nurtures critical thinking, creativity and moral values among learners.

Ancient Indian scriptures like the Upanishads and Smritis bestow divine attributes upon the teacher, as seen in: "आचार्यदेवो भव ।" (Taittirīya Upaniṣad, Shikṣāvallī, Verse 1.11) This statement is not merely a cultural sentiment but a foundational educational principle, aligning well with NEP's humanistic and learner-centric philosophy.

## 1. NEP 2020: A Paradigm Shift in Indian Education

The NEP 2020 emphasizes:

- Universal foundational literacy and numeracy by Grade 3
- Redesigning curriculum to reduce content and encourage experiential learning
- Multilingualism and mother tongue as a medium of instruction
- Integration of Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS), including ancient languages i.e. Sanskrit
- Assessment reform: from summative to formative
- Teacher autonomy, leadership and professional development i.e. (Continuous Professional Development of a teacher)

**This educational shift redefines the teacher's identity as:**

- A facilitator of learning
- A mentor for values and life skills

- A culturally grounded innovator

In the words of the NEP (2020): “Teachers must be at the center of the fundamental reforms in the education system.” (NEP 2020, Para 5.1)

### **NEP 2020 and its Transformative Vision of Teaching:**

NEP 2020 acknowledges the teacher as the “most respected and essential member of our society”. It highlights the following principles:

- Ensuring teacher recruitment and deployment based on merit and equity
- Continuous Professional Development (CPD)
- Autonomy and career path
- Emphasis on school leadership, mentoring and collaboration

“The new education policy places high importance on teacher recruitment, training and career progression. Only the very best and motivated individuals should be recruited to teach.” (NEP 2020, Para 5.1)

## **2. An Archetype of Ideal Leadership**

Indian thought has always revered the teacher’s role as foundational to character-building and nation-building. The Guru Gita defines the teacher thus:

गुकारस्त्वन्धकारः स्याद्गुकारस्तेज उच्यते।  
अज्ञानग्रासकं ब्रह्म गुरुरेव न संशयः॥

(Guru Gītā, Skanda Purāṇa (Uttara Khanda), Verse 17)

“The syllable ‘Gu’ means darkness and ‘Ru’ means the remover. Thus, the Guru removes the darkness of ignorance.”

The Mahabharata narrates how Dronacharya, despite his flaws, epitomized the mastery of skill transmission. These insights reinforce that NEP’s vision for an empowered and autonomous teacher has deep philosophical roots.

**Pedagogical Shift: From Content Delivery to Competency and Value-Based Learning.** The teacher’s role under NEP is not to deliver rigid syllabi but to inspire inquiry, critical thinking and ethical citizenship. The policy promotes:

- Multilingualism
- Experiential learning

- Foundational literacy and numeracy (FLN)
- 21st-century skills and values

Teachers are expected to integrate Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS), including Yoga, Sanskrit and moral education.

In ancient Sanskrit texts, this was well articulated: “सा विद्या या विमुक्तये” “That is true knowledge which liberates.” (Vishnu Purana 1.19.41) This places a moral and philosophical responsibility on the teacher to lead learners toward mukti — intellectual and emotional freedom.

### **Empowering Teachers: Agency, Autonomy and Leadership**

NEP 2020 proposes teacher training and career pathways through mechanisms like:

- NPST (National Professional Standards for Teachers)
- NCF for Teacher Education (NCFTE)
- Cluster-based CPD
- Teacher Incentives & Recognition

Such ideas resonate with ancient gurukula systems where teachers had the freedom to design the curriculum, based on students’ context and aptitude.

“न हि ज्ञानेन सदृशं पवित्रमिह विद्यते।”

“Nothing is as purifying as knowledge.” (Bhagavad Gita, 4.38)

### **3. Teachers as Catalysts of Change and as Facilitator**

NEP calls for reducing curriculum load to allow inquiry-based, discussion-based, discovery-oriented learning.

The NEP 2020 places teachers at the core of educational transformation, highlighting their empowerment, autonomy and critical role in implementing the policy’s vision. Teachers are expected to:

- **Create joyful, experiential learning** through pedagogy that is inquiry-driven, integrated and learner-centred (NEP 2020, Para 4.6).
- **Promote multidisciplinary learning** by bridging arts and sciences, curricular and co-curricular, vocational and academic streams (Para 4.9).

- **Ensure foundational literacy and numeracy (FLN)** for all children by 2025, identified as the policy's top priority (Para 2.1).
- **Foster students' social, emotional and ethical growth**, nurturing holistic development beyond academics (Paras 4.4, 4.5).
- NEP 2020 is profoundly aligned with the Indian knowledge system's view of education as the pursuit of holistic human development  
(NEP 2020, Para 4.6).

Teachers are envisioned not just as facilitators but as leaders in shaping India's new learning landscape.

- Teachers are expected to nurture multidisciplinary competencies — language, arts, science, logic, ethics — within learners.
- Use of local context, real-life applications and learning through doing (अनुप्रयोगः) is emphasized.

Thus, the teacher must enable learning that is liberating, not just qualifying.

#### 4. Integration of Indian Knowledge Systems and the Role of the Teacher

NEP 2020 calls for the inclusion of:

- Vedic and classical languages
- Yoga, Ayurveda, logic (Nyaya), environment (Prakriti) and art forms
- Sanskrit as an optional and accessible subject
- Teachers become custodians of civilizational wisdom, reviving India's indigenous education ethos:

“विद्यां चाविद्यां च यस्तद्वेदोभयं सह।  
अविद्यया मृत्युं तीर्त्वा विद्ययाऽमृतमश्नुते॥”  
(Isha Upanishad, 11)

- “One who knows both worldly and spiritual knowledge, crosses mortality and attains immortality.”

Thus, the role of a teacher expands beyond literacy - to ethical, spiritual, and ecological guidance.

## 5. Technology Integration: The Teacher as a Digital Mentor

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 strongly advocates for the integration of technology, including ICT tools, AI-based learning environments and the DIKSHA platform, into the educational process (NEP 2020, Chapter 23). This shift necessitates that teachers become digitally literate and creative in leveraging these tools to enhance learning outcomes. Key recommendations of the NEP (2020) include:

- Utilizing digital platforms such as DIKSHA, SWAYAM and e-Content, alongside AI-powered tools.
- Adopting blended learning as a primary pedagogical model.
- Employing Assistive Technology to ensure inclusive education for all students.

Crucially, the NEP emphasizes the ethical dimension of technology use. Teachers are tasked with more than just technical instruction; they must act as digital mentors, guiding students to use technology responsibly and with discernment. This includes fostering the ability to differentiate between credible and false information and promoting sound judgment in digital spaces. By grounding digital literacy in moral wisdom, teachers empower children to navigate the complexities of the modern world without compromising their core human values. This integration of technology and the teacher's role as a digital facilitator underscores the importance of ethical oversight, a quality deeply rooted in Indian philosophy.

## 6. Teacher as a Cultural Anchor: Promoting Indian Ethos

### Multilingualism and Cultural Sensitivity

NEP 2020 advocates strongly for multilingual education, recognizing its cognitive benefits and its role in preserving India's rich linguistic diversity (NEP 2020, Para 4.13–4.16). Teachers are now expected to incorporate Indian art, culture, history and value systems into daily learning. NEP 2020 promotes local knowledge, mother tongue education and awareness of India's cultural wealth.

This vision echoes Taittiriya Upanishad's vision: “मातृदेवो भव। पितृदेवो भव। आचार्यदेवो भव।” (Revere your mother, father, and teacher as God.)

A teacher is thus a conduit of samskara (values) and a custodian of civilizational continuity.

## 7. Assessment & Mentorship and the Role of Formative Feedback

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 (Para 4.34) introduces a fundamental shift towards **assessment for learning** over rote-based, summative evaluation. Teachers are crucial in implementing this change, using formative, peer-based, and competency-driven assessments to inform instruction and provide meaningful feedback

### The policy specifically promotes:

- The implementation of continuous, formative assessment.
- The use of diverse evaluation methods, including portfolio-based and peer-based assessments.
- A focus on what a child has genuinely learned and understood, rather than solely on marks and scores.

In this vision, the teacher's role is to observe individual growth and patiently nurture each child's latent potential through regular feedback and care. Furthermore, the NEP mandates structured mentoring and support for teachers, particularly those at the foundational stage. This emphasis on mentorship re-establishes a pedagogical bond reminiscent of the ancient guru-shishya tradition. The Sanskrit classic, Manusmriti, encapsulates this ideal with the verse "उपगच्छेत्प्रियं गुरुधर्मे तिष्ठेत्" (upagacchetpriyamgururndharmetisthet) or "Approach the beloved Guru and live in righteousness" (2.71), underscoring the teacher's role as a moral and academic guide.

## 8. Teachers as Leaders, Mentors and Policy Implementers

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 (Para 5.17) envisions teachers not merely as facilitators of content delivery, but as leaders, mentors and key stakeholders in policy implementation. A transformative aspect of NEP 2020 is the emphasis on school complexes, academic leadership, and collaborative networks that empower teachers to take ownership of the educational ecosystem.

The proposed National Professional Standards for Teachers (NPST) promotes

merit-based professional growth, outlining career pathways such as master teachers, mentors and academic researchers. This paradigm shift recognizes teaching as a profession requiring continual development and leadership capacity. This transition from being instructors to thought leaders and nation-builders reflects the profound Indian philosophical vision embedded in the Sanskrit ethos-

गुरुरेव जगत्सर्वं ब्रह्म विष्णुः शिवात्मकम्।  
गुरोः परतरं नास्ति तस्मै श्रीगुरवे नमः॥

(Guru Gītā, Verse 178, Skanda Purāṇa)

“The Guru is everything in the universe - the essence of Brahmā (creator), Viṣṇu (sustainer), and Śiva (transformer). There is nothing superior to the Guru. I bow to that revered Guru.”

Each teacher, therefore, is not just an educator, but a conscious contributor to national development, shaping future citizens and policies alike. As NEP 2020 rightly articulates, empowering teachers is the most crucial step in the transformation of education, and in turn, the transformation of the nation.

## 9. The Teacher’s Mandate: Foundational Learning

The National Education Policy (NEP) and its NIPUN Bharat Mission have designated **foundational literacy and numeracy (FLN)** as a top priority, with the goal of achieving universal proficiency by Grade 3. This mandate requires foundational-stage teachers to be proficient in a child-centered, engaging pedagogy. Key to this approach are:

- Play-based and activity-based learning, which makes education joyful and effective.
- Creative language development through storytelling, rhymes and poetry.
- Leveraging local contexts and multilingualism to connect learning with a child’s environment.

This pedagogical philosophy echoes the rich tradition of learning through play found in ancient Indian texts. For instance, the Subhashita-sangraha used playful verses and analogies to teach complex values. A well-known subhashita from the Subhāṣita Ratnabhāṇḍāgāra perfectly illustrates this:

“काकः कृष्णः पिकः कृष्णः कोभेदः पिककाकयोः।  
वसन्तकाले सम्प्राप्तेकाकः काकः पिकः पिकः॥”

The verse, which translates to “The crow and cuckoo are both black; but in spring, the cuckoo’s sweetness reveals the difference,” subtly teaches the value of discernment. By embracing these principles, teachers can fulfill their critical role in making foundational education a truly engaging, joyful and meaningful experience for every child.

## 10. Professional Development and Support under NEP 2020

To empower teachers, NEP 2020 proposes structured career growth, autonomy, and regular upskilling (Paras 5.13–5.16). Key initiatives include:

- **School Complexes** to enable sharing of resources and expertise (Para 7.6).
- **NPST** to set clear standards for teacher performance and career progression (Para 5.19).
- **Mandatory 50 hours of CPD** annually to keep teachers updated with new pedagogies and technologies (Para 5.9).

## 11. Challenges Ahead and Strategic Recommendations

The ambitious vision of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 for teachers is accompanied by a set of significant challenges. The successful implementation of the policy requires addressing these hurdles head-on. The core issues revolve around a need for widespread upskilling, a lack of resources and resistance to change. This calls for educators to embody the spirit of selfless dedication captured in the Bhagavad Gita:

“कर्मण्येवाधिकारस्तेमा फलेषु कदाचन।” (You have the right to perform your duty, not to its fruits” (2.47). This principle of focusing on one’s duty rather than the outcome must guide modern educators.

## Conclusion

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 positions the teacher at the very heart of its vision for educational reform. The policy seeks to empower, respect, and support the continuous professional development of educators, transforming them into facilitators of holistic learning, promoters of Indian knowledge systems, and

agents of ethical digital citizenship. This modern reimagining of the teacher's role is not a departure from the past but rather a profound return to the foundational principles of ancient Indian thought, where the teacher was revered as a spiritual and social guide.

The NEP's forward-looking framework converges with this timeless wisdom, recognizing that the teacher's work is not merely a profession but a dharma—a sacred responsibility to nurture young minds. By harmonizing contemporary reforms with the rich heritage of Sanskrit literature, the policy aims to cultivate an education system that is truly value-driven and prepared for the future. Ultimately, the NEP 2020 reaffirms the timeless truth that teachers are the indispensable force that guides society from ignorance to enlightenment, as beautifully articulated in the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad:

तमसो मा ज्योतिर्गमय। (“From darkness, lead me to light.”-1.3.28)

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