

## **Challenges in Rural English Classrooms: NEP 2020 Implementation and Its Impacts**

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### **Abstract:**

This research paper examines the multifaceted challenges confronting English language teaching and learning in rural Indian classrooms following the implementation of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. While NEP 2020 proposes transformative reforms emphasizing the Three-Language Formula, mother-tongue based multilingual education, and skill-based learning approaches, its translation into rural contexts faces substantial obstacles including infrastructure deficits, teacher capacity gaps, digital divide issues, and socio-cultural barriers. Drawing on empirical data from 150 participants across rural and urban schools, this paper identifies that approximately 63% of rural teachers feel inadequately prepared to implement NEP 2020, while over 70% of rural administrators report insufficient digital infrastructure and funding. The study reveals that only 33% of rural students demonstrate enthusiasm for skill-based approaches compared to 63% in urban settings. This paper synthesizes current research, policy documents, and empirical findings to provide a comprehensive analysis of implementation challenges and proposes evidence-based recommendations for effective rural English language pedagogy under NEP 2020.

**Keywords:** NEP 2020, rural education, English language teaching, Three-Language Formula, teacher preparedness, digital divide, India

### **Introduction**

The National Education Policy 2020 represents one of India's most comprehensive educational reform initiatives, fundamentally reimagining the structure, pedagogy, and assessment approaches across the educational spectrum. For English language teaching (ELT), NEP 2020 introduces significant changes through its Three-Language Formula, emphasis on mother-tongue based multilingual education (MTB-MLE), promotion of skill-based learning, and integration of technology-driven pedagogical approaches[1]. The

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policy's vision extends to creating inclusive, equitable educational ecosystems that serve both urban and rural learners.

However, the chasm between policy formulation and ground-level implementation remains substantial, particularly in rural contexts. Rural schools in India continue to grapple with systemic challenges that predate NEP 2020 inadequate infrastructure, teacher shortages, resource scarcity, and limited technological access[2]. Superimposing ambitious policy objectives onto these constrained contexts without targeted support mechanisms risks perpetuating educational inequities rather than ameliorating them.

This paper addresses this critical implementation gap by examining the specific challenges rural English classrooms face in actualizing NEP 2020's vision. Through analysis of empirical data, case studies, and policy implementation research, the paper identifies key barriers to successful ELT reform and proposes contextually appropriate interventions.

## **2. Background: NEP 2020 and English Language Teaching Framework**

### **2.1 Key Policy Provisions for English Language**

NEP 2020 restructures English language provision within three interconnected frameworks: **The Three-Language Formula:** At least two of three languages must be Indian languages, with the third typically being English or another modern Indian language. This framework aims to balance multilingualism with global English competence[1][2].

**Mother-Tongue Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE):** The policy recommends that home language/mother tongue should be the medium of instruction till Grade 8, with transition to English and other languages occurring thereafter. This approach theoretically enhances conceptual clarity and emotional connection to learning[1][3].

**Skill-Based Learning:** Rather than traditional rote memorization, NEP 2020 emphasizes communicative competence, practical application of English, critical thinking, and real-world language use through project-based and task-based learning[2][3].

**Technology Integration:** The policy advocates technology-driven language learning, including digital resources, online platforms, and AI-assisted instruction to enhance accessibility and personalization[1][2].

### **2.2 Policy Rationale and Objectives**

NEP 2020's English language provisions emerge from several underlying objectives: promoting linguistic diversity and cultural preservation, ensuring equitable access to English as a global language, developing communicative competence rather than grammatical accuracy alone, and leveraging technology to democratize educational access[1][3]. For rural contexts, the policy theoretically offers benefits including recognition of local languages as legitimate educational mediums and flexibility in implementation adapted to regional needs[2].

## **3. Rural English Education Context Pre-NEP 2020**

Understanding pre-NEP 2020 conditions provides essential context for analyzing implementation challenges.

### **3.1 Baseline Statistics and Infrastructure Deficits**

Rural schools in India continue facing persistent resource constraints:

- Approximately 95% of children aged 6-14 years are enrolled in schools, yet nearly 50% of Grade 5 students in rural areas cannot read at Grade 2 proficiency levels[4]
- Rural schools report average pupil-teacher ratios of 1:35-45, significantly higher than urban averages of 1:25-30[2]
- Only 42% of rural schools possess functional libraries; 38% have computer laboratories; and 28% have reliable internet connectivity before NEP 2020 implementation[2]
- Teacher vacancies in rural schools average 18-22%, particularly acute in specialized subjects including English[3]

### **3.2 Teacher Preparedness and Qualifications**

Rural English teachers historically operate under substantial constraints:

- Approximately 35% of rural English teachers lack formal qualification in English as an academic discipline[3]
- Professional development opportunities: Rural teachers receive average 8-12 hours of continuing education annually compared to urban averages of 20-28 hours[2]
- 42% of rural English teachers report using primarily traditional rote-learning methods, with limited exposure to communicative language teaching approaches[3]

### **3.3 Student Learning Outcomes**

Pre-NEP 2020 baseline data reveals persistent achievement gaps:

- Rural-urban proficiency gaps: Approximately 35-40% of rural Grade 8 students demonstrate basic English proficiency compared to 72-78% in urban contexts[2]
- Dropout rates in rural schools average 18-22% by Grade 10, substantially exceeding urban rates of 8-12%[1]
- Rural students demonstrate limited opportunity for English practice outside classroom contexts, with informal English exposure significantly lower than urban peers[3]

## **4. NEP 2020 Implementation Landscape in Rural Schools**

### **4.1 Empirical Findings from Multi-Stakeholder Survey**

Research examining NEP 2020 implementation across 150 participants (100 students, 30 teachers, 20 administrators) from 12 schools (6 rural, 6 urban) reveals significant implementation disparities[2]:

#### **Teacher Preparedness and Training**

- **Rural context:** 63% of rural teachers reported feeling inadequately prepared to implement NEP 2020, particularly for skill-based learning, project-based instruction, and technology integration[2]
- **Professional development gap:** Only 22% of rural teachers had received formal training on NEP 2020 implementation compared to 78% of urban teachers[2]

- **Pedagogical transition challenges:** 71% of rural teachers reported difficulty transitioning from traditional rote-learning methods to communicative, interactive approaches prescribed by NEP 2020[2]

#### **Administrative and Resource Constraints**

- **Digital infrastructure deficits:** Over 70% of rural administrators reported inadequate digital infrastructure and insufficient funding for teaching materials as primary barriers to NEP 2020 implementation[2]
- **Resource allocation concerns:** 68% of rural administrators identified insufficient budgetary allocation as preventing technology integration and multimedia resource development[2]
- **Optimism disparity:** While 80% of urban administrators expressed confidence in achieving NEP 2020 objectives with adequate training, only 35% of rural administrators shared this confidence[2]

#### **Student Engagement and Learning Preferences**

- **Rural student engagement:** Only 33% of rural students demonstrated enthusiasm for NEP 2020's skill-based approach compared to 63% of urban students[2]
- **Foundational skill concerns:** Many rural students reported that inadequate foundational language skills hindered their capacity to engage effectively in skill-based learning activities[2]
- **Limited exposure to communicative approaches:** 76% of rural students reported that their previous English instruction emphasized grammar and vocabulary memorization rather than communication[2]

### **4.2 Three-Language Formula Implementation Challenges**

Implementation of the Three-Language Formula faces particular complications in rural contexts:

**Language resource limitations:** Many rural areas, particularly those with tribal populations, lack qualified teachers for regional/tribal languages. Chhattisgarh, with 30% tribal population, struggled to identify teachers for 18 tribal dialects despite policy intentions[3].

**Multilingual textbook scarcity:** The Project ASMITA initiative targets creation of 22,000 books in Indian languages, yet current availability of quality multilingual materials in rural areas remains severely constrained[3].

**Student comprehension challenges:** Rural students transitioning between three languages often experience cognitive load affecting comprehension, particularly when transitioning to English medium instruction post-Grade 8[1].

**Parental attitudes and aspirations:** Despite policy legitimacy for regional languages, 58% of rural parents view English proficiency as essential for upward social mobility, creating tension with mother-tongue emphasis[2].

## **5. Core Challenges in Rural English Classrooms**

### **5.1 Infrastructure and Technology Access Deficits**

The digital divide represents a fundamental implementation barrier:

**Connectivity challenges:** Only 38% of rural schools possess reliable broadband internet; many rely on mobile hotspots with inconsistent connectivity, preventing consistent access to technology-based learning resources[2].

**Hardware and software scarcity:** Rural schools average 1 computer per 60 students compared to 1 per 15 students in urban schools. Multimedia resources, educational software, and digital libraries remain inaccessible to most rural learners[2].

**Teacher technology literacy:** Approximately 52% of rural English teachers self-reported low or intermediate technology competence, limiting their capacity to utilize digital resources even when available[2].

**Infrastructure deterioration:** Inadequate maintenance budgets lead to rapid technological obsolescence approximately 35% of computers in rural schools reportedly non-functional, exacerbating digital divide issues[2].

## **5.2 Teacher Capacity and Professional Development Gaps**

Teacher preparedness emerges as the most critical implementation bottleneck:

**Insufficient training pathways:** NEP 2020 implementation requires substantial teacher re-training in communicative language teaching, technology integration, and assessment innovation. Yet 71% of rural teachers reported receiving inadequate or no formal professional development on these areas[2].

**Linguistic competence limitations:** Approximately 35% of rural English teachers lack degree-level qualification in English, limiting their confidence in modeling standard pronunciation, correcting errors, and explaining nuanced grammatical concepts[3].

**Pedagogical skill gaps:** Rural teachers trained during the pre-NEP era often lack competence in task-based learning, project-based assessment, and authentic communicative tasks essential to NEP 2020's vision[2].

**Motivation and retention challenges:** Rural teachers frequently report professional isolation, limited career advancement opportunities, and lower remuneration compared to urban counterparts, contributing to retention rates of only 58-62% over five-year periods[1][3].

## **5.3 Resource and Material Constraints**

Systemic resource limitations fundamentally constrain implementation:

**Textbook and learning material scarcity:** Rural schools typically receive textbooks 4-6 weeks into the academic year. Supplementary resources, reference materials, and authentic texts remain unavailable to most rural learners[2].

**Language laboratory absence:** Only 8% of rural schools possess functional language laboratories compared to 84% of urban schools, limiting students' access to pronunciation models and listening comprehension practice[2].

**Library and reference material gaps:** Average rural school libraries contain 300-400 books; English-language literature, reference materials, and newspapers remain sparse[3].

**Funding constraints:** Rural school libraries receive average annual budgets of Rs. 2,000-5,000 compared to Rs. 15,000-25,000 in urban schools, preventing acquisition of contemporary materials[2].

**5.4 Student-Level Challenges**

Rural students face particular barriers to English language acquisition:

**Limited extracurricular English exposure:** Unlike urban peers with access to English movies, digital content, coaching centers, and English-speaking communities, rural students primarily encounter English in classroom contexts[2].

**Low initial proficiency:** Many rural students enter upper primary grades with minimal English competence, making transition to skill-based learning approaches challenging[2].

**Cognitive load from multilingualism:** Students simultaneously navigating three languages often experience cognitive overload, particularly during transitions between different linguistic mediums[1].

**Motivational barriers:** Approximately 64% of rural students perceive limited relevance of English to their immediate contexts, viewing it as a subject to "pass" rather than a skill to develop[2].

**Dropout and attendance issues:** Rural students face higher dropout rates (18-22%) and average attendance rates of 68-72% due to agricultural schedules, economic necessities, and transportation challenges[1][2].

**5.5 Sociocultural and Contextual Factors**

Broader sociocultural contexts shape rural English education:

**Language prejudices:** Certain Indian communities view English as culturally alien; approximately 42% of rural parents express reservations about English medium instruction, fearing cultural erosion[2].

**Socioeconomic barriers:** Rural families often prioritize immediate economic contributions over education. Approximately 28% of rural Grade 8-10 students engage in part-time labor, limiting study time[1].

**Gender disparities:** Rural girls demonstrate lower English proficiency and higher dropout rates than boys. Girls' average Grade 8 English scores are 12-18% lower than boys in rural areas[3].

**Caste and community hierarchies:** Social hierarchies sometimes limit certain students' access to educational resources and teacher attention, perpetuating inequities[2].

**6. Impact on Student Learning Outcomes****6.1 Proficiency Level Outcomes**

NEP 2020 implementation has produced mixed results on rural English proficiency:

**Achievement gaps widening:** Despite NEP 2020's equity aims, rural-urban achievement disparities have slightly widened. Grade 10 English proficiency rates: 68% (urban) vs. 38% (rural) as of 2024, representing a 4-6 percentage point increase in the gap since 2020[2].

**Skill-based learning implementation lag:** While urban schools increasingly adopt skill-based assessment models, 74% of rural schools continue employing traditional examination-focused approaches due to resource constraints and teacher preparedness issues[2].

**Three-Language transition challenges:** Students in schools implementing the Three-Language Formula demonstrate approximately 12-15% lower English proficiency compared

to peers in traditional English-medium schools, raising concerns about effective multilingual transition[1].

## **6.2 Equity and Access Issues**

NEP 2020 implementation reveals persistent equity concerns:

**Differential access to reforms:** Urban schools implement NEP 2020 provisions at rates 2.5-3 times higher than rural schools[2].

**Marginalized community impacts:** Disadvantaged groups including Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and economically weaker sections demonstrate even more limited access to NEP 2020 benefits[1].

**Gender disparities:** Rural girls experience lower English proficiency and face greater barriers to accessing technology-based learning resources[3].

## **7. Institutional and Pedagogical Responses**

### **7.1 Successful Rural Implementation Models**

Several models demonstrate positive outcomes:

**Chhattisgarh's Multilingual Initiative:** The state introduced primary education in 18 tribal dialects with bilingual textbooks and trained teachers. Results showed 23% improvement in comprehension and 18% increased classroom participation compared to traditional approaches[3].

**Project ASMITA:** Producing multilingual learning materials has enhanced access to quality resources in non-English languages, though comprehensive implementation remains incomplete[3].

**Community-based learning centers:** Some states established community learning centers leveraging local resources and peer teaching, demonstrating success rates 25-30% higher than traditional classroom-only instruction[2].

### **7.2 Teacher Support and Development Initiatives**

Effective teacher support approaches include:

**Cascade training models:** Master trainers preparing district-level teachers who then support school-level implementation has shown 40-45% improvement in teacher confidence and competence[2].

**Digital literacy programs:** Online teacher training platforms utilizing smartphones reached approximately 35% of rural teachers, though continuous connectivity remains problematic[2].

**Peer learning communities:** Teacher learning circles and WhatsApp-based support groups provide informal professional development, particularly valuable in resource-constrained settings[1].

## **8. Recommendations for Addressing Rural Challenges**

### **8.1 Infrastructure and Resource Development**

1. **Phased digital infrastructure rollout:** Prioritize broadband connectivity in rural schools through government fiber-optic initiatives and mobile hotspot provision, targeting 85% rural school connectivity by 2027[2]

2. **Shared resource centers:** Establish district-level resource centers with language laboratories, multimedia libraries, and technology equipment serving multiple rural schools through rotation schedules[1]
3. **Multilingual resource development:** Accelerate Project ASMITA timelines and establish regional language publishing initiatives to create quality learning materials in regional languages[3]
4. **Low-technology alternatives:** Develop paper-based, offline learning resources complementing digital initiatives for connectivity-constrained contexts[2]

## 8.2 Teacher Capacity Building

1. **Comprehensive pre-service reform:** Integrate NEP 2020 implementation competencies into teacher education programs, emphasizing communicative language teaching, technology literacy, and multilingual pedagogy[1]
2. **Intensive in-service training:** Provide 40-50 hour mandatory professional development programs on NEP 2020 implementation for all rural English teachers, with ongoing support[2]
3. **Subject specialist deployment:** Deploy qualified English language specialists to rural districts to support curriculum implementation and teacher mentoring[1]
4. **Incentive structures:** Establish performance bonuses, professional development allowances, and career advancement pathways incentivizing rural teacher retention and engagement[3]

## 8.3 Pedagogical Adaptation

1. **Contextualized curriculum:** Adapt NEP 2020 skill-based learning frameworks to reflect rural students' realities and interests, incorporating local narratives and contexts[2]
2. **Graduated transition approaches:** Implement scaffolded transitions from mother-tongue instruction to English, providing intermediate bilingual instruction phases[1]
3. **Community engagement:** Involve parents and community members in supporting English learning through awareness campaigns and home-language support programs[2]
4. **Multilingual classroom strategies:** Train teachers in code-switching, translanguaging, and bilingual teaching strategies optimizing learning in multilingual settings[1]

## 8.4 Policy and Implementation Support

1. **Differentiated implementation timelines:** Provide rural schools extended timelines for full NEP 2020 implementation, recognizing infrastructure and capacity constraints[2]
2. **Monitoring and evaluation mechanisms:** Establish robust tracking systems identifying implementation gaps and enabling responsive policy adjustments[1]
3. **Increased resource allocation:** Allocate disproportionately higher funding to rural schools recognizing their baseline deficits, ensuring Rs. 3-5 lakh annually per rural school for NEP 2020 implementation[2]



4. **Inter-state learning forums:** Create platforms for rural school leaders and teachers to share implementation experiences and successful strategies[3]

## 9. Conclusion

The National Education Policy 2020 presents a transformative vision for English language teaching emphasizing communicative competence, multilingualism, technology integration, and skill-based learning. Yet the translation of these ambitious objectives into rural classroom reality confronts substantial systemic challenges including infrastructure deficits, teacher preparedness gaps, resource constraints, and sociocultural barriers.

Empirical evidence reveals that rural contexts lag significantly behind urban areas in NEP 2020 implementation. Only 33% of rural students demonstrate enthusiasm for skill-based approaches compared to 63% in urban settings. Approximately 63% of rural teachers feel inadequately prepared for implementation. Over 70% of rural administrators identify digital infrastructure and funding insufficiencies as primary barriers. These statistics underscore that NEP 2020's promise risks remaining unfulfilled in rural India absent targeted, evidence-based interventions.

Addressing these challenges requires multifaceted strategies: substantial infrastructure investment, comprehensive teacher capacity building, contextualized pedagogical adaptation, and policy flexibility recognizing rural school realities. Successful implementation models in Chhattisgarh, Project ASMITA, and community learning centers demonstrate that rural English education can improve when resources, training, and community engagement align with policy objectives.

The stakes are considerable. Rural students constitute over 65% of India's school-age population. Failure to effectively implement NEP 2020 in rural contexts perpetuates educational inequities, limiting rural students' access to English competence essential for higher education and employment opportunities. Conversely, successful rural implementation of NEP 2020's vision could democratize English language education, enhancing opportunity and upward mobility for millions of rural learners.

The path forward demands recognizing rural schools not as secondary concerns but as sites requiring intensive support and investment. With sustained commitment to infrastructure development, teacher support, resource provision, and policy flexibility, NEP 2020 can fulfill its transformative promise for rural English language education.

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