



Reimagining Foundational Literacy and Numeracy in India: A Conceptual Analysis of the NIPUN Bharat Mission in the Light of NEP-2020

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Abstract

Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN) has become a key agenda in the Indian school education system, especially following the identification of learning gaps at the primary level. In an effort to recognise the importance of early learning outcomes, the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 has made FLN the centre of the educational reform and operationalised it by introducing the NIPUN Bharat Mission in India. In this context, the current conceptual study aims at reimagining FLN in India through a critical analysis of the NIPUN Bharat Mission in the context of NEP 2020. It discusses the importance of FLN, outlines the vision and main elements of the NIPUN Bharat Mission, and examines the pedagogical, curricular, and assessment reforms suggested under NEP 2020, identifying the significant conceptual and implementation-level challenges facing the realisation of universal FLN. The study employs a qualitative research design, conducted through the close examination of policy documents, including NEP 2020, the guidelines of the NIPUN Bharat Mission, governmental reports, and existing literature on the topic of early childhood education and foundational learning. The shifting conception of FLN is interpreted through a thematic and descriptive approach where competency-based learning, experiential learning, continuous assessment, teacher preparedness and systemic support mechanisms are put into focus.

The study shows that the NEP-2020 policy and the NIPUN Bharat Mission jointly signify a paradigm shift from content-driven schooling towards outcome-based and progressively appropriate learning in the primary years. Although the policy framework highly focuses on child-centred pedagogy, multilingual education, and formative assessment, the challenges associated with the conceptual issues of teacher capacity, contextual diversity, monitoring processes and fair implementation across regions and school typologies are also noted in the paper. The study finds that the implementation of universal FLN should not be limited solely to sound policy design but also to institutional support, capacity building and the balance of the policy purpose and classroom practice.

Keywords: Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN), National Education Policy 2020 (NEP-2020), NIPUN Bharat Mission, Competency-Based Learning, Child-Centred Pedagogy, Assessment Reforms

Introduction

It is accepted that education is the keystone to individual and national growth (Benveniste, 2025). The early years of schooling are extremely important among the other stages of schooling, as they provide the cognitive, linguistic

and numerical basis on which all subsequent learning will be based. Over the last few years, the conceptualisation of Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN), which can be described as the capacity of a child to read, write, and do simple mathematical operations by the early grades, has gained more and more attention. Lack of these prerequisite skills has been noted as a primary obstacle to valuable learning, educational achievement and general educational equity. The issue of lack of learning outcomes at the primary level has been a concern in India, even after the school enrolment and infrastructure witnessed massive growth in the last few decades. Different national and international investigations have consistently highlighted the fact that a significant percentage of children in lower classes struggle with basic reading and counting skills. Such learning deficiencies, if not addressed at the early stage, with the passage of time, lead to poor academic achievement and increased dropout rates as well. Recognising this serious issue, the Government of India has placed Foundational Literacy and Numeracy at the core of educational reform through the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 and the launch of the NIPUN Bharat Mission. The 2020 policy marks a significant shift in school education in India by explicitly acknowledging that quality education cannot be achieved without strong foundations in literacy and numeracy. Thus, quality education cannot be achieved without a foundation of literacy and numeracy (Hossain et al., 2023). In this connection, the NEP-2020 policy highlighted that the lack of FLN skills is considered the biggest obstacle to equity, excellence, and lifelong learning. The policy recommended that every child should achieve basic literacy and numeracy by 2025. This policy is a shift in contrast to previous policy frameworks and significantly focuses on access, enrolment and curriculum coverage to an outcome-based model that considers the learning competencies and the child's holistic development. In an attempt to implement the NEP 2020 policy, the Ministry of Education introduced the NIPUN Bharat Mission (National Initiative of Proficiency in Reading with Understanding and Numeracy). The mission suggests a guided and time-limited structure that seeks to make sure that all children achieve grade-level FLN proficiencies in the foundational years. NIPUN Bharat is not just a programme, but a national mission program which is holistic in its approach as it incorporates a curriculum reform, pedagogical change, assessment practice, teacher capacity development, and systemic monitoring system. It focuses on activity-based, culturally responsive, and joyful (play-based) learning experiences that are progressively appropriate. Foundational Literacy and Numeracy under NEP 2020 and NIPUN Bharat looks beyond the mechanical skills. Literacy is not just seen as being able to decode text, but as the ability to understand, interpret and express ideas. In the same way, numeracy is considered to be the skill of perception of numbers, the skills to perform elementary operations and the mathematical cognition in practical

situations. This concept denotes a transition in competency-based learning, in which learning outcomes are coordinated with the real-world implementation and cognitive growth, in contrast to rote memory. The main distinction between the FLN structure in NEP 2020 and the one before is that the former focuses on the foundational phase that incorporates pre-primary up to Grade 2. The stage is also known as a key period in terms of brain development, language acquisition and learning habits (NEP-2020). The policy recognises the significance of early childhood care and education (ECCE) as a component of foundational learning, and has promoted a smooth transition between pre-school and first primary grades. NIPUN Bharat attempts to support this continuum through harmonising the curricular, learning outcomes, and pedagogical practices in the foundational years. Another important part of the FLN agenda is pedagogical transformation (NIPUN BHARAT MISSION). NEP 2020 and NIPUN Bharat believe in learning techniques that are child-centred, experiential and play-based that promote curiosity, engagement, and conceptual knowledge. The old-fashioned teacher-centred classes and textbook-based learning are gradually considered ineffective in building the basic skills. Rather, the policy encourages interactive learning conditions in which children actively build knowledge using stories, games, activities, and collaborative activities. The transition to the home or mother tongue as the medium of instruction in the early stages of learning is also highlighted to be used as a way of improving understanding and mental growth. Reforms in assessment are very important in facilitating the FLN outcome. NEP 2020 recommended the transition from summative examination to the continuous, formative, and competency-based assessment practice. Under the NIPUN Bharat, the assessment is considered to be a means of facilitating learning as opposed to just evaluating performance. Constant student tracking, diagnostic testing, and feedback systems can be used to assist teachers in observing learning deficiencies in students at an early stage and suggest specific assistance (NEP-2020). Preparation and professional capacity of teachers are also well-known as the essential factors of successful implementation of FLN initiatives. NEP 2020 recognises the fact that to meet universal foundational literacy and numeracy, teachers must be well-trained, motivated and supported to know the progress of children, pedagogy and assessment. The NIPUN Bharat Mission gives great importance to continuous professional growth, mentoring, as well as academic support to teachers, especially those who teach at the foundational level. Nevertheless, the issues connected to the teacher workload, quality of training, and contextual diversity are still of great concern. Several key objectives highlighted by the Mission are clearly understood with the help of Figure 1.

Fig. 1: Objectives of NIPUN Bharat Mission

- Inclusive Classroom Environments
- Motivating Early Learners to be Independent Readers and Writers
- Developing Numeracy and Spatial Skills
- High-Quality, Culturally Responsive Materials
- Ongoing Teacher Training
- Involving All Stakeholders
- Assessments That Help Learning
- Tracking Learning Progress

In spite of the comprehensive policy vision and structured outline provided by NIPUN Bharat and NEP 2020, the implementation of FLN initiatives faces numerous conceptual and practical challenges. It was highlighted that India's vast socio-economic conditions, linguistic diversity, and regional variations presented difficulties in translating national policies into effective classroom practices. It is also suggested that issues related to resource availability, infrastructure, teacher deployment, monitoring mechanisms and parental involvement can influence the effectiveness of FLN interventions. Furthermore, ensuring equity in initial learning for students from disadvantaged backgrounds, marginalised communities, and first-generation learners remains a critical concern. In this connection, there was a need for conceptual clarity and critical reflection on the understanding of Foundational Literacy and Numeracy in India. In conclusion, the present paper aimed to examine ways to achieve early learning outcomes and enhance the quality of school education in India by identifying key challenges and presenting strategic recommendations.

Rationale of the Study

Foundation Literacy and Numeracy (FLN) has been recommended as the core of all future learning and a key factor in long-term educational achievement in children. The deficits in learning among children in India at the lower primary level have raised serious concerns about the quality and efficiency of school education (Kumar, 2023). With high enrolment rates, it is noted that a good number of children do not get basic reading and numeracy skills at the early levels of school education. Keeping these issues in consideration, the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 makes the universal achievement of FLN the centre of educational transformation and recommends NIPUN Bharat Mission as a national initiative to overcome the issue of foundational learning. So, in this connection, the study rationale is

based on the need to critically analyse and outline the conceptual basis of FLN as it is proposed under NEP 2020, with the operationalisation of the concept using the NIPUN Bharat Mission. Although policy documents suggest specific direction and objectives, there is an increasing interest in the way in which these frameworks should be coherently and integratively interpreted as to what lies behind them in terms of educational philosophy, pedagogical orientation, and systemic implications. A conceptual analysis can be used to unravel such major concepts as competency-based learning, child-centred pedagogy, continuous assessment and teacher preparedness, which form the core of the FLN agenda. Moreover, the NIPUN Bharat Mission is a radical change from the previous modes, which have more of an access, infrastructure, and curriculum coverage orientation. It prioritises learning outcomes, instruction in the classroom and regular tracking of their performance. Nevertheless, in order to understand this determined vision of the policy into practice, it is necessary to have conceptual clarity of the work of educators, administrators and policymakers. Thus, by reimagining FLN through a conceptual lens, the current research seeks to bridge the gap between policy intent and practical understanding, thereby contributing to more well-versed implementation and decision-making. The diversity and complexity of the Indian education system, in which differences in socioeconomic status, language backgrounds (Deshmukh, 2023), and institutional capabilities affect the success of foundational learning programs, is also what justified the study. The critical reflection of the issues of equity, inclusion, and contextual relevance can be understood with the help of a conceptual analysis of FLN in the context of NEP 2020 and NIPUN Bharat. In conclusion, the rationale of the research lies in its potential to strengthen the conceptual understanding of foundational learning and support the effective process of the transformative vision of NEP-2020 through the NIPUN Bharat Mission.

Research Gap

An overview of the literature and current policy documents indicates some gaps in research about Foundational Literacy and Numeracy in the framework of NEP 2020 and the NIPUN Bharat Mission. Such gaps can be interpreted with the help of the following points.

- a) **Inadequate Conceptual analyses:** Although some of the studies have investigated the learning outcomes and implementation issues of FLN programmes, no detailed conceptual framework has been developed for the vision of NEP 2020 with the operational structure of the NIPUN Bharat Mission.
- b) **Policy Practice Disconnect:** Existing research mostly focuses either on policy formulation or on classroom-level practices, while giving limited

attention to how policy intentions are conceptually framed and implemented during the primary stages.

c) **Underdeveloped Pedagogical and Assessment Aspects:** There is limited conceptual literature investigating the implications of play-based learning, competency-based assessment and child-centred pedagogy for FLN as proposed under NEP 2020.

Methodology

This research paper employed a qualitative conceptual research design to examine Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN) within the framework of the NIPUN Bharat Mission and the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. The study is conceptual because it is not based on primary data collection in the field. Rather, it is concerned with systemic analysis, interpretation and synthesis of available policy documents (NEP-2020) and academic literature. The paper aimed to explain important concepts, policy goals, and frameworks of implementation regarding foundational learning.

Sources of Data: The research was purely based on the secondary data sources, which consist of: The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 document, National Framework towards Foundational Literacy and Numeracy, The government reports, guidelines, and policy documents by the Ministry of Education, review studies, and research papers in the areas of FLN, early childhood education and learning outcomes, and Reports of national and international organisations related to foundational learning.

Method of Data Analysis: The thematic and descriptive analysis was used to analyse the existing literature and policy documents. The essential themes of the study were defined by the idea of FLN, curriculum and pedagogy, reforms in the assessment, teacher preparation, institutional support, and implementation issues were outlined and discussed systematically. Comparative interpretation was used in order to create an alignment between the vision of NEP 2020 and the operational plans of the NIPUN Bharat Mission.

Scope and Delimitation of the Study

The study is limited in its scope to the conceptual and policy level analysis of Foundational Literacy and Numeracy in the Indian school education system. There is no empirical validation, field investigation, or statistical analysis in the study. Only the officially available documentation, published literature were analysed in a detailed way.

Research Approach

The study follows an interpretative and analytical approach, enabling a critical examination of policy intent, conceptual clarity, and potential implementation gaps related to FLN.

Objectives of the Study

The present conceptual paper is undertaken with the following objectives:

- a) To investigate the significance of Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN) as envisaged in the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020.
- b) To analyse the key components of the NIPUN Bharat Mission in achieving Foundational Literacy and Numeracy in India.
- c) To critically examine the assessment reforms, pedagogical, and curricular reforms related to FLN proposed under NEP 2020.
- d) Critically analyse the SWOT technique on Foundational Literacy and Numeracy in the Context of NEP 2020.
- e) To identify major conceptual challenges and implementation concerns in achieving Foundational Literacy and Numeracy.

All above-mentioned objectives were achieved by a structured conceptual analysis, which entails an integrated review of the policy, theoretical knowledge and critical thinking. The paper used major policy texts like the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 and the NIPUN Bharat Mission instructions to analyse the vision, assumptions, and accessible strategies concerning Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN). The literature, research studies and reports on the relevance of FLN at the national and international levels were analyzed to contextualise the FLN in the larger context of education and development.

Moreover, the paper used critical reflection of the pedagogical practices, assessment practices, and systemic arrangements suggested in early grades between the policy purposes and classroom practices. Let's analyse the research objectives of the study in detail:

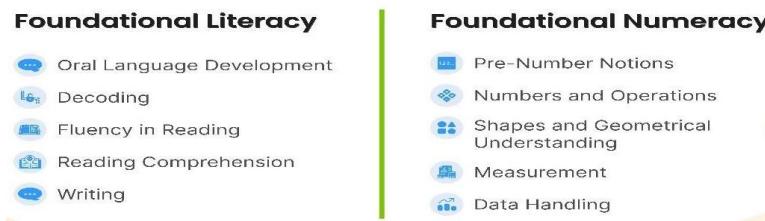
To investigate the significance of Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN) as envisaged in the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020.

Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN) takes a central position in the National Educational Policy (NEP) 2020, marking a shift in the thinking and vision of school education in India. FLN is conceptualised in NEP 2020 as the key skill of children to comprehend and read, write down their ideas, and solve simple mathematical tasks by the end of the foundational stage (Ministry of Human Resource Development [MHRD], 2020). In contrast to previous policy frameworks that primarily focused on enrolment, curriculum coverage, and examination performance (Shubhada et al., 2021), NEP 2020 clearly suggested that the lack of foundational skills is a significant obstruction to the effectiveness of subsequent schooling. The policy identifies literacy as a multidimensional variable that involves decoding, comprehension, vocabulary, oral expression and communication. Numeracy skills are also considered to be the perception of numbers (Purpura et al., 2011), quantities, operations and solving problems in the real world (MHRD, 2020). This

conceptualisation is consistent with the international view of early learning, the cognitive and reasoning skills are developed instead of rote learning (UNESCO, 2019). NEP 2020 recognises that children who fail to gain the basic skills in the lower grades find it difficult to adapt the excellent learning in the later stages, which will result in repetitions, uninterestedness, and dropouts (MHRD, 2020). Hence, FLN is set to be accomplished as a condition of quality and equity in education. NEP-2020 also puts FLN in context with Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE), which puts greater emphasis on appropriate, play-based, and child-centred learning in the foundational stage. Through giving FLN a priority, the policy aims at turning early schooling into an engaging and inclusive learning process that facilitates lifelong learning and holistic development (MHRD, 2020).

To analyse the key components of the NIPUN Bharat Mission in achieving universal FLN in India.

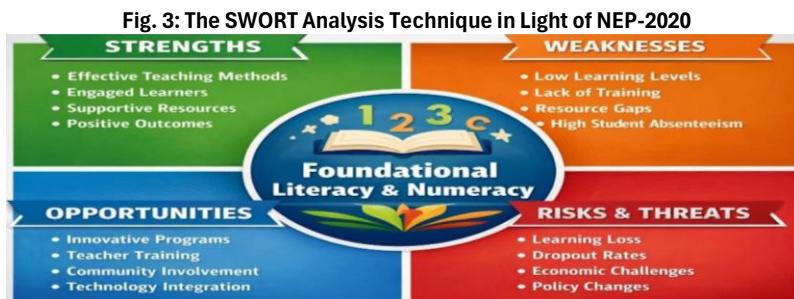
The NIPUN Bharat Mission was introduced in order to implement the NEP 2020 objectives and to resolve the countrywide issue of low foundational learning outcomes. The mission focuses on the objective of making sure that all children acquire reading and numeracy skills at the end of Grade 3 (Ministry of Education, 2021). It is based on the fact that its vision is that early learning outputs are the foundation of quality education and national development. The mission describes measurable and specific learning objectives to be achieved by each of the foundational-stage grades with a focus on reading comprehension, writing skills, number sense, and elementary arithmetic skills (Ministry of Education, 2021). Such results give a systematic guideline on curriculum development, classroom teaching, and evaluation. One of the key components of NIPUN Bharat, which helps to achieve the FLN in India, is that it focuses on child-centred and experiential pedagogy. The mission fosters enthusiastic learning in stories, play, activities, and life contexts, which are in line with the development theories of learning (Piaget, 1970; Vygotsky, 1978). It is also strongly encouraged that the mother tongue or home language should be used in the early grades to achieve better understanding and cognitive growth (Shankhasindhu, 2025). Another pillar of the mission is assessment and monitoring mechanisms. NIPUN Bharat fosters formative and diagnostic testing (key elements) to identify the existing learning gaps and suggest support on time (Ministry of Education, 2021). Professional development of teachers, parental involvement and community involvement are also highlighted as key facilitators of elementary learning.

Fig. 2: Key components of Foundational Literacy and Numeracy

To critically examine the pedagogical, curricular, and assessment reforms related to FLN under NEP 2020

Pedagogy, curriculum, and assessment changes are introduced by NIPUN Bharat Mission in light of NEP-2020 to encourage FLN in India. The policy supports play-based, activity-based, and experiential approaches to learning, which are considered the key forms of learning in young children (MHRD, 2020). The curricula change is aimed at decreasing the content overload and paying attention to the key competencies. The foundational curriculum is made flexible, integrated, and aligned with well-defined learning outcomes according to NIPUN Bharat (Ministry of Education, 2021). This type of methodology emphasises knowledge, creativity and freedom of the learner. Reforms in assessment have been a significant change in terms of summative assessment to continuous and formative assessment practices. NEP 2020 considers assessment as a means of learning and not evaluation (Ministry of Human Resource Development [MHRD], 2020). NIPUN Bharat implements this vision using classroom-based assessment, observation and feedback. Nevertheless, studies show that the successful implementation of these reforms is connected with the existence of many teacher training and systemic support (NCERT, 2022).

Critically analyse the SWOT technique on Foundational Literacy and Numeracy in the Context of NEP 2020



A SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) analysis technique can be used in the context of the FLN initiative as a part of NEP 2020 and the NIPUN Bharat Mission to have a comprehensive understanding of it.

- a) **Strengths:** The positive aspects of the FLN framework are the high level of commitment to the policies, clear learning objectives, and the coordination on the national level. NEP 2020 is focused on FLN as one of the priorities; therefore, it has political and administrative backing. NIPUN Bharat is designed in a way that its structure incorporates specific competencies and monitoring systems, which enhance the coherence of implementation.
- b) **Weaknesses:** Systemic weaknesses in the policies deal with issues like teachers' preparedness, inequitable distribution of resources and lack of infrastructure. A large number of teachers need a substantial amount of training to make use of child-centred pedagogy and formative assessment. Also, differences in school facilities and learning resources may become a hindrance to implementing the FLN in schools (Ige et al., 2024).
- c) **Opportunities:** The opportunities can be seen in greater attention to policies, technological integration, and community involvement. Online learning tools, educator education systems, and data monitors can be used to improve the FLN performance. There is also scope for collaboration between schools, parents, NGOs and local communities through the mission.
- d) **Threats:** The socioeconomic inconsistency, linguistic variation, and external influences such as pandemics are some of the challenges. Lacking steady commitment and situational transformations, FLN initiatives might be inconsistent or insufficient. The long-term commitment, flexibility, and inclusive strategies will be needed to address these threats.

To identify major conceptual challenges and implementation concerns in achieving FLN and to suggest policy-level and practice-oriented strategies.

Even though NEP 2020 and the NIPUN Bharat Mission suggested a framework of Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN) that is thoroughly planned, it has numerous issues in interpretation and proper implementation. The competency-based learning and formative assessment are new concepts that teachers and school administrators struggle to apply in their day-to-day teaching processes, since they need to be guided accordingly. There are numerous practical issues that have an impact on implementation. Most teachers are already overworked, and a significant number of them are not

trained to learn new teaching techniques. Students are not easy to be given attention individually due to an unacceptable teacher-student ratio. Moreover, parents tend not to be actively engaged in the learning of their children, which decreases the success of the FLN activities. It is even worse in the rural and marginalised regions where poverty, absence of resources, and linguistic diversity make the situation harder since the children might not speak the same language as in schools. Professional training should be on a regular basis, not a one-time training. To overcome such serious issues, schools are supposed to make plans for their local requirements, and adequate learning materials and resources should be availed. Teacher mentoring, teacher collaborations, parent involvement programmes and the use of teaching resources that are localised can be recommended in this context. Working jointly on these problems, the FLN initiative will be able to bring the transformative goals of NEP 2020 into practice.

Conclusion

The current conceptual study critically examines Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN) in India through an analysis of the NIPUN Bharat Mission in the context of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. The overall aim of the study was to rethink FLN as an element of the Indian educational change, through the lens of the conceptual foundation of the concept, policy vision, pedagogical reforms, systemic strengths and weaknesses, and the critical implementation issues. The study identifies the core role of FLN in enhancing the quality, equity, and long-term learning outcomes through the use of policy documents, scholarly literature, and analytical frameworks. The paper points out that NEP-2020 can bring a significant change in the education policy of India, where Foundational Literacy and Numeracy are put at the heart of education reform in schools (Swargiary, 2024). Previously, the education policies mainly concentrated on enrolment, access, and curriculum achievement with little regard to the actual learning outcomes. Conversely, NEP-2020 clearly recognises that it is impossible to achieve meaningful learning without children developing strong foundational skills in the first few grades. The policy is conceptualising FLN as a multi-dimensional construct to encompass reading with understanding, writing abilities, oral expression, number sensation and logical thought and problem solving. Connecting FLN to cognitive development, emotional health, and lifelong learning, NEP 2020 acknowledges foundational learning as an educational as well as social priority. The policy also focuses on the fact that learning disparities, which occur at an early stage when not addressed, become gradually higher as time goes on and lead to inequality and low educational achievements. Based on this vision, the NIPUN Bharat Mission is examined as the framework of operation and implementation of the FLN objectives of NEP 2020. The mission offers a systematic, result-driven, and time-limited process of

attaining universal FLN before the end of Grade 3. It has clear grade-based learning outcomes, facilitates competency-based advancement, and emphasises ongoing evaluation. NIPUN Bharat is also encouraging joyful, child-centred, activity-based learning, which is an indication of the breakdown of rote memorisation and transition to experiential and meaningful learning (Haoyue & Oyam, 2024). NEP 2020 and NIPUN Bharat represent a consistent policy structure that can support the empowerment of the early learning foundations nationwide. The paper also examines the pedagogical, curricular and assessment reforms related to the FLN agenda. Pedagogically, the focus on play-based, experiential and interactive learning is in line with the recognised theories of child development. Reform within the curriculum is meant to minimise the overload of content and focus on the key competencies so that learners can have an in-depth knowledge of content rather than a surface knowledge. The evaluation is also being redefined in terms of assessment reforms and especially on the emphasis on both formative and diagnostic assessment, which places evaluation as a continuous process that aids learning, but not a judgment of performance. All these reforms encourage the inclusive, friendly, and supportive classroom experiences among learners. The study, however, warns that the success of these reforms is highly dependent on the preparedness of teachers and institutional support. The new role of teachers will include facilitator, mentor, and assessor, which require prolonged professional growth, academic assistance, and resources. When we apply the technique of SWOT analysis to the policy framework. The strengths are high political commitment, strategic policy direction, coordination in the country, as well as the elaborated guidelines within the NIPUN Bharat Mission. The given factors provide a great basis for the mass educational change. Nevertheless, lack of balanced teacher capacity, infrastructural disparity, class size and teaching-learning resources are weaknesses that create huge challenges. As for the opportunity dimension is concerned, the utilisation of digital means to offer teacher training, monitor learning outcomes, and engage the community more is also identified by the study. Meanwhile, the threats, including socio-economic differences, language differences, and regional inequalities, make standard implementation challenging and require flexible and locally adaptive solutions. The paper also talks about important conceptual and implementation issues in the realisation of universal FLN. Competency-based learning, child-centred pedagogy, and formative assessment are key elements that are suggested by policy. The realisation of FLN goals is also hampered by implementation issues like the workload, the scarcity of instructional resources, the impact of COVID-19 (Lynch et al., 2023), the lack of parental support, and administrative burdens. Many basic challenges are faced by rural, remote, and economically disadvantaged areas in India (Chan & Rao, 2023).

In order to overcome those obstacles, the paper focuses on the importance of a multi-level and cooperative strategy. Schools should have good academic leadership, mentoring and conducive learning conditions at the institutional level. On a classroom level, the teachers need practical tools, teaching materials in context, and ongoing feedback systems. Home environment plays an important role in early learning (Kumar & Behera, 2022). The research also brings out the role of parental and community participation in the process of supporting foundational learning outside the classroom, and particularly in the primary years. Equity is cited as one of the key issues in the realisation of universal FLN (Deshmukh, 2023). The research believes that it is not possible to reform the foundation of learning without taking into consideration the needs of the first-generation learners. Though both NEP 2020 and NIPUN Bharat are aware of such issues, their implementation will rely on specific actions, inclusive approaches, and ongoing evaluation of the learning outcomes. The need to provide equity in FLN is put across as both a social justice issue and a prerequisite to national development and social cohesion. To sum up, the paper investigates that Foundational Literacy and Numeracy are the cornerstones of the education system in India. Combined, NEP 2020 and the NIPUN Bharat Mission provide a radical vision that places emphasis on early learning, competency-based learning, and child-centred pedagogy. Yet, to translate this vision into reality, there is a need to have a long-term commitment, systemic coherence, and responsiveness to context. Empowered teachers, supportive institutions, active participation of the community and long-term policy support are needed to strengthen FLN. With a conceptual rethinking of FLN, the paper highlights the fact that the policy intent should be replaced by meaningful and sustained educational change in India.

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Dr Aasia Maqbool is a Senior Assistant Professor in the Department of Education, University of Kashmir, Srinagar. She has been teaching various PG and UG Courses in the Department such as Psychological Foundation of Education, Guidance and Counselling, Mental Hygiene, creativity and Education and Measurement and Evaluation. She obtained M.Ed and M.A. degrees from the University of Kashmir. She has been awarded Gold Medal for securing first position at masters level and qualified state level examination SET in 2010 and reputed national level examination UGC NET in 2012. She started her research career in the same University to obtain M.Phil. degree on the topic "Self Concept, Mental Health, and Academic Achievement of Orphan and Non Orphan Adolescents". She worked for her Ph. D on the topic, "Self Esteem, Depression, Academic Anxiety and Academic Achievement of Orphan Adolescents". She has published many research papers in the reputed journals, co-authored 3 books and attended many national and international conferences. She has worked as subject expert of many e-contents under MHRD and MOOCs. She is the course coordinator of four credit MOOC course "Psychological Foundation of Education" and " Development of education system in India. She is working as Principal Investigator and COPI for the project funded by NCERT, New Delhi.

Dr Altaf Ahmad Sheikh is currently working as a Research Assistant on a project funded by ICSSR. He has completed M.A. (Sociology), B.Ed., and M.Ed. degrees from the University of Kashmir and has qualified UGC-NET (Education) in June 2019 and UGC-JRF (Education) in November 2020. He was awarded an Integrated M.Phil/Ph.D on 09/10/2025, on the title

“Loneliness, Mental Health, and Study Habits among College-going Students Addicted to Social Networking Sites.” He has taught as a Lecturer in Education for the B.Ed. Programme at Green Valley College of Education, Dhobiwan Tangmarg from March 2019 to August 2020. He has contributed to the development of MOOCs and e-contents as a content writer and presenter on topics related to Vedic, Brahmanistic, and Buddhist philosophy and served as an assistant lecturer for the MOOC “Psychology of Individual Differences” from July to December 2025. He has authored a book on the educational philosophy of M.K. Gandhi, contributed several book chapters on topics including New Education Policy 2020 and digital learning impacts, and has published many research papers on different issues in reputed journals. He has presented papers at national and international conferences and participated in workshops and webinars on research methodology and holistic education. Currently, he is working on the ICSSR-funded project titled “Achievement of FLN Goals under NIPUN Bharat Mission in the context of NEP-2020.”

Dr Rasak Annayat, Assistant Professor Department of English Kupwara Campus University of Kashmir. Earlier he was an Assistant Professor of English Literature in the Department of Humanities, Social Science and Management, National Institute of Technology, Srinagar (India) and Institute of Technology, Zakura Campus, University of Kashmir.

Dr Rasak has been teaching for the last 11 years and has been rated as an excellent teacher by students in the various surveys conducted by the National Institute of Technology, Srinagar and University of Kashmir from time to time. He teaches Introduction to Social Sciences. Communication skills, British Poetry, British Drama, English for Engineers and Professional Communication. Dr Rasak is the author of several, articles and research papers. His research interests include Post Colonial literature, ELT and Language Education. He has participated in a number of national and international seminars and made numerous presentations at various conference and workshops. He has worked in E-content development, as (Subject Expert) through Information Communication Technology (NME-ICT) launched by Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India, with EMMRC, University of Kashmir. Rasak Annayat has completed two research projects granted by NCERT, New Delhi and ICSSR Indian Council of Social Sciences Research Ministry of Education, New Delhi. Rasak Annayat did his M. A (English) from the University of Kashmir and obtained his M.Ed from LPU Jalander and PhD in English Literature. Besides, he has obtained Post Graduate in Journalism and Mass Communication (PGJMC) and Post Graduate Diploma in Higher Education from IGNOU.