

Assessment Reforms in the Indian Education System under the National Education Policy 2020

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ABSTRACT

The Indian education system is undergoing a major transformation with the promotion of holistic reforms in assessment practices as part of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. The policy emphasises on the competency-based, learner-centred and continuous assessment to do away with rote memorisation and high stakes examinations. It advocates formative assessment, holistic assessment of progress, flexible examination pattern and use of technology in assessment. The reforms aim to foster critical thinking, creativity, problem solving skills and lifelong learning competencies among students. This paper discusses the major assessment reforms proposed under NEP 2020 along with their objectives, key features, implementation strategies and potential challenges. The study concludes that adequate teacher preparation, institutional support, technological infrastructure and continuous policy monitoring are required for successful implementation of these reforms.

Keywords: *Assessment Reform, Competency-based Assessment, Formative Assessment, Holistic Progress Card, National Education Policy 2020, PARAKH*

Assessment has been a part of educational systems as a central driver of learning for long as it measures students' learning, provides feedback for improvement and guides for educational decision-making (Gupta & Chaudhuri, 2026). However, India's traditional assessment practices have remained largely summative in nature with high-stakes examinations that tend to reward rote memorisation and factual recall rather than meaningful learning outcomes (Mishra & Palai, 2026). This exam-oriented methodology has led to major educational issues such as excessive academic stress on students, lack of skill development opportunities, and inadequate attention to the holistic development of students (Das, 2024).

The National Education Policy 2020, approved by the Indian Cabinet on July 29, 2020, is the first education policy of India in 34 years and replaces the National Policy of Education of 1986 (NEP-2020; Nandi, 2023). The National Education Policy 2020, led by Dr. K. Kasturirangan, the ex-chairman of the Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO), recognises serious flaws in the existing education system and proposes radical reforms that meet the learning needs of the 21st century (Kumar, 2021). Under the National Education Policy 2020, the pre-primary to higher education system has been overhauled and reformed.

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Received: July 27, 2026; Revision Received: July 31, 2026; Accepted: August 04, 2026

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The NEP 2020 has initiated to transform the assessment practice and is fully focused on the overall development of a learner recognising the previous limitations of assessment. One of the major pillars of this policy framework is the overhaul of assessment practices to promote continuous, learner-centred, and meaningful learning rather than examination-driven competition (Shrivastava & Shrivastava, 2024). The policy recommends a shift from content-based testing to competency-based assessment with a focus on conceptual understanding, critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, communication and problem-solving (NEP-2020).

Need for Assessment Reforms

Limitations of Traditional Assessment Systems

The present assessment system in Indian education system has been criticised for various limitations. Summative, examination-oriented approaches that focus on assessing students' ability to recall information rather than their critical thinking, creativity, problem-solving, and practical application of knowledge have been criticised in traditional assessment systems (Black & Wiliam, 1998). Such assessments often prioritise memorisation and standardised testing, leaving out higher-order cognitive skills and real learning experiences (Brookhart, 2017). Traditional examinations also give a snapshot of the students' performance at a single point in time and do not show the continuous nature of learning and individual progress (Choudhury, 2021). This one-dimensional approach also has deficiencies in important aspects of learners' development such as collaboration, communication, ethical reasoning, and socio-emotional competencies (Das, 2024; Mishra & Palai, 2026).

In addition, traditional assessment practices have failed to capture the multidimensionality of student learning and development (Naik et al., 2024). Traditional report cards and examination scores only focus on academic achievement, neglecting important aspects such as social-emotional development, practical abilities, physical development, and creative potential (Chocha & Panda, 2026). This limited focus of assessment has led to educational practices that inadequately prepare students for the complex demands of contemporary life and work environments.

Alignment with 21st-Century Learning Needs

Current research and global educational perspectives are increasingly recognising that 21st-century learners need a wide range of skills, such as critical thinking, creativity, problem-solving, cooperation, and ethical reasoning, rather than just acquiring knowledge (Weitl-Harms et al., 2023). Traditional assessment systems in India have been found inadequate for assessment and development of such competencies (Kamala, 2020). So there is a need for urgent assessment approaches that can assess a wider range of student capabilities and develop these skills that are essential.

Research in education has shown that when used well, formative assessment supports learning as it progresses, and helps students to identify and close gaps in their knowledge (Wiliam et al., 2004). Likewise, competency-based assessment frameworks have been demonstrated as promising tools for the alignment of education and real-world needs (Ober et al., 2026). NEP 2020 proposes reforms in assessment to meet these identified needs through more comprehensive, meaningful and conducive assessment practices for holistic development of learners.

Objectives of the Study

- To Know vision of the assessment under NEP 2020
- To analyses the major assessment reform under NEP 2020
- To illustrate the role of teachers in assessment reforms
- To explore the benefits of assessment reforms

Vision of Assessment under NEP 2020

The National Education Policy 2020 presents a transformative vision for assessment that fundamentally departs from the examination-centric paradigm that has dominated Indian education (Mishra & Palai, 2026). This vision is grounded in several key principles designed to promote meaningful learning and holistic development.

Core Principles of the NEP 2020 Assessment Vision

NEP 2020 advocates for moving away from conventional examination-centric methods toward a more inclusive evaluation system that takes into account students' varied skill sets (Naik et. al., 2024). The policy emphasizes that assessment should be a continuous process crucial for evaluating students' performance and ensuring the quality of education, rather than a discrete event occurring at the end of a term or academic year (Das, 2024).

The assessment framework envisioned in NEP 2020 is grounded in several core principles: (a) ***learner-centeredness***, placing the development of the individual student at the heart of assessment practices; (b) ***comprehensiveness***, evaluating cognitive, affective, and psychomotor dimensions of development; (c) ***formative emphasis***, prioritizing learning and improvement over summative judgement and certification; and (d) ***equity***, ensuring that assessment practices are fair, transparent, and responsive to diverse student needs and backgrounds (Naik et al., 2024).

Shift from Product to Process

A fundamental aspect of NEP 2020's vision is the conceptual shift from assessment as a measure of what students have learned (product) to assessment as a process for facilitating, monitoring, and enhancing learning (Nandi et al., 2023). This reorientation reflects contemporary educational research demonstrating that assessment functions are not limited to certification but include supporting learning and building the capacity of students to make their own judgements (Boud, 2020). This process-oriented perspective recognizes that meaningful assessment must be integrated with teaching and learning rather than separated from these processes.

Major Assessment reforms under NEP 2020

Competency-Based Assessment

Competency-based assessment (CBA) represents one of the most significant departures from traditional assessment practices under NEP 2020. Rather than assessing isolated knowledge units, competency-based assessment evaluates the integrated application of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values in addressing real-world challenges and professional demands (Ober et al., 2026).

Competency-based assessment emphasizes the development of higher-order competencies such as critical thinking, creativity, problem-solving, communication, and collaboration (Onyango et al., 2024). This approach recognizes that students progress differently and may demonstrate competencies through varied pathways, requiring assessment tools that can

flexibly capture multiple forms of evidence and recognize diverse demonstrations of competence (Schuwirth & Ash, 2013).

Implementation of CBA in Indian classrooms involves a shift toward practical-based assessments including projects, portfolios, demonstrations, dialogues, interviews, dramatization, and discovery methods, which have proven more relevant for developing students' competencies than purely theoretical, paper-based assessments (Ndimbo, 2024). Research has shown that teachers and students alike recognize the value of these practical assessment approaches for supporting meaningful learning and skill development (Ndimbo, 2024).

The challenges in implementing competency-based assessment include the need for substantial teacher training, development of clear rubrics aligned with specific competencies, and creation of authentic assessment tasks that meaningfully evaluate competency development (Costa et al., 2025). Despite these challenges, competency-based assessment is increasingly recognized as essential for preparing students to meet real-world requirements and develop relevant professional capacities.

Shift from Summative to Formative Assessment

NEP 2020 places particular emphasis on promoting formative assessment as a central mechanism for supporting student learning and development. While acknowledging the importance of summative assessment for certification and progression decisions, the policy advocates for a formatively focused assessment system that gives priority to providing feedback to learners in a format and manner that will help them improve, develop, and grow (Konopasek et al., 2016).

Formative assessment is characterized as a continuous process rather than discrete events, organized and integrated over time as part of regular teaching and learning activities (Konopasek, 2016). Effective formative assessment involves regular feedback loops where students receive information about their current performance, guidance on areas for improvement, and opportunities to apply feedback toward enhanced learning (Sadykova & Duisekova, 2025).

Research demonstrates that increased use of formative assessment (assessment for learning) leads to higher quality learning outcomes, with studies showing significant effect sizes favoring interventions that emphasize formative assessment practices (William et al., 2004). Furthermore, performance of formative assessments has proven predictive of summative examination scores, suggesting that formative assessment supports not only learning processes but also eventual achievement (Meher et al., 2023).

The transition from summative to formative emphasis requires substantial shifts in assessment culture within schools. Teachers must be prepared to view assessment as an integral part of instruction rather than a separate evaluative function, and students must develop understanding of feedback as a tool for improvement rather than as judgement of their ability (Bok et al., 2013).

Holistic Progress Card

One of the most innovative assessment initiatives under NEP 2020 is the development of holistic progress cards designed to provide comprehensive visual summaries of learner development across multiple dimensions. The traditional report card, which typically presents

only subject-based grades, has been expanded under this reform to encompass a much broader range of learner characteristics and capabilities (Chocha & Panda, 2026).

Holistic assessment, devoid of prejudice, incorporates diverse evidence-based methods exploring different facets of learning including knowledge, abilities, interests, and attitudes (Das, 2024). The holistic progress card evaluates students' cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains, while also incorporating crucial 21st-century skills (Chocha & Panda, 2026). This approach recognizes that meaningful development extends far beyond academic achievement to include social-emotional capabilities, physical development, creative expression, and ethical growth.

Implementation of holistic progress cards in PM SHRI schools of Odisha and other pilot institutions has involved the use of standardized formats, teacher orientation programmes, inclusion of self and peer assessment, and ongoing monitoring processes (Mishra & Palai, 2026). These comprehensive progress cards provide educators, parents, and students themselves with a much richer understanding of student development and learning than traditional report cards allow.

However, implementation of holistic assessment faces significant challenges, including increased teacher workload, limited training opportunities, subjectivity in assessment, infrastructural constraints, and resistance to change among stakeholders (Mishra & Palai, 2026). Addressing these challenges requires sustained institutional support, adequate resource allocation, and comprehensive teacher professional development.

Flexible Board Examinations

While NEP 2020 advocates for reduced reliance on high-stakes summative examinations, it also proposes reforms to make board examinations more flexible and aligned with contemporary learning objectives. These reforms include:

- Reduction in examination pressure through reduced frequency and stakes
- Greater flexibility in assessment formats and methods beyond traditional written examinations
- Multiple opportunities for students to take board examinations rather than a single opportunity
- Integration of board examinations with regular formative assessment processes

These changes reflect recognition that while summative assessment serves important functions in certification and student progression, its current excessive emphasis has created detrimental effects on student wellbeing and learning quality.

PARAKH (Performance Assessment Review and Analysis of Knowledge for Holistic Development)

NEP 2020 establishes PARAKH, a national assessment center designed to monitor achievement of learning outcomes and guide educational boards in making learning more contemporary and suited to future needs (Nandi, 2023). PARAKH serves as a peer review system of assessment that evaluates student learning at national level while providing feedback to states and educational institutions regarding curriculum implementation and student achievement patterns.

The PARAKH framework is designed to complement rather than replace state and school-level assessments, providing an overarching monitoring mechanism that helps ensure that

educational quality and learning outcomes align with national standards and contemporary requirements (Nandi, 2023).

Technology- Enabled Assessment

NEP 2020 recognizes the critical importance of digital technologies and artificial intelligence as tools for enhancing assessment practices. Technology enables several key improvements to assessment systems: personalized and adaptive assessment that can adjust to individual learner needs and proficiency levels, real-time feedback provision through automated systems, efficient data collection and analysis supporting insights into learning patterns, and scalable solutions for managing assessment in large educational systems (El Msayer et al., 2026).

Digital assessment tools, when properly designed and implemented, support learning regulation, instructional decision-making, and educational quality rather than focusing solely on measurement efficiency (El Msayer et al., 2026). Technology-enabled assessment can include computerized adaptive testing (CAT), online portfolios, learning management systems, and AI-based diagnostic tools that provide detailed feedback regarding student progress and areas requiring additional support.

However, successful implementation of technology-enabled assessment requires adequate technological infrastructure, teacher training in using digital assessment tools, and careful attention to issues of equity and access to ensure that technology-enhanced assessment does not exacerbate existing educational inequalities (Dakapraska, 2025).

Assessment for Learning

Central to NEP 2020's vision is the concept of assessment for learning, which emphasizes that assessment should fundamentally support and enhance student learning rather than merely measure or certify achievement. This represents a significant shift in assessment philosophy from viewing assessment primarily as a summative mechanism for judging competence to viewing it as an integral part of the teaching-learning process (Otaki et al., 2022).

Assessment for learning emphasizes that meaningful feedback with each assessment is essential, and that students should be actively engaged in the assessment process through self-assessment and reflective practice (Otaki et al., 2022). This approach recognizes that effective learning requires students to understand learning objectives, monitor their own progress, identify areas for improvement, and take responsibility for their learning development (Rahman, 2025).

Role of Teachers in Assessment Reforms

The successful implementation of NEP 2020's assessment reforms depends critically on comprehensive teacher preparation, professional development, and support in understanding and implementing new assessment approaches (Therasa, 2020). Teachers serve as central agents in translating assessment reform policy into classroom practice and have direct influence on how assessment impacts student learning and development.

Teacher Understanding and Capacity Building

Research indicates that teachers require substantive understanding of competency-based assessment concepts and methods to implement these approaches effectively (Ndimbo, 2024). Many teachers currently lack clarity regarding the conceptual meaning and practical

implementation of competency-based approaches, highlighting the critical need for well-structured professional development focused on new assessment frameworks (Ndimbo, 2024).

Effective teacher development for assessment reform must include training in designing authentic assessment tasks, developing clear competency rubrics, providing meaningful feedback, and interpreting assessment data to guide instruction (Costa et al., 2025). Teachers need opportunities to develop expertise in using diverse assessment formats and methods, including performance-based assessment, portfolio assessment, and self and peer assessment approaches (Ndimbo, 2024).

Assessment Literacy and Professional Development

Comprehensive attention to faculty development and training for teachers is essential for successful implementation of assessment programmes (Bok et al., 2013). Assessment literacy—teachers' understanding of assessment principles and methods and their ability to implement effective assessment practices requires ongoing professional learning opportunities rather than one-time training events.

Systematic support systems, including access to assessment resources, collaborative planning time, mentoring from experienced practitioners, and regular professional development opportunities, are essential for building teacher capacity (Costa et. al., 2025). Additionally, creating a school culture that values assessment as integral to learning rather than as a separate evaluative function requires sustained leadership support and collaborative effort among teachers.

Teachers' Agency and Curriculum Alignment

Successful assessment reform requires that teachers maintain autonomy in designing assessments and instructional approaches aligned with their students' needs and contexts, rather than implementing assessments in a mechanistic, top-down manner (Chandran, 2020). The dynamic relationship between assessment and learning is critical to reinvigorating the discourse and practice of assessment (Khunyakari & Takker, 2025), and teachers are central to creating assessment practices that genuinely support learning within their specific educational contexts.

Benefits of Assessment Reforms

NEP 2020's assessment reforms are designed to generate multiple significant benefits for students, teachers, schools, and the broader educational ecosystem.

Enhanced Learning Outcomes

Research demonstrates that assessment approaches that emphasize formative feedback and competency development lead to improved student learning outcomes (William et al., 2004). By shifting assessment focus from memorization toward meaningful skill development, students develop deeper understanding and greater capacity to apply knowledge in diverse contexts (Sadykova & Duisekova, 2025).

Holistic assessment approaches that evaluate multiple dimensions of student development support more comprehensive learning outcomes, including development of social-emotional capabilities, creative capacities, and ethical understanding alongside academic achievement (Chocha & Panda, 2026).

Improved Student Engagement and Motivation

When assessment practices emphasize learning and improvement rather than selection and ranking, student motivation and engagement typically increase (Otaki et al., 2022). Formative assessment feedback, when provided in a timely, constructive manner focused on improvement, enhances learner motivation and resilience (Gupta & Chaudhuri, 2026). Additionally, competency-based assessment that allows diverse demonstrations of competence recognizes and values different forms of student strength, reducing the sense of failure experienced by students who do not perform well on traditional examinations (Schuwirth & Ash, 2013).

Support for Holistic Development

NEP 2020's emphasis on holistic assessment enables recognition and development of the full range of student capabilities rather than focusing narrowly on academic achievement (Chocha & Panda, 2026). This comprehensive approach supports cognitive, affective, and psychomotor development, as well as development of 21st-century skills essential for student success in contemporary society (Chocha & Panda, 2026).

Reduce Examination Pressure and Improved Student Wellbeing

The shift away from high-stakes, examination-centric assessment has potential to reduce excessive academic pressure on students and associated mental health challenges (Mishra & Palai, 2026). By valuing multiple forms of evidence of learning and recognizing diverse forms of student achievement, assessment reforms contribute to improved student psychological wellbeing and reduced anxiety (Das, 2024).

Better Preparation for Professional Life

Competency-based assessment that emphasizes practical skill development, problem-solving, and real-world application prepares students more effectively for professional contexts where these capabilities are essential (Ndimbo, 2024). Students develop during their school years the competencies employers seek, improving their prospects for meaningful employment and professional success.

CONCLUSION

The comprehensive assessment reforms in the National Education Policy 2020 are a transformative change in India's paradigm of evaluating and nurturing student learning. The NEP 2020 aims to overcome the fundamental limitations of traditional Indian education systems that have primarily emphasized examination-centric practices, by adopting competency-based, formative, and holistic assessment approaches. It aims to align assessment practices with contemporary understandings of learning and skill development requirements of the 21st century.

The major reform initiatives, comprising competency-based assessment, emphasis on formative assessment, holistic progress cards, flexible board examinations, PARAKH implementation and technology-enabled assessment together constitute a comprehensive reimagining of assessment functions. Rather than establishing assessment primarily as a means of selection and ranking of students, these reforms place assessment in the context of supporting learning, providing meaningful feedback, recognizing holistic development, and preparing students for successful participation in professional and civic life.

The role of teachers as key actors in assessment reform cannot be over emphasized. Teachers need to be well versed in new ways of assessing, be well supported and resourced and trusted

to use their professional judgement when designing and implementing assessments that meet the needs and contexts of their students. This requires heavy investment in teacher education and professional development systems.

In the end, NEP 2020's vision of transformed assessment practices has the potential to create more equitable, learner-centred, and developmentally responsive education in India. These assessment reforms can make a meaningful contribution to the achievement of national aspirations for educational quality, equity and inclusion, in line with Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education), by acknowledging and valuing the multidimensionality of student learning and development, supporting continuous improvement through formative feedback, and equipping students with the relevant competencies for life in the modern world.

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Acknowledgment

The author(s) appreciates all those who participated in the study and helped to facilitate the research process.

Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

How to cite this article: Rajbanshi, S. (2026). Assessment Reforms in the Indian Education System under the National Education Policy 2020. *International Journal of Social Impact*, 11(3), 066-076. DIP: 18.02.006/20261103, DOI: 10.25215/2455/1103006