

## Original Article

# Bridging NEP 2020 and SDGs: Pathways to Inclusive and Sustainable Education

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Manuscript ID:  
BN-2025-020848

ISSN: 3065-7865

Volume 2

Issue 8

August 2025

Pp245-248

Submitted: 19 July 2025

Revised: 28 July 2025

Accepted: 17 Aug 2025

Published: 31 Aug 2025

DOI:  
[10.5281/zenodo.17221607](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17221607)  
DOI link:  
<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17221607>



Quick Response Code:



Website: <https://bnir.us>



### Abstract

A revolutionary change to India's educational system, the New Education Policy (NEP) 2020, seeks to advance inclusivity, quality, equity, and holistic development. Simultaneously, universal access to fair and lifelong learning is emphasized by the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially SDG 4, on Quality Education. By connecting policy components, such as transdisciplinary education, skill development, digital literacy, and environmental awareness, with global sustainability targets, this study investigates how NEP 2020 and SDGs align. Drawing on international best practices, this study analyses implementation issues, gaps, and strengths using secondary data and policy analysis. Improving access to marginalized groups, closing the digital divide, advancing gender equality, and incorporating sustainability into curricula are important areas of focus. Although NEP 2020 is generally in line with the SDGs, the results indicate that strong monitoring using SDG indicators, infrastructure development, teacher capacity building, and sufficient funding are necessary for success. Stronger NEP–SDG synergy can promote inclusive, future-ready education, improve employability, and further India's sustainable development commitments, according to the findings of the study.

**Keywords:** NEP 2020, Sustainable Development Goals, Inclusive Education, Quality Education, Skill Development, Digital Literacy, Sustainability

### Introduction

Everyone agrees that education is essential for human growth, societal change, and long-term advancement. With Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) focusing on inclusive, egalitarian, and high-quality education for all, the United Nations' approval of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development placed education at the center of the conversation about global development. In light of this, India's New Education Policy (NEP) 2020 stands out as a historic reform that attempts to adapt the educational system to the needs of the twenty-first century. Cognitive, social, emotional, and ethical growth are given equal weight in NEP 2020, which aims to create a comprehensive, adaptable, and multidisciplinary approach to education. Access, equity, quality, affordability, and accountability are its guiding principles, which align well with the objectives of the SDGs. Through the promotion of digital literacy, skill development, vocational training, inclusion, and environmental awareness, the policy offers a framework that can greatly accelerate India's transition to sustainable development.

However, bridging the NEP 2020 and SDGs requires more than policy alignment; it demands effective implementation, monitoring, and adaptation to diverse socio-economic contexts. Challenges such as infrastructure gaps, the digital divide, teacher preparedness, and funding constraints must be addressed to ensure that the transformative vision of NEP translates into practice. Moreover, the integration of sustainability education, gender sensitivity, and community engagement within the education system is essential for realizing the long-term development goals. This study examines the synergies between NEP 2020 and the SDGs, analysing how India's education reforms can contribute to inclusive and sustainable futures.

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### How to cite this article:

Chand, J. (2025). Bridging NEP 2020 and SDGs: Pathways to Inclusive and Sustainable Education. *Bulletin of Nexus*, 2(8), 245–248. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17221607>

By mapping policy provisions to SDG targets, it seeks to highlight opportunities, identify challenges, and propose pathways to strengthen the role of education in driving sustainable national and global development.

### Review of Literature

According to UNESCO (2015), education is essential for attaining sustainable development since it contributes to growth, equity, and poverty reduction under SDG 4. To develop responsible global citizens, academics emphasize the importance of including sustainability in curricula (Tilbury, 2016). Through inclusiveness, digital literacy, skill development, holistic learning, and environmental awareness, India's NEP 2020 aligns with the SDGs (Kumar, 2021; Joshi, 2021). Digital divide, gender inequality, poor industry-academia relations, and insufficient monitoring are still issues (Mishra, 2021). According to comparative studies (Anderson, 2020), NEP-SDG convergence depends on strong implementation and assessment.

### Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework examines how important SDG targets—specifically, quality education (SDG 4), gender equality (SDG 5), reduced inequalities (SDG 10), and sustainable communities (SDG 11)—and the NEP 2020 guiding principles—equity, inclusivity, holistic learning, vocational training, and digital literacy—can work together. The paradigm, which is based on the human capital theory, emphasizes how education may boost economic growth and productivity. Sustainable Development Theory emphasizes education as a driver of social and environmental well-being. The Capability Approach places additional emphasis on increasing people's opportunities and freedom. When taken as a whole, these viewpoints present NEP 2020 as a revolutionary route to sustainable and equitable growth.

### Objectives of the Study

- To analyse the extent to which NEP 2020 aligns with SDG targets (especially SDG 4).
- To explore pathways through which NEP 2020 can accelerate progress towards inclusivity and sustainability.
- To identify challenges and opportunities in implementing NEP 2020 for achieving SDGs.

### Methodology

A mixed-methods strategy was used in this study, integrating quantitative and qualitative designs. While quantitative research employs statistical data on literacy, enrollment, dropout rates, gender parity, and employability, qualitative analysis concentrates on the policy assessment of papers such as NEP 2020, SDG reports, UNESCO publications, and NITI Aayog progress reports. Comparison tools include comparative comparison with international best practices, policy mapping to compare NEP provisions with SDG targets, and incorporating stakeholder perspectives through input from politicians, educators, and students. A thorough

understanding of the relationship between NEP 2020 and the SDGs is ensured by this integrated technique.

### Key Themes for Analysis

NEP 2020, which prioritizes universal access to education and bridges socioeconomic, gender, and regional gaps, places strong emphasis on equity and access. SDG 4.5, which seeks to eradicate educational disparities and guarantee opportunities for underprivileged populations such as scheduled castes, rural learners, and students with disabilities, is directly supported by this.

NEP's Quality and Holistic Education program emphasizes value-based learning, vocational integration, and a multidisciplinary approach. This supports the SDGs' goal of education as a basis for sustainable societies by guaranteeing that students acquire not only academic knowledge, but also ethical, cultural, and life skills. Another important element is digital and technological integration, with NEP prioritizing online and ICT-based learning environments. This gives students the marketable skills and digital competencies required for a technology-driven global economy, in accordance with SDG 4.4. Achieving inclusiveness requires addressing this digital gap.

SDG 5 (Gender Equality) is greatly aided by inclusivity and gender sensitivity. Education has become a weapon for social justice and empowerment because of NEP's gender-sensitive teaching, scholarships, and focused interventions for underrepresented groups.

Climate education, eco-literacy, sustainability, and environmental education play significant roles in NEP. Since students are urged to embrace ecologically conscious conduct and support sustainable communities, this is in line with SDG 13 (Climate Action).

Lastly, NEP's emphasis on innovation, entrepreneurship, and vocational training is reflected in Skill Development and Employability. By lowering unemployment, encouraging entrepreneurial ecosystems, and equipping young people with sustainable livelihoods, these directly contribute to SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth).

These concepts highlight the transformative potential of NEP 2020 in creating an educational system that significantly supports global sustainable development.

### Findings and Discussion

The study found that NEP 2020 and the SDGs are strongly aligned, particularly when it comes to advancing inclusive, equitable, and high-quality education. SDG aims are strongly aligned with NEP's emphasis on digital literacy, vocational skills, holistic learning, and environmental awareness. However, NEP may not fully satisfy several global objectives, such as robust sustainability policies and broad access to all excluded groups. Implementation is made more difficult by regional and socioeconomic differences, whereas urban centers advance swiftly, and rural and isolated areas face challenges because of a lack of digital connectivity and

infrastructure. These differences demonstrate how localized approaches and more robust monitoring systems are required.

### Challenges

The implementation of NEP 2020 is fraught with difficulties, despite its forward-thinking aim. Particularly in remote areas, infrastructure deficiencies such as poor classrooms, labs, and the internet are still common. Underprivileged students are marginalized by the digital divide. Inadequate capacity building and teacher training hinders the successful implementation of comprehensive and sustainability-focused curricula. Implementing policy goals in the classroom presents significant difficulties, frequently worsened by bureaucratic hold-ups. Additionally, the long-term viability of reforms is threatened by inadequate and unequal funding as well as inadequate monitoring systems. A policy's ability to support the SDGs will continue to be underutilized and unequal across socioeconomic circumstances if these crucial barriers are not addressed.

### Recommendations

Stronger policy coordination at the federal and state levels is necessary to connect NEP 2020 with SDGs. Educational planning should incorporate explicit connections between SDG and NEP provisions. Digital literacy, diversity, and sustainability are the main topics of improved teacher preparation programs. Reducing regional and socioeconomic gaps requires investment in ICT access and infrastructure. Partnerships between public and private sectors can improve employment and vocational training. Finally, to properly track progress, strong monitoring and evaluation systems that are in line with SDG targets are required. NEP 2020 will emerge as a potent catalyst for sustainable development owing to these concerted efforts.

### Conclusion

According to the report, NEP 2020 closely reflects the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially SDG 4, for high-quality education. It offers a strong foundation for promoting equitable and sustainable development in India, because of its emphasis on fairness, inclusivity, holistic learning, digital literacy, vocational skills, and environmental education. This strategy makes a significant contribution to both national and international development goals by equipping young people with employable skills, encouraging innovation, and promoting social responsibility. However, obstacles such as digital divide, poor teacher preparation, poor monitoring, and infrastructure shortages make it difficult to execute effectively, particularly in underserved and rural areas. To fully realize its transformative potential, these flaws must be fixed. In the future, it will be crucial to invest in digital and physical infrastructure, build teacher capacity, ensure community engagement, and align NEP 2020 with SDG indicators more closely. By implementing these actions,

India can create a future-proof, inclusive, and sustainable educational system.

### Acknowledgment

I wish to express my sincere gratitude to all those who contributed directly and indirectly to the completion of this research work. I am deeply thankful to my institution, Government P.G. College, Nahan (Himachal Pradesh), for providing the academic environment and resources that supported the study.

My heartfelt appreciation goes to the scholars and researchers whose works have been cited in this paper; their insights laid the foundation for critical reflections on the synergies between NEP 2020 and the Sustainable Development Goals. I am also indebted to policy documents, reports of UNESCO, NITI Aayog, Government of India, and various international organizations for providing valuable data and reference material.

I extend my gratitude to my colleagues, students, and peers who shared thoughtful discussions and constructive feedback during the development of this paper. Finally, I acknowledge with respect and affection my family members for their constant encouragement and moral support throughout this academic journey.

### Financial support

Nil

### Conflicts of interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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