



A focussed study on National Curriculum Framework (NCF) 2023: The challenges on Indian ELT context

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Abstract

The National Curriculum Framework (NCF) 2023 introduces significant reforms to India's education system, particularly emphasizing multilingualism, competency-based learning, and a shift from rote memorization in English Language Teaching (ELT). In the Indian ELT context, it promotes mother-tongue instruction up to Grade 5 while integrating English as a bridge language, aiming for holistic proficiency through experiential pedagogy. The key reforms in NCF 2023 adopts a 5+3+3+4 structure covering ages 3-18, focusing on foundational literacy, oracy, and cultural integration in languages. It addresses ELT by advocating balanced literacy practices, literature exposure, and digital tools to foster communicative competence over memory-based assessments. The challenges in Indian ELT Implementation faces hurdles like negligible teacher training, linguistic diversity, poor infrastructure, and resistance to multilingual shifts, often resulting in rote learning persistence and unequal access in rural areas. Low-quality materials and socio-cultural biases further impede effective ELT, despite NCF's push for inclusivity. The framework's success hinges on robust teacher preparation and equitable resources to overcome these barriers, potentially transforming ELT into a skill-oriented domain. Studies suggest integrating AI and community engagement could enhance outcomes, but uniform policy execution remains critical and biased.

Keywords: NCF, ELT, curriculum, NEP, pedagogy, assessment, competency-based, surveys, reforms, AI, oracy

Introduction

The National Curriculum Framework (NCF) 2023 redesigns Indian school education system in lieu of competency-based learning, multilingualism, and holistic development under the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. Within this, language education (including English) is institutionalized through a three-language approach and learner-centred pedagogy. However, moving from policy to practice reveals colossal challenges - especially in the English Language Teaching (ELT) domain.

A focused study on NCF 2023 and ELT challenges typically examines

- **Policy intent vs. ground realities:** The National Curriculum Framework (NCF) 2023, aligned with India's NEP 2020, outlines visible reforms for school education, but implementation faces significant ground-level difficulties like poor infrastructure and teacher training. NCF 2023 propagates learner-cantered education, foundational literacy and numeracy, multilingualism, experiential learning, and integration of life skills, technology, and vocational training up to grade 12. It shifts from rote memorization to critical thinking and interdisciplinary approaches, with reduced curriculum load and flexible assessments. Despite these ideals, challenges persist in translating policy into practice, including shortages in teacher training, digital infrastructure, and regional adaptations, leading to uneven rollout across states. Systemic issues like caste-based inequalities and lack of community-specific planning remain unaddressed at grassroots levels, perpetuating exclusion. Overcrowded classrooms and reliance on outdated methods hinder experiential learning goals. Infrastructure deficits, especially in rural areas, limit technology-aided and inclusive education.

Insufficient focus on monitoring mechanisms results in policy visions is not matching daily classroom realities. Teacher preparation lags, with many unable to adopt student-centric pedagogies amid heavy workloads.

- **Pedagogical constraints:** India's National Curriculum Framework (2023) for School Education acknowledges experiential, competency-based pedagogy while facing multiple implementation constraints. This limits its shift from rote learning to holistic education. The formidable challenges include resource shortages and teacher readiness. Schools often lack infrastructure for hands-on activities and digital integration required by NCF 2023. Regional inequalities exacerbate funding gaps, hindering play-based learning in foundational stages. Educators need continuous training for new methods like inquiry-based projects, but many face time constraints and inadequate professional development programs. Resistance to moving away from traditional exams adds friction. Shifting to competency-based evaluations demands overhauling exam systems, yet schools struggle with biannual testing and formative assessments due to existing rigid structures
- **Teacher preparation & resources:** The National Curriculum Framework (NCF) 2023, aligned with India's NEP 2020, emphasizes comprehensive teacher preparation to support competency-based, holistic education. It promotes ongoing professional development, flexible pedagogy, and technology integration for educators. Key resources include training programs, digital tools, and curriculum alignment guidelines. NCF 2023 prioritizes teacher empowerment through lifelong professional growth, reflective practices, and capacity-building initiatives.

Teachers are positioned as facilitators and instructional leaders, requiring training in diverse learner needs, formative assessments, and vocational integration starting from Grade 6. Multiple training programs aim to equip educators with skills for equitable, developmentally appropriate environments. Official NCERT resources under NCF 2023 include lighter, interactive textbooks adaptable to local contexts, with teacher mentoring systems recommended. Digital platforms and collaborative tools foster nationwide educator networks for continuous improvement. Schools are encouraged to launch NCF-aligned training, technology integration, and assessment practices.

- **Assessment practices:** NCF 2023 introduces transformative assessment practices in India's schooling system, shifting from rote memorization and summative exams to competency-based, formative evaluations that support holistic student development. These practices emphasize regular feedback, self-reflection, and real-world skill application across cognitive, emotional, and physical domains. NCF 2023 outlines three interconnected approaches: assessment of learning to measure outcomes, for learning to inform teaching adjustments, and as learning to foster student metacognition and ownership. Formative methods like observations, quizzes, and peer reviews provide ongoing insights, while summative tools such as projects and portfolios evaluate progress at key intervals. Assessments must align with defined competencies, use diverse methods beyond paper-pencil tests (e.g., experiments, debates, concept maps), and incorporate 360-degree progress cards blending teacher, self, and peer inputs. Holistic evaluation covers values like empathy and collaboration, with AI tools potentially aiding personalized tracking. Teachers receive professional development for these shifts, ensuring curriculum-pedagogy-assessment alignment, while parental involvement bridges home-school gaps. Challenges like over-reliance on standardized tests are addressed through policy advocacy for balanced, learner-centered systems.
- **Linguistic diversity & equity:** Framework (NCF) 2023, released by India's Ministry of Education, emphasizes linguistic diversity and equity in language education to promote inclusivity and cognitive development.

NCF 2023 builds on equity, inclusion, and multilingualism, advocating learning in the mother tongue or familiar languages up to Grade 5 or later to ensure linguistic dignity and cultural unity. It recognizes India's vast linguistic diversity, promoting multilingual proficiency for better cognitive abilities, national integration, and appreciation of cultural identities.

The framework reaffirms the three-language formula, requiring students to learn two Indian languages alongside English or another language, fostering cultural sensitivity and economic opportunities. This includes home/regional languages, Hindi (or another Indian language), and a third language, with flexibility for states to adapt. By prioritizing mother tongue instruction, NCF 2023 addresses disparities

for non-native speakers, countering biases in traditional monolingual models and enhancing access to education. It aims to preserve linguistic pluralism while building skills for a globalized world.

- **Stakeholder perspectives:** The National Curriculum Framework (NCF) 2023 for school education in India emphasizes stakeholder perspectives by centering teachers as primary implementers while involving parents, communities, administrators, and students in the reform process.

Teachers are positioned at the core, with the framework providing practical guidance tailored to their classroom realities, school sizes, and student backgrounds. Parents and communities play supportive roles in holistic child development, while educational administrators and institutions ensure infrastructure and resources align with NEP 2020 goals. NCF 2023 drew from extensive consultations, including over 1.5 lakh teachers, 1 lakh citizens (students and parents), 1550 district-level meetings across 32 states/UTs, and inputs from 4000+ experts via 600+ papers. A pre-draft in April 2023 garnered 1500+ detailed comments from institutions and educators, synthesizing collective wisdom into actionable changes.

The framework outlines clear roles, responsibilities, and timelines for stakeholders to enable smooth transitions, such as curriculum revisions from preschool to grade 12 with interdisciplinary approaches. It confronts systemic issues head-on to foster equity, deeper learning, and reduced disruption during reforms.

Framework-Level Challenges Relevant to ELT

Foundational Literacy Crisis: NCF 2023 flags a low level of foundational literacy among learners, where many students struggle with basic reading and comprehension. This is a systemic issue that impacts all languages - including English - making advanced language competencies difficult to achieve.

Implications for ELT

- Students' limited literacy skills constrain progress in English, particularly in reading comprehension and writing.
- ELT classrooms may need to allocate more time to remedial literacy before higher-order language skills can develop.

Insufficient Time Allocation for Language Learning

The official text notes that in many schools, the time assigned to language learning is inadequate relative to learning needs.

ELT Impact

- English often competes with other subjects for instructional time, which may reduce opportunities for balanced skill development (listening, speaking, reading, writing).
- In multilingual schedules (three languages), prioritizing adequate English exposure without overburdening learners becomes complex.

Low-Quality Materials & Resources

The NCF acknowledges uneven quality of language learning materials and a lack of age-appropriate, engaging resources. ELT Challenges:

- Lack of contextualized English learning materials (stories, graded readers) suited to diverse linguistic backgrounds.
- Reliance on textbooks alone may fail to support communicative competence.

Teacher Preparation & Pedagogical Gaps

One of the most emphasized constraints in NCF 2023 is inadequate teacher training and preparation, especially for language subjects.

Why This Matters for ELT

- Many teachers lack specialized ELT training, limiting their ability to facilitate interactive, communicative language classes.
- Traditional teacher education programmes often under-emphasize practical language pedagogy, focusing instead on theory.

Ineffective Pedagogies & Assessment Practices

NCF 2023 cautions against rote, content-completion approaches and memory-based assessment that dominates language classrooms.

ELT Implications

- Persisting traditional methods (lecture, grammar translation) are ineffective for actual language use.
- Shifting to communicative, task-based assessment requires teacher skill-upgradation and assessment redesign.

Broader Systemic & Contextual Challenges

Multilingual Policy vs. Implementation Reality

- While NCF 2023 promotes three-language learning with emphasis on mother tongue and Indian languages alongside English, this poses complex challenges:
- Students and parents often prioritise English for social mobility and employment prospects, leading to tension with policy goals.
- Language roll-out strategies vary across states, resulting in uneven implementation and, in some cases (e.g., Maharashtra revoking the third language temporarily) and confusion.

ELT Concern: It aligned multilingual policy with ELT goals without diluting English proficiency expectations.

Equity Gaps in Language Learning: India's linguistic diversity means learners enter school with vastly different home languages. For many, English is a foreign language, intensifying the learning curve.

Equity Issues: Students from disadvantaged, rural, or non-English environments often lag behind peers. Without targeted support, ELT may worsen educational inequities.

Implementation Challenges at School Level

Studies and media reports highlight:

- Mismatch between policy vision and on-ground readiness (infrastructure, classroom support, instructional materials).
- Teachers expressing difficulty shifting mindset from exam-oriented teaching to communicative, competency-based approaches.

Synthesis of ELT-Specific Challenges under NCF 2023

NCF 2023 introduces transformative shifts in India's school education, emphasizing competency-based learning,

multilingualism, and experiential approaches in English Language Teaching (ELT), but implementation faces distinct hurdles. Teachers require specialized training to adopt formative, competency-focused assessments over rote methods, as NCF 2023 prioritizes genuine learning skills. Many lack readiness for integrating multilingual practices or handling large classes with demotivated learners. Resource Schools often miss infrastructure, materials, and digital tools needed for experiential ELT, such as hands-on activities linking theory to real-world contexts. Budget redistribution also poses financial strain for new resources amid existing shortages. Management interference, rigid policies, and top-down changes ignore local contexts, stifling teacher autonomy in ELT planning and assessment. A shift from instructionism to student-centered models demands mindset changes among educators and parents.

Conclusion

The NCF 2023 lays out a transformative vision for language education, but its success hinges on overcoming entrenched challenges in ELT:

- Strengthening teacher training with ELT-specific modules
- Developing quality, context-sensitive ELT resources
- Shifting classroom assessment toward communicative competence
- Ensuring equitable implementation across linguistic and socio-economic contexts

Such reforms require policy momentum, funding, capacity building, and continuous feedback loops between policymakers, teacher educators, and schools.

NCF 2023 proposes a transformative shift in India's education system, mainly in English Language Teaching (ELT), by stressing multilingualism, competency-based learning, and foundational literacy up to Class 3. However, its execution in the Indian ELT context faces major obstacles like too little teacher training, resource shortages in rural areas, and battle to moving away from rote learning. The key reforms in ELT in NCF 2023 encourage mother tongue instruction alongside English to build fluency, amalgamating oracy, literacy, and real-life skills over memorization. It ropes a 5+3+3+4 pattern with play-based pedagogy in early stages and bilingual approaches to lessen English - only burdens. Teacher shortages and poor preparation obstruct effective ELT delivery, particularly in secluded regions. Low-quality materials and infrastructure gaps undermine multilingual goals. Assessment remains memory-focused in spite of calls for holistic evaluation.

Digital devices and uneven policy execution across states complicate ELT integration with vocational and 21st-century skills. Uniform training programs are essential but currently it is lacking.

Success calls for targeted teacher development, better resources and monitoring to blend NCF's vision with India's diverse ELT realities, presumably stirring English proficiency in long-term.

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