

## NCF-SE 2023: A ROAD MAP FOR FUTURISTIC SCHOOL EDUCATION

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**Paper Received On:** 5 FEBRUARY 2023

**Peer Reviewed On:** 28 FEBRUARY 2023

**Published On:** 01 MARCH 2023

### Abstract

*The National Curriculum Framework for School Education (NCF) is developed based on the vision of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, and to enable its implementation. The NCF addresses education for the age group 3 to 18 years, across the entire range of diverse institutions in India. This is across the four Stages in the 5+3+3+4 Curricular and Pedagogical restructuring of School Education as envisioned in NEP 2020. This paper is an effort to understand NCF SE-2023 with its key features and implementational challenges.*

**Keywords:** NCF, NCF SE, Education, School Education, Pedagogy, Multidisciplinary Education.

NCF-SE stands for the National Curriculum Framework for School Education. It was released by Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan on 23 August 2023, and aims to catalyse and overhaul the school education system, particularly for students aged 3 to 18 years, from foundational stages to secondary education. It was developed in response to the National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020), which called for a complete transformation of India's schooling system to make it of the highest quality for all students equitably, and to serve the needs and aspirations of the country.

### Key Characteristics of NCF SE-2023

- 1. The 5+3+3+4 School Structure:** - The NCF-SE 2023 outlines the curriculum structure according to the 5+3+3+4 model recommended by NEP 2020, dividing schooling into four stages — Foundational (3–8 years), Preparatory (8–11 years), Middle (11–14 years), and Secondary (14–18 years).
- 2. Holistic and Multidisciplinary Education:** - There is no hard separation of subjects or streams in the senior secondary stage. Curriculum integration enables teachers to connect different disciplines to enhance understanding of a subject or topic. Holistic and integrated

education ensures that students experience social, emotional, academic, and physical development.

**3. Rooted in India:** - The curriculum is rooted in India and informed by the wealth of Indian knowledge and thought on education. Contributions to knowledge in various disciplines by Indians from ancient to contemporary times have been integrated into the curricular goals of all school subjects.

**4. Transformed Pedagogy:** - The NCF-SE enables the entire range of age and context-appropriate pedagogy, from play-based, activity-based, inquiry-based, and dialogue-based approaches. It is designed to enable and empower teachers and schools for the full flowering of their creativity and enhanced engagement.

**5. Reformed Assessment:** - Assessment and exams at all levels are to be transformed to enable genuine learning and reduce stress, including Board exams.

**6. Three-Language Policy:** - Languages in the school curriculum are denoted as R1 (mother tongue or state language), R2 (any language other than R1), and R3 (any language other than R1 and R2). At least two of these three languages must be native to India.

**7. Emphasis on Art and Physical Education:** - Art Education and Physical Education & Well-being are given renewed emphasis in the curriculum with specific learning standards and recommended time allocation. Art Education encompasses both visual arts and performing arts, with equal emphasis on making, thinking about, and appreciating artwork.

**8. Equity and Inclusion:** - The NCF-SE is informed by principles to ensure equity and inclusion in all aspects — from content and pedagogy to school culture and practices.

**9. Vocational Education:** - Vocational education is introduced as a subject from the Middle Stage onwards.

**10. School Culture as Curriculum:** - School culture and practices are to be developed as an integral and important part of the curriculum.

### **Structure of the NCF-SE Document**

The framework is organized into following parts:

- Part A articulates broad aims of school education and principles for content, pedagogy, and assessment.
- Part B focuses on cross-cutting themes like rootedness in India, values, environment, and inclusive education.
- Part C has separate chapters for each school subject with learning standards defined for all stages.

## **Main Challenges for Implementation of NCF-SE**

**1. Teacher Training and Capacity Building:** - The realization of NCF-SE will depend on the ability of teacher training, infrastructural reinforcement, and wise dissemination in various regions. 21K School Managing 16 courses across 8 curricular areas having multiple disciplines will create extra pressure on school management to maintain teacher availability and training levels — challenges similar to those already faced by the IB board. Teachers need to shift from being content-deliverers to facilitators of inquiry-based, activity-based, and multidisciplinary learning, which requires deep and sustained professional development.

**2. Infrastructure and Resource Gaps:** - Great difficulties experienced in schools are attributable to regional inequality, poor funding, and concern over autonomy from pre-specified conventional practices. Challenges like teacher training, digital infrastructure, and uniform implementation persist. Google Translate Rural and under-resourced schools in particular lack the physical space, technology, and materials needed to support the framework's ambitious pedagogical vision.

**3. Centre-State Federal Tensions:** - From the methods of its preparation and curriculum subjects, to the manner of its implementation, the NCF has stirred major controversies. Education experts have raised objections to the manner and modes involved in finalising the NCF in 2023. While NEP 2020 aimed to promote a consultative process where SCERTs would play a pivotal role, in actual reality the participatory process has been undermined in multiple ways. Since education is a concurrent subject under the Constitution, many states strongly assert their right to be equal partners in curriculum design and implementation.

**4. The Three-Language Policy Controversy:** - A major controversy erupted over the three-language policy. The old fear of Hindi imposition and the centralising nature of NEP has raised a massive political storm in Tamil Nadu and other opposition-ruled states. After major political showdowns over Hindi imposition, the Maharashtra state government stalled implementation of the language policy, subject to the recommendation of an expert committee.

**5. Resistance to Change:** - As a country, there is considerable hesitance to accept changes, hence awareness at the teacher level is crucial for them to be drivers of change. The detailed and integrated nature of the document itself could become a roadblock if stakeholders start getting overwhelmed by the comprehensiveness of the plan.

**6. Delays in State-Level Adoption:** - State Boards might take their own time to implement the changes, and a delay in implementation might not allow enough time for students to adapt to

the new changes before they sit for their examinations. Since the NCF and NEP are not binding on states, adoption timelines vary widely across the country.

**7. Curriculum Content Controversies: - Historians** and educators have blamed NCERT for taking unilateral decisions on curriculum making, which violates the tenets of NCF-SE 2023. Controversies around NCERT's deletion of history chapters from textbooks have created political friction and raised questions about academic integrity in the curriculum development process.

**8. Transition to New School Stage Structure: -** The framework recognizes the challenges that states face in terms of infrastructure for teaching and assessment under a semester system. It now recommends a "long-term" transition to semester or term-based systems for all education boards. Shifting from the old 10+2 model to the new 5+3+3+4 model requires overhauling timetables, teacher roles, syllabi, and assessment systems simultaneously.

**9. Digital Divide and Technology Access: -** Adoption of educational technology tools has the potential to ease implementation hurdles, though the NCF's provision for teacher education and training under its NCF-TE module might need more awareness building. A significant rural-urban digital divide means technology-driven pedagogy recommended by the NCF will be unequally accessible.

**10. Special Education and Inclusion Gaps: -** Special education inclusion is not adequately addressed in the framework, leaving a gap in how students with diverse learning needs will be supported as the new curriculum structure rolls out.

In summary, while NCF-SE 2023 is a bold and visionary document, its success hinges on effective teacher preparation, equitable infrastructure, political alignment between states and the Centre, and a sustained commitment to genuine systemic change rather than merely procedural compliance. NCF-SE 2023 is a landmark policy document shaping India's K–12 curriculum to be more holistic, flexible, culturally rooted, and aligned with 21st-century learning needs.

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