

# Five years of NEP 2020: Time to take stock of NIPUN Bharat, India's largest foundational learning mission

Transforming India's education system through NIPUN Bharat Mission, ensuring foundational literacy and numeracy for all children.

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As India looks ahead to build on these early green shoots of progress under NIPUN, we need a bolder roadmap for sustained impact at scale. | iStock/Getty Images

This July marks the fifth anniversary of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, a reform effort aimed at transforming India's education system. Over the past five years, paradigms have shifted, AI has entered classrooms and leading global institutions have

set up campuses in India. But away from the spotlight, a steady and strong change in our children's learning trajectory is unfolding—the story of India's NIPUN Bharat Mission.

Launched in July 2021, NIPUN Bharat operationalised NEP's vision for foundational learning into a nationwide mission to ensure every child in India can read with understanding and do basic math by Grade 2. With ₹2,700 crore in annual funding, it now reaches over 5 crore children and 17 lakh teachers across 6 lakh schools making it the world's largest foundational learning programme and a global benchmark for what strong prioritisation and action for foundational literacy and numeracy (FLN) for all children can and should look like.

A significant contributor to the success of NIPUN is how the funding is designed. Nearly 80% of State school education budgets are usually tied up in teacher and staff salaries and infrastructure, leaving very little flexibility for spending on quality initiatives.

NIPUN earmarks ₹500/student per year for quality teaching-learning materials (TLMs) and ₹150/teacher for teacher resources and training. States like Uttar Pradesh, Haryana and Assam have leveraged these funds to roll out teacher guides with structured lesson plans, student workbooks for both language and maths, and hands-on training that is helping change classroom transaction and practice—all aligned with their FLN goals.

Funding under NIPUN Bharat Mission is also strengthening implementation at the district level. States are now empowered to set-up district units for tracking of student learning to review progress of state's FLN mission. In 2023-24 alone, over 4 lakh spot assessments across Grades 1 to 3 were conducted by Academic Resource Persons in Uttar Pradesh, while Odisha's Cluster Resource Coordinators made 57,000 classroom visits to mentor teachers.

The question on everyone's mind is whether the design and large scale deployment of NIPUN state missions has had a positive impact on student learning? The early evidence is showing positive results.

State-run large-scale annual student assessments are showing positive trends in FLN competencies. In Madhya Pradesh, for example, the percentage of students who were NIPUN-competent in oral reading fluency went up by 10 percentage points between 2023 and 2024. Nationally, ASER 2024 recorded the strongest early learning gains in

over two decades with the percentage of Grade 3 students proficient in literacy and numeracy increasing by 7 percentage points between 2022 and 2024.

## **Looking ahead**

As India looks ahead to build on these early green shoots of progress under NIPUN, we need a bolder roadmap for sustained impact at scale.

First, extending NIPUN Bharat for another five years, beyond its current deadline of 2027 will help India get the necessary runway to ensure early signs of impact grow strong roots for sustained learning gains. Nearly 100% of allocated funds to states are being utilised, showing clear evidence of demand and momentum. What's needed now is continuity.

Second, NIPUN can be expanded to cover the foundational stage starting from Balvatika/Kindergarten for 5-year-olds to Grade 5. A full year Balvatika in schools will give our children the necessary preparedness to start their grade 1 learning journey. Support in Grade 3 to 5 will ensure year on year learning gains are sustained for successful onward learning journeys in middle school and high school.

Third, district-level FLN units can be strengthened with continued funding and strong accountability through state reviews. Districts have been the critical link for deployment of state programmes across all schools and classrooms in the state. Hence setting up district level FLN units will ensure high fidelity implementation of the state's FLN mission leading to all children learning.

Fourth, the health of our education system can be regularly assessed by institutionalising annual system level diagnostics like the 2022 Foundational Learning Study which was an oral assessment. Such assessments will help benchmark progress, identify learning deficits early, and inform timely interventions so that every child achieves FLN competencies.

Finally, build political and community ownership. Strong political sponsorship of NIPUN will ensure momentum from NEP and NIPUN Bharat is sustained through to NIPUN 2.0.

India's social change campaigns like Swachh Bharat and Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao gained momentum through widespread community engagement and strong political

ownership. Community ownership for NIPUN can involve panchayats organising NIPUN Gram Sabhas to spread awareness about the mission, materials being distributed by schools to parents for at-home learning, and local leaders celebrating learning milestones of students.

Given that our vision of a Viksit Bharat rests on realising the full potential of our young population, FLN warrants similar visibility. The last four years have shown what's possible when the system puts learning first.

As Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam once said, "Learning gives creativity, creativity leads to thinking, thinking provides knowledge, and knowledge makes you great." In many ways, NIPUN Bharat has laid out the foundational tracks for this journey for all our children. What's needed now is to sustain and strengthen this momentum.

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