

5.0 Professional Attitude of Government Primary School Teachers in the Light of NEP- 2020 Reforms

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Abstract

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 has redefined the landscape of Indian education, especially at the foundational and primary levels, by emphasizing competency-based learning, inclusive practices, and teacher empowerment. Within this transformative context, the professional attitude of government primary school teachers emerges as a crucial determinant of successful policy implementation. This theoretical study critically examines the concept of professional attitude, its dimensions, and the evolving expectations from teachers under NEP 2020. Drawing upon educational theory, policy documents, and recent literature, the paper explores how teacher attitudes influence classroom practices, student engagement, and institutional development. The analysis highlights that professional attitude encompasses ethical responsibility, openness to innovation, reflective practice, and commitment to continuous professional development. It further discusses the structural challenges and institutional support required to foster such attitudes in the government school system. The study concludes that unless teachers internalize the values and vision of NEP 2020 through attitudinal transformation, the policy's goals may remain aspirational. This paper thus contributes to a deeper understanding of the human and psychological dimensions of educational reform and underscores the need to align teacher identity, training, and policy expectations for holistic educational advancement.

Keywords: Professional Attitude, Government Primary Teachers and NEP 2020.

Introduction

The professional attitude of teachers is considered a foundational pillar in the quality of education delivery, particularly at the primary school level. In India, the significance of teachers' attitudes has gained renewed attention with the introduction of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, which reimagines the roles, responsibilities, and expectations from school teachers in the 21st century learning ecosystem. Government primary school teachers, being at the frontline of educational implementation, are now expected to possess not only strong academic and pedagogical skills but also a professional disposition that fosters inclusivity, ethical practices, lifelong learning, and child-centered approaches. In this changing educational landscape, understanding and evaluating the professional attitude of primary school teachers has become critical for ensuring the successful realization of NEP 2020 reforms. Professional attitude in teaching refers to the disposition, beliefs, behavior, and values that guide a teacher's interactions with students, colleagues, administration, and the community at large. It encompasses a teacher's commitment to ethical practices, responsibility, professional growth, innovation, and responsiveness to learners' needs. According to Hoy and Miskel (2013), a professional attitude is reflected in a teacher's ability

to demonstrate respect for students, fairness, commitment to learning outcomes, and readiness to adapt to new educational challenges. In the Indian context, government primary school teachers often operate within varied sociocultural and infrastructural realities, making their professional disposition an even more complex and vital subject of inquiry.

NEP 2020 presents a transformative vision for Indian education, emphasizing foundational literacy and numeracy, competency-based teaching, inclusive education, continuous professional development (CPD), and the integration of technology in pedagogy. At the heart of these reforms is the repositioning of the teacher as a facilitator of holistic development. The policy explicitly states that “teachers truly shape the future of our children — and, therefore, the future of our nation” (MHRD, 2020, p. 23). NEP 2020 outlines a comprehensive framework for teacher training, recruitment, career progression, and appraisal, all aimed at enhancing the professional stature and motivation of educators. These reforms are expected to bring a paradigm shift in the way government school teachers view their roles and responsibilities, thereby influencing their professional attitudes. Recent studies have pointed out that a teacher's professional attitude directly correlates with their classroom behavior, teaching effectiveness, and students' learning outcomes. For instance, Kumar and Kaur (2018) found that teachers with a high level of professional commitment showed greater instructional clarity and responsiveness to students' needs. Similarly, Sharma and Singh (2020), in a study conducted among primary school teachers in Uttar Pradesh, revealed that professional ethics, punctuality, and collaboration were significantly associated with student engagement and satisfaction. In the post-NEP environment, such attributes are not just desired but are deemed essential for the successful operationalization of policy goals such as the NIPUN Bharat Mission, which focuses on achieving foundational learning by Grade 3.

The professional attitude of teachers is also shaped by their training and institutional support. According to Banerjee and Choudhary (2019), the lack of systematic professional development opportunities and feedback mechanisms can demotivate teachers and lead to a decline in professional commitment. NEP 2020 aims to address this issue through regular CPD programs and a national professional standards framework for teachers (NPST), which encourages self-reflection and competency enhancement. In a theoretical review by Thomas (2021), it was argued that policies like NEP 2020 would only succeed if teachers internalize professional values as part of their identity and practice, not merely as compliance-driven expectations. Another key aspect is the attitudinal shift required in areas such as inclusive education and use of technology. With NEP 2020 promoting inclusive classrooms and universal access to quality education, teachers are expected to demonstrate empathy, cultural sensitivity, and adaptability. A study by Mishra and Das (2022) explored how professional attitude impacts the inclusion of children with special needs in government schools, concluding that teachers with a positive attitude toward diversity were more successful in applying inclusive strategies. Additionally, digital readiness has emerged as a component of professional attitude in the post-pandemic period. Teachers who are open to integrating ICT tools into their teaching display a forward-looking professional mindset, as highlighted by Verma and Nair (2021), who found a strong relationship between technological confidence and instructional innovation in government schools.

The challenges, however, remain significant. Government school teachers, particularly at the primary level, often struggle with issues such as high pupil-teacher ratio, lack of autonomy, administrative burden, and limited infrastructural facilities. These contextual constraints can impact their motivation and professional outlook. According to Raj and Menon (2020), many teachers feel that while NEP 2020 offers a promising vision, its implementation must be accompanied by systemic changes in school governance, workload management, and teacher empowerment for it to effectively influence professional attitudes. Furthermore, studies like those by Sahu (2021) suggest that a disconnect between policy intentions and grassroots realities often leads to superficial adoption of reforms, without real attitudinal transformation. Given the centrality of teachers in achieving NEP 2020 objectives, there is a need for theoretical and empirical exploration into how government primary teachers perceive their professional identity, how reforms influence their attitude, and what institutional conditions support or hinder their professional growth. This becomes especially important in rural and economically disadvantaged contexts, where teachers serve as role models and change agents in communities. The concept of professionalism in teaching is evolving — no longer limited to content mastery and classroom control but extending to collaboration, reflection, innovation, and social responsibility.

In light of the above, this paper seeks to analyze the theoretical underpinnings of professional attitude among government primary school teachers within the transformative framework of NEP 2020. It will draw from educational psychology, policy analysis, and teacher development literature to understand the implications of reform-driven expectations on the daily practices and mindsets of primary educators. This examination is necessary not just to align teaching behavior with national goals but also to ensure that the professional dignity and agency of teachers are preserved and enhanced. NEP 2020 envisions education as a collaborative and dynamic process — and in this vision, the teacher's professional attitude is not peripheral, but pivotal.

Conceptual Understanding of Professional Attitude

The professional attitude of a teacher refers to their set of values, beliefs, behaviors, and commitment toward their role as an educator, extending beyond classroom instruction to include ethical conduct, lifelong learning, collaboration, and student-centered practices. In the context of primary education, professional attitude becomes particularly significant as teachers are responsible for laying the foundational cognitive, emotional, and social frameworks for young learners. A teacher with a strong professional attitude demonstrates responsibility, punctuality, dedication to inclusive learning, adaptability to change, and a willingness to reflect on and improve one's own practices (Hoy & Miskel, 2013). This concept is not merely a personal trait but is deeply embedded within the institutional, societal, and policy contexts in which a teacher function. Tichenor and Tichenor (2005) emphasized that professional attitude combines personal characteristics such as empathy and patience with professional skills such as effective communication, organization, and responsiveness to diverse learners. In government primary schools, where teachers often face challenges related to infrastructure, resources, and student diversity, the strength of their professional attitude can significantly influence both their performance and student outcomes.

Further, professional attitude includes a commitment to equity, continuous professional development, and an openness to pedagogical innovations. Teachers who maintain a growth-oriented mindset tend to engage more actively in new training initiatives and curriculum reforms (Borko, 2004). This is especially relevant today, as the expectations from primary educators are rapidly evolving. A positive professional attitude is considered a driving force behind teacher motivation, school improvement, and policy implementation at the grassroots level (Day, 2002). In India, several studies have explored dimensions of professional attitude among school teachers. For example, Kaur and Khandelwal (2019) found that government school teachers with high professional orientation were more effective in integrating child-centered pedagogy and inclusive practices. Similarly, Mishra and Yadav (2020) noted that teachers with a proactive and reflective attitude were more likely to engage with curriculum reforms, including early literacy programs and digital learning initiatives. Thus, a strong professional attitude is not an abstract ideal but a measurable, observable, and influential aspect of a teacher's professional identity.

Overview of NEP 2020 with Reference to Primary Education

The National Education Policy 2020 represents a comprehensive restructuring of the Indian education system, with a strong emphasis on foundational and primary education. Recognizing that over 80% of cumulative brain development occurs by the age of eight, NEP 2020 introduces the Foundational Stage (ages 3–8) as a critical component of school education. This stage includes five years of flexible, play/activity-based learning and lays the groundwork for future academic success (MHRD, 2020). The policy's vision for primary education revolves around several core areas: ensuring foundational literacy and numeracy (FLN), promoting multilingualism, integrating arts and sports, introducing experiential and competency-based learning, and nurturing socio-emotional skills. The NIPUN Bharat Mission was launched in 2021 to operationalize the FLN goals of NEP 2020, targeting Grade 3 as the benchmark for basic learning outcomes (NCERT, 2021). These reforms require not only curricular redesign but also a transformation in the mindset and working culture of primary school teachers.

NEP 2020 strongly emphasizes the empowerment and accountability of teachers. It advocates for Continuous Professional Development (CPD), National Professional Standards for Teachers (NPST), and merit-based promotion systems, aiming to elevate the status of teaching to that of a respected and professional career (MHRD, 2020). Government primary school teachers are thus expected to evolve into facilitators of learning who are reflective, innovative, and student-centric in their approach. This transformation places the professional attitude of teachers at the center of policy implementation. According to Rao and Iyer (2021), the success of NEP 2020 at the primary level is directly tied to how teachers internalize and respond to its vision. They argue that reforms must go beyond structural changes and engage with the values, perceptions, and attitudes of educators. In a similar vein, Sharma (2022) stresses that NEP 2020 will remain aspirational unless teachers demonstrate readiness to adopt inclusive pedagogies, embrace digital tools, and foster competency-based assessments.

Professional Expectations from Primary Teachers under NEP 2020

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 marks a paradigm shift in India's approach to school education, especially in its treatment of teachers as central figures in transforming learning outcomes. The policy envisions teachers as facilitators of holistic development rather than mere transmitters of information. For primary teachers, particularly in government schools, NEP 2020 outlines several key professional expectations. These include fostering foundational literacy and numeracy, employing experiential and competency-based pedagogies, embracing inclusive education, integrating technology in classrooms, and continually engaging in professional development (MHRD, 2020). One of the foremost expectations is the shift toward learner-centered and activity-based pedagogy, especially in the foundational stage (ages 3–8). Teachers are now expected to implement flexible, play-based approaches that promote curiosity, conceptual understanding, and socio-emotional development (NCERT, 2021). This demands a professional attitude that is innovative, empathetic, and responsive to the diverse needs of young learners. Additionally, NEP 2020 emphasizes multilingualism and encourages teachers to adapt instruction to the child's home language or mother tongue, especially in early grades, thereby requiring cultural sensitivity and adaptive communication skills.

Another significant expectation is engagement in Continuous Professional Development (CPD), with NEP 2020 mandating 50 hours of CPD per year for all teachers. This reflects a broader shift toward reflective teaching and lifelong learning. Teachers are encouraged to update themselves with new methodologies, digital tools, and assessment techniques. According to Sharma and Verma (2021), government school teachers who actively participate in CPD programs exhibit greater classroom effectiveness and openness to reform-based practices. Furthermore, NEP 2020 emphasizes teacher autonomy and professionalism. Teachers are expected to exercise judgment in lesson planning, classroom management, and assessment while adhering to ethical conduct and inclusive values. The National Professional Standards for Teachers (NPST), proposed in NEP 2020, aim to define clear benchmarks for professional behavior, thus institutionalizing professionalism in the teaching community (Rao & Iyer, 2021).

Theoretical Perspectives on Teacher Professionalism

The concept of teacher professionalism has evolved significantly over time, influenced by various educational, sociological, and psychological theories. At its core, teacher professionalism refers to the attitudes, behaviors, and competencies that characterize a teacher as a responsible, ethical, and effective educator. The behavioral perspective, as proposed by B.F. Skinner, views professionalism as a set of observable actions shaped through training and reinforcement. From this standpoint, professional attitudes can be cultivated through structured feedback and continuous development programs. The humanistic perspective, grounded in the work of Carl Rogers, emphasizes the teacher's self-concept, empathy, and intrinsic motivation as key components of professionalism. Teachers are seen as self-directed individuals who thrive when they are respected, empowered, and supported in their personal and professional growth (Day, 2002). This perspective aligns closely with NEP 2020's vision of teacher autonomy and reflective practice.

Sociologically, Hargreaves (2000) suggests that teacher professionalism is shaped by institutional cultures, peer networks, and policy environments. The idea of "extended professionalism" emphasizes collaboration, inquiry-based practice, and moral purpose. Within this framework, NEP 2020's reforms such as peer-led training, mentorship, and school-based management are efforts to foster a culture of collective professional identity. From a policy analysis standpoint, teacher professionalism is increasingly being linked with accountability, performance, and standards. As Sachs (2016) argues, the modern discourse on professionalism includes both democratic ideals (agency, equity) and managerial expectations (efficiency, results). NEP 2020 attempts to balance these dimensions by proposing standards while also valuing teacher voice and contextual judgment.

Policy-Practice Interface: NEP 2020 and Ground Realities

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 outlines an ambitious and holistic framework for transforming Indian education. However, the success of any policy is determined not only by its design but also by its implementation at the grassroots level. This is especially true for government primary schools, where teachers are often required to translate policy ideals into day-to-day classroom realities. The NEP envisions foundational literacy and numeracy, inclusive and play-based pedagogy, and the development of professional standards for teachers (MHRD, 2020). Yet, implementing these visions demands institutional readiness, adequate resources, and supportive administrative structures—factors that are often lacking in under-resourced government schools. Studies have highlighted this disconnect between policy vision and on-ground conditions. According to Singh and Mehra (2021), many teachers are not fully aware of NEP 2020's recommendations due to limited access to training and information dissemination mechanisms. Teachers often face a heavy administrative workload, large class sizes, and infrastructural deficits, which reduce their capacity to engage meaningfully with new reforms. Furthermore, in rural and remote schools, the absence of basic amenities such as electricity, digital devices, and reading material constrains the integration of technology-based and activity-oriented learning approaches advocated by NEP 2020 (Rao & Iyer, 2021). This mismatch creates challenges for teachers who wish to demonstrate professional attitudes aligned with policy reforms but are constrained by systemic limitations.

Role of Continuous Professional Development (CPD)

Continuous Professional Development (CPD) is a central pillar of NEP 2020's strategy to enhance teacher quality and professionalism. The policy mandates at least 50 hours of CPD annually for all school teachers, focusing on updating their pedagogical skills, technological capabilities, and content knowledge (MHRD, 2020). CPD is viewed as a process that promotes reflective practice, lifelong learning, and adaptive teaching strategies. For primary teachers, it serves as a vehicle for aligning their professional attitudes with evolving educational needs. CPD's role in fostering positive professional attitudes has been widely recognized in research. According to Borko (2004), CPD programs that are collaborative, context-specific, and sustained over time are more likely to improve teaching practices and professional engagement. In the Indian context, Sharma and Prasad (2022) found that teachers who regularly participated in in-service training programs demonstrated

higher levels of motivation, classroom innovation, and student-centered teaching approaches. The NEP encourages peer learning, mentoring, and community-based professional learning networks, which are essential to shift teacher development from being a top-down directive to a participatory and empowering process.

However, CPD's effectiveness depends on its quality, accessibility, and contextual relevance. Many teachers report attending training sessions that are theoretical, repetitive, and disconnected from classroom realities (Chatterjee, 2021). To ensure meaningful impact, CPD must be designed with inputs from teachers, focus on local challenges, and be supported by mentoring systems that reinforce professional growth over time.

Implications for Stakeholders

The redefinition of teachers' roles and professional expectations under NEP 2020 has important implications for various stakeholders in the education system. For policymakers, the findings underline the need to bridge the gap between vision and implementation. Policies must be supported by infrastructure development, inclusive access to training, and mechanisms for feedback from ground-level educators. Without systemic support, even the most well-crafted policies may falter in execution. For school administrators and head teachers, fostering a professional culture within schools is essential. This includes reducing administrative burdens, encouraging peer collaboration, and creating an environment where teachers feel respected and empowered. According to Nambiar and Jha (2021), schools that promote a culture of trust and professional autonomy witness higher levels of teacher engagement and ownership of reforms.

Teacher training institutions also need to revisit their curriculum and practices to align with NEP 2020. They must focus not only on content knowledge but also on developing reflective, ethical, and inclusive teaching attitudes. Integration of NEP-aligned modules and experiential learning strategies during pre-service and in-service training can support this goal. For teachers themselves, the policy offers an opportunity for self-renewal and growth. They are not merely implementers of reform but key change agents whose professional attitudes and behaviors will shape the success of NEP 2020. A sense of intrinsic motivation, openness to feedback, and commitment to student well-being are essential for translating reform into reality.

Conclusion

The implementation of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 presents a transformative opportunity to redefine the educational landscape of India, particularly at the primary level. Central to this transformation is the professional attitude of government primary school teachers, who are the primary agents of executing the vision laid out in the policy. As this research highlights, a teacher's professional attitude encompasses a range of attributes including ethical responsibility, reflective practice, openness to innovation, inclusivity, and commitment to lifelong learning. These qualities are not only desirable but essential for the effective implementation of NEP mandates such as foundational literacy and numeracy, competency-based learning, and inclusive education. Theoretical and empirical perspectives affirm that professional attitude is shaped not only by individual disposition but also by institutional culture, policy support, and ongoing professional development.

While NEP 2020 provides a comprehensive framework for enhancing teacher professionalism through initiatives like Continuous Professional Development (CPD), National Professional Standards for Teachers (NPST), and pedagogical reforms, its successful realization depends on bridging the gap between policy and practice. Teachers need enabling environments, adequate training, and recognition of their voices in the reform process. Equally, stakeholders such as policymakers, school leaders, and training institutions must collaborate to create structures that support and sustain professional attitudes in the teaching community. In conclusion, strengthening the professional attitude of government primary teachers is not merely a policy requirement—it is a moral and strategic imperative for achieving educational equity, quality, and national development as envisioned by NEP 2020. The future of foundational education rests on teachers who not only teach but lead, reflect, and inspire with professionalism at the core of their practice.

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