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# NITI Aayog's School Education Report: From Textbook Completion to Foundational Mastery

THE HINDU

9 May 2026

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# NITI Aayog's School Education Report: From Textbook Completion to Foundational Mastery

 The Hindu

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## INTERVIEW ANGLE

*"NITI Aayog's report reveals systemic educational failure despite two decades of Right to Education. Is the problem one of pedagogy, governance, or resources — and which should India fix first?"*

## EDITORIAL SUMMARY:

The Hindu analyses NITI Aayog's comprehensive school education report, which reveals 1.19 lakh schools without electricity, significant post-Class 10 dropout rates, and weak foundational learning outcomes — arguing that India must shift from a grade-completion model to a learning-mastery model to fulfil the promise of NEP 2020.

## THE REPORT'S CORE FINDINGS

NITI Aayog's school education assessment — based on UDISE+ 2024-25 data — reveals a system that is structurally extensive but pedagogically shallow:

### Infrastructure Deficits

- **1.19 lakh schools** lack access to functional electricity
- Significant gaps in toilets, potable water, and laboratory facilities in rural schools
- Teacher vacancies especially acute in STEM subjects at secondary level

### Learning Outcome Crisis

- Children are being promoted by grade but are not learning at grade level
- NIPUN Bharat targets (foundational literacy and numeracy by Grade 3) are off-track
- Post-Class 10 dropout surge: economically marginal children exit at the first formal completion point

## The Grade-Completion Trap

India has historically prioritised **enrolment and completion statistics** over learning outcomes. Getting a child into school and keeping them until Class 10 counts as success — even if they cannot read a newspaper or do simple arithmetic.

NITI Aayog recommends: **teach children at their actual learning level, not their grade level** — the approach pioneered by Pratham’s ASER assessments and Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) methodology.

### NEP 2020’S 5+3+3+4 FRAMEWORK

STAGE	AGES	GRADES	FOCUS
Foundational	3-8	Pre-primary to Grade 2	Play-based learning
Preparatory	8-11	Grade 3-5	Discovery-based
Middle	11-14	Grade 6-8	Critical thinking
Secondary	14-18	Grade 9-12	Multidisciplinary

NEP 2020 mandated achieving **FLN goals** by Grade 3 for all children by 2026-27 — a target the NITI Aayog findings suggest is at serious risk.

### WHAT STRUCTURAL REFORMS ARE NEEDED

- 1 **Learning-level teaching (TaRL):** Group children by learning level, not age/grade — proven in Bihar’s SATH-E programme
- 2 **Teacher training reform:** From content-delivery to pedagogical skill training
- 3 **Infrastructure electrification:** 1.19 lakh schools without power cannot use digital resources
- 4 **School rationalisation:** Many schools have 1-2 teachers for all grades — consolidation needed
- 5 **Career counselling at Class 9-10:** Vocational pathways prevent the dropout cliff

### UPSC MAINS ANALYSIS

#### GS Paper 2 — Governance, Social Justice

- NEP 2020 FLN targets at risk
- Learning outcomes vs. enrolment as educational equity metrics

- Digital infrastructure gap undermines digital education schemes

### GS Paper 1 — Society

- Post-Class 10 dropouts disproportionately from SC, ST, OBC — perpetuates inter-generational poverty

**Keywords:** NEP 2020, FLN, NIPUN Bharat, UDISE+, ASER, Teaching at the Right Level, 5+3+3+4, foundational literacy, NITI Aayog, school dropout

### Mains Angles:

- 1 Critically evaluate India’s progress on foundational literacy and numeracy goals under NEP 2020.
- 2 “India’s school education system is wide but shallow.” Discuss with reference to learning outcomes data.
- 3 What structural reforms would meaningfully reduce post-Class 10 school dropout rates?

*The Hindu argues: NITI Aayog’s report is a data-backed indictment of India’s grade-completion obsession. The shift from “how many children are in school” to “what are they actually learning” is the central reform India’s education system needs. NEP 2020 provides the framework; NITI Aayog’s report reveals how far implementation lags behind aspiration.*

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