

GUIDING PRINCIPLES AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE NCF-FS AND NCF-SE: SHAPING EARLY CHILDHOOD AND SCHOOL EDUCATION

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Introduction

NEP 2020 is a comprehensive framework for education reform in India and it aims to bring significant changes in the education system by providing a holistic and multidisciplinary approach to education. National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 is a comprehensive framework designed to guide the development and regulation of education. It not only shapes the educational landscape but also sets directions for its governance and promotion. The policy encompasses all stages of education, including early childhood care and education, school education, higher education, teacher education, and vocational education. The first National Policy on Education was established in 1968, followed by the second in 1986, which was later modified in 1992.

The latest iteration is NEP 2020, which was introduced on July 29th, 2020. As the first education policy of the 21st century, NEP 2020 aims to address the nation's growing developmental needs. It envisions creating an education system by 2040 that is among the best globally, providing equitable access to high-quality education for all learners, irrespective of social or economic background. The policy calls for a comprehensive revision and revamping of the entire educational structure, including its regulation and governance, to develop a system that aligns with the aspirational goals of 21st-century education, such as SDG4, while preserving and building upon India's rich traditions and values. NEP 2020 encompasses a broad spectrum of reforms aimed at addressing the challenges of access, equity, quality, and relevance in education.

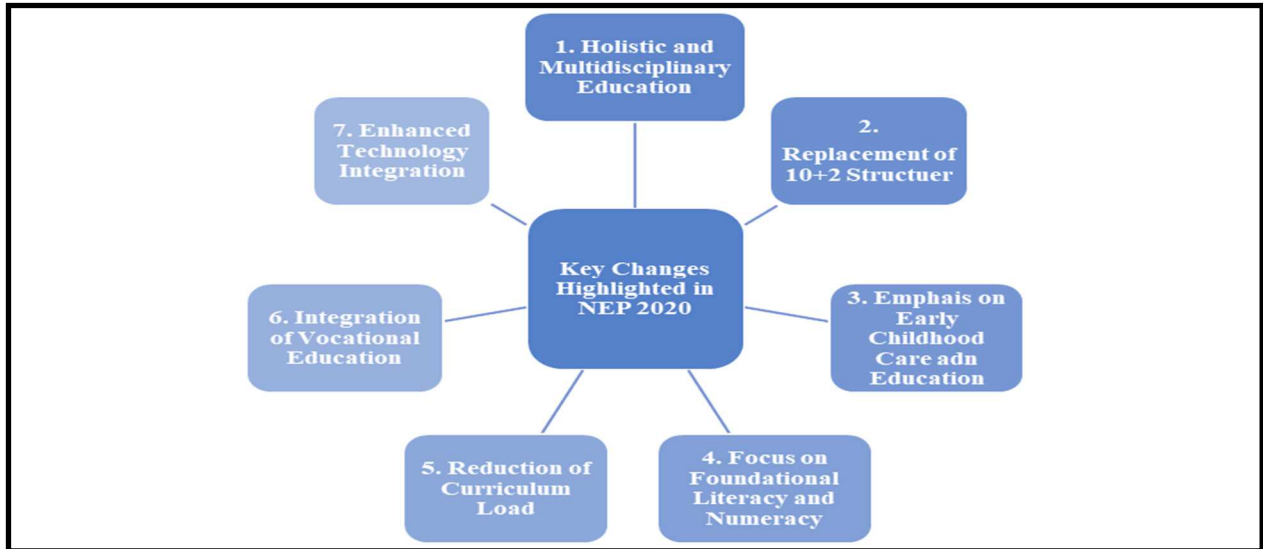


Fig. 1: Key Changes Highlighted in NEP 2020

1.1 Alignment of NEP 2020 with National Curriculum Frameworks

NEP 2020 focuses on key elements such as-

- a) Universalization of education from preschool to secondary level
- b) Introduction of a new pedagogical and curricular structure
- c) Emphasis on the development of foundational literacy and numeracy skills in primary education
- d) Increased focus on research and development in education.

To realize these objectives the document has suggested the development of four national curriculum frameworks such as -

- a) National Curriculum Framework for School Education (NCFSE)
- b) National Curriculum Framework for Early Childhood Care and Education (NCFECCE)
- c) National Curriculum Framework for Teacher Education (NCFTE)
- d) National Curriculum Framework for Adult Education (NCFAE).

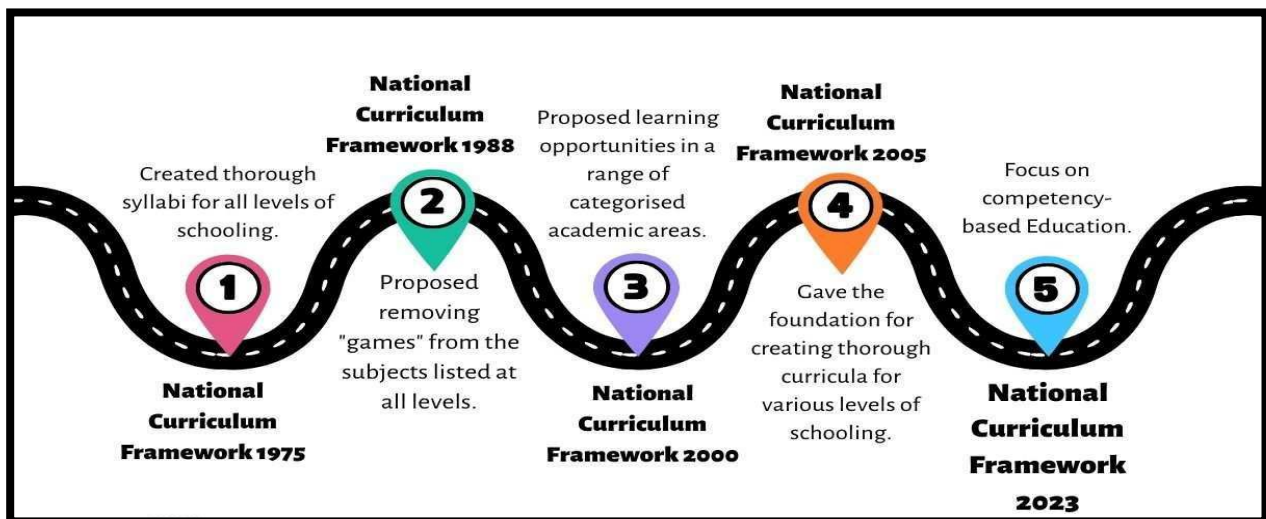


Fig. 2: Timeline of National Curriculum Frameworks

Source: <https://www.jagranjosh.com/articles/ncf-national-curriculum-framework-timeline-1692879491-1>.

Biswas (2024) stated that with the introduction of National Educational Policy (2020) and National Curriculum Frameworks (NCF) the educational scenario has witnessed several changes. These documents play a significant role in shaping the direction of education in our country. These documents have the power to enhance the quality, inclusivity and relevance of education in India.

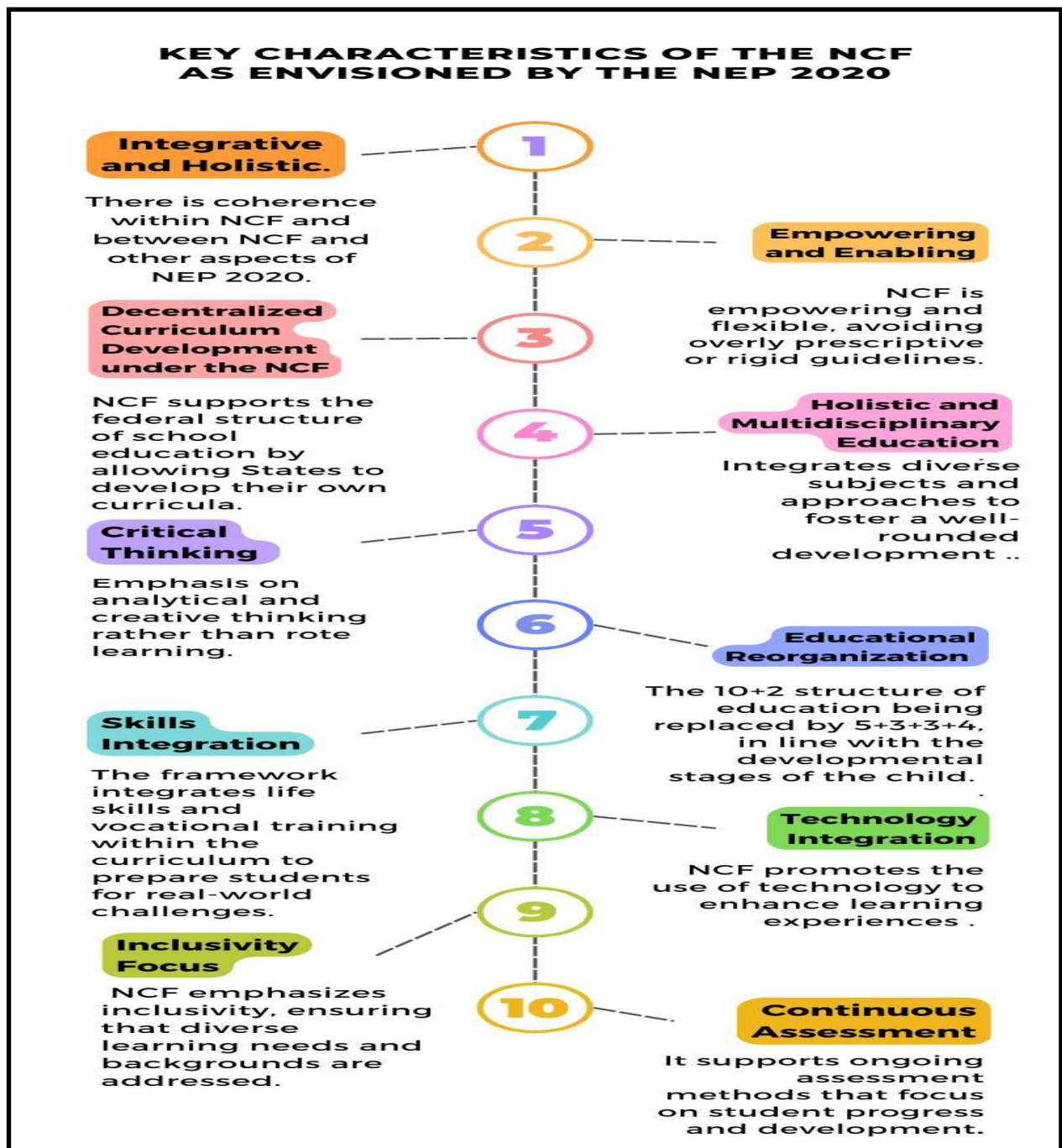


Fig. 3: Key Characteristics of NCF as Envisioned by NEP 2020

These frameworks have the responsibility to provide guidelines for curriculum development and child-centered approach to education. Both NEP and NCF focus on the cognitive, emotional and social development thus leading to the holistic development of students. In addition to this, NEP suggests the reduction of curriculum load on the students and NCF fulfills this recommendation by focusing on the meaningful learning experiences and critical thinking. Furthermore, NCF also emphasizes inclusivity, universal access, equitable education, and preparing students for real life situations. It also promotes the integration of vocational education, technology, and skill development in education.

1.2 NCF for Early Childhood Care and Education (Foundational Stage)

The primary goal of NCF-FS (2022) is to provide high-quality education to all children to build an equitable, inclusive, and pluralistic society. This marks the first integrated curriculum framework in India for children aged 3 to 8, emerging from the NEP's 5+3+3+4 curricular and pedagogical structure for school education. The Foundational Stage, which covers this age group, emphasizes a holistic approach to Early Childhood Care and Education. The framework also provides a well-defined strategy for achieving foundational literacy and numeracy, using age-appropriate methods, in alignment with the goals set by NEP 2020.

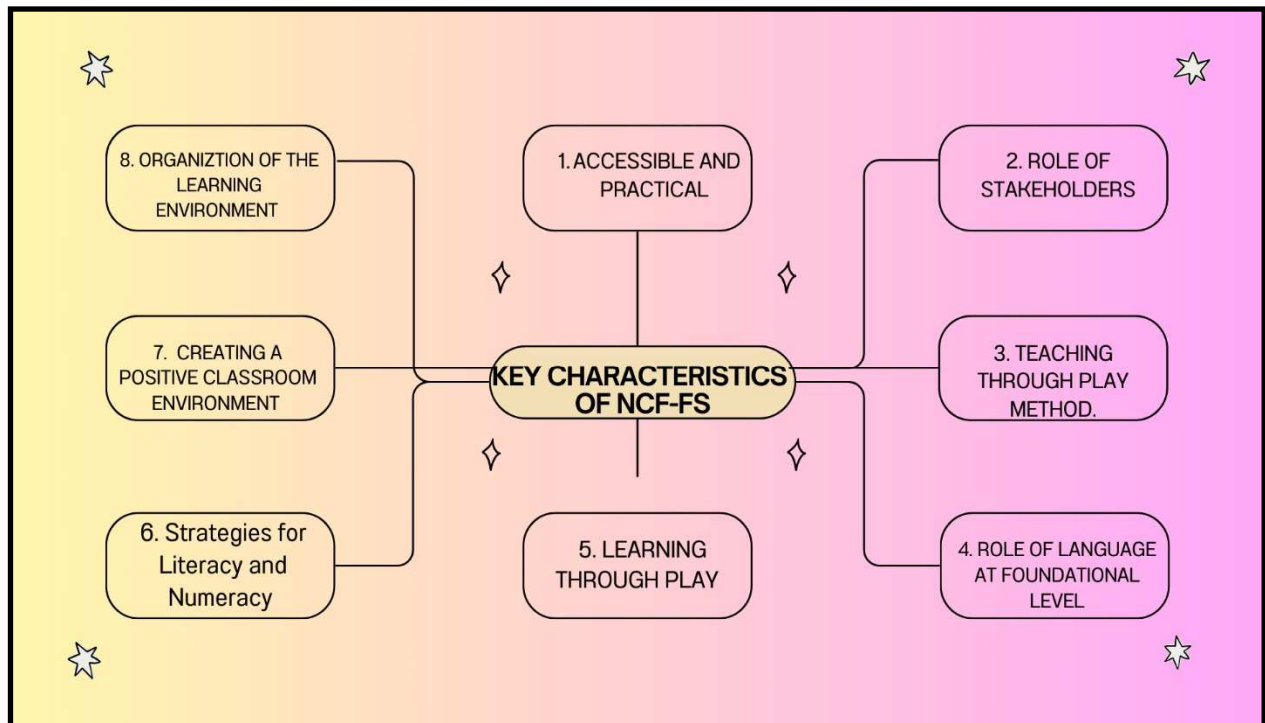


Fig. 1: Key Characteristics of NCF-FS to Achieve the Educational Goals

1. Accessible and Practical

- The key characteristics of this NCF is to be accessible and practical for teachers, school leaders, and education system professionals. It further includes project officers, resource persons, education officers, teacher educators, and curriculum developers ensuring that the framework is relevant and actionable for all stakeholders involved in the educational process.
- 2. Role of stakeholders**
- The NCF further offers readers insight into the role of parents, community members, and citizens so that they can play a significant role in shaping and supporting India's education system.
- 3. Teaching through Play Method**
- National Curriculum Framework-FS (NCF-FS) underscores the central role of 'play' across various dimensions of education. It emphasizes that the curriculum and teaching methods should be play based. Games and playful activities should be used to enhance learning and accommodate diverse learning styles (NCF-FS, Para 1.4.2).
- 4. Role of Language at Foundational Level**
- It is also stated that the home language of a child is important in making concepts easier for students. Therefore, during the Foundational Stage, the primary medium of instruction should ideally be the child's home language, mother tongue, or familiar language (NCF-FS, Para 3.2a).
 - In addition to this, multiple spoken languages should be introduced to children. The schools should train teachers to engage children using at least two, ideally three languages (NCF-FS, Para 3.2b).
- 5. Learning through Play**
- **Conversations** play a crucial role in helping children connect with people and their surroundings. Ongoing dialogue in the classroom fosters trust and strengthens relationships between children and their environment. Free conversions and structured conversations are essential in developing the children's ability to present their options and communicate with others (NCF-FS, Para 4.4.1).
 - **Storytelling** is an essential tool for teaching social relationship, ethics, emotions and life skills. Through storytelling children can expand their vocabulary, sentence structure , and enhance problem-solving skills. Stories also help children to focus longer by enhancing their attention span. Additionally, culturally relevant stories introduce children to their culture, social norms, and surroundings (NCF-FS, Para 4.4.2).

- **Toys, Songs and Rhymes**

Toys can also be made from readily available items such as fabric, bottles, cardboard boxes, yarn, cooking pans, bangles, pipe cleaners and pinecones. Regardless of a toy's simplicity or complexity, it offers valuable learning opportunities for a child. When a child handles and interacts with a toy, he/she practices motor skills and enhances hand-eye coordination (NCF-FS, Para 4.4.3).

Children grasp various concepts and expand their vocabulary through songs. The physical movements that accompany songs improve both gross and fine motor skills, while gestures help in understanding concepts. Songs also encourage interaction and foster cooperation among children (NCF-FS, Para 4.4.4).

In addition to this, arts and crafts activities such as drawing, painting, clay molding, tearing, cutting, folding, and constructing new things are essential in developing fine motor skills, creativity, and problem-solving abilities in children (NCF-FS, Para 4.4.6). Furthermore, indoor games, outdoor games, field trips and spending time in nature is also important in order to make children aware about nature.

6. Strategies for Literacy and Numeracy

- To develop literacy and numeracy among children the teachers should ask them to 'pretend read' illustrated storybooks, draw or write after storytelling, and engage with a print-rich environment featuring big books, picture books, and posters. Setting up 'reading' and 'writing' corners in the classroom also supports their literacy development (NCF-FS, Para 4.5.1.2).

7. Creating A Positive Classroom Environment

- The section 4.6 of NCF-FS discusses the importance of an inclusive classroom in order to create a positive classroom environment. It is stated that the classroom should be open, supportive and offer support. The teacher should create respectful boundaries with the students. The students should be disciplined by providing guidance and making them responsible for their actions. At the Foundational Stage, flexible seating and dynamic classroom displays support the pedagogical approach. Learning Corners should be inviting and stimulate curiosity, providing flexible, engaging spaces for children.

8. Organization of the Learning Environment

- The arrangement and organization of the learning environment are crucial in the Foundational Stage. Children at this stage learn best by actively engaging with and

manipulating their surroundings through all their senses. To support this rich sensory experience, thoughtfully selected Teaching Learning Materials (TLMs) are essential in the classroom (NCF-FS, Chapter 5).

National Curriculum Framework (NCF) under NEP 2020 is a game-changer for education in India, especially for young learners. It introduces a holistic and playful approach, making learning both engaging and effective. By focusing on early literacy, multiple languages, and a stimulating classroom environment, NCF helps create a nurturing space where children can thrive. It also empowers teachers and involves families in the educational journey. This framework is set to make a real difference, ensuring that every child has the opportunity to succeed and grow in a supportive and equitable setting.

1.3 National Curriculum Framework for School Education (NCF-SE)

National Curriculum Framework for School Education (2023), developed in alignment with National Education Policy (2020), serves as a guide for curriculum design, textbook creation, and teaching methodologies in schools. Its main goal is to elevate educational standards through more effective teaching and learning strategies. A central emphasis of the framework is on tailoring instruction to meet the diverse needs of students. It also discusses the educational needs of the students belonging to the age group of 3 to 18 years. This framework suggested development of the teaching methodologies according to the 5+3+3+4 structure. This structure comprises:

- a. **Foundational Stage** (Covering ages 3-8, this includes 3 years of Anganwadi/pre-school and 2 years of primary education.)
- b. **The Preparatory Stage** (For children aged 8-11, covering Grades 3 to 5.)
- c. **The Middle Stage** (For ages 11-14, encompassing Grades 6 to 8.)
- d. **The Secondary Stage** (For ages 14-18, divided into two phases covering Grades 9 to 12.)

National Curriculum Framework for School Education (NCF-SE) was developed to respond to this four-stage school design. Some key points of this framework are discussed below:

1. Comprehensive curriculum framework

- The framework covers all four stages of school education and recommended that it is important to select proper content, pedagogy and assessment methods in order to maintain the quality of education.

2. Connecting with the Stakeholders

- NCF-FS has made conscious efforts in developing communication with all the stakeholders (teachers, parents and administrators) to effectively implement the changes in the curriculum.
- 3. Competencies and Learning Standards**
 - NCF outlines clear and rigorous learning standards for all school subjects, providing direction for all stakeholders, especially teachers. These standards define the specific competencies to be achieved at the end of each stage. There is a logical progression from the broad aims of education to subject-specific goals and competencies for each stage.
 - 4. Holistic Development of Knowledge, Skills, and Values**
 - The curriculum framework emphasizes the development of deep, meaningful knowledge alongside essential skills and values. It fosters a genuine understanding of core concepts, while nurturing fundamental capacities such as critical thinking, problem-solving, and creativity.
 - 5. Innovative and Engaging Pedagogy**
 - The curriculum framework supports a diverse range of pedagogical approaches tailored to age and context, including play-based, activity-driven, inquiry-led, and dialogue-centered methods. It promotes the use of effective and widely accessible teaching materials to create a highly engaging learning environment for students.
 - 6. Reimagining Assessments and Exams**
 - Assessments and exams are redesigned to focus on meaningful learning experiences rather than memorization. This approach helps reduce the stress often associated with tests, including Board exams. The goal is to make evaluations more supportive and reflective of students' real understanding.
 - 7. Multidisciplinary Education with Equity and Inclusion**
 - All children will experience a multidisciplinary education designed to foster an integrated and holistic perspective. NCF-SE emphasizes equity and inclusion across all aspects, including content, pedagogy, and school culture, ensuring that every student benefits from a comprehensive and equitable learning environment.
 - 8. Vocational Education**
 - NEP 2020 highlights the importance of integrating vocational education into school curricula, and the NCF-SE incorporates specific standards, content, pedagogy, and

assessments for this purpose. The curriculum covers three key areas: work with life forms, work with materials and machines, and work in human services.

9. Multilingualism and Indian Languages

- NCF-SE emphasizes the importance of multilingualism and learning Indian languages. Reflecting India's diverse linguistic heritage, it aims for all students to become proficient in at least three languages, including at least two native to India. Additionally, students are expected to achieve a high level of linguistic proficiency in at least one Indian language.

10. Flexibility and Choice in the Secondary Stage

- The Secondary Stage has been restructured to provide greater flexibility and choice for students. There are no rigid boundaries between academic and vocational subjects or among science, social science, art, and physical education. Students can select a variety of subjects that interest them to earn their school-leaving certificates.

Conclusion

NEP 2020 and its National Curriculum Frameworks are set to transform India's education system, making it more holistic, inclusive, and adaptable. These changes focus on nurturing early childhood development, promoting multilingualism, integrating vocational training, and offering flexible learning paths. By reducing the stress of traditional exams and fostering a supportive, engaging environment, these reforms aim to create a more equitable education system that prepares students for the future while respecting India's cultural heritage. As these changes take root, they are likely to promise a more dynamic and supportive educational experience for all learners.

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Shri Dharmendra Pradhan releases the National Curriculum Framework for School Education in New Delhi.

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