

“Constructing Knowledge, Constructing Nation” A Study of Constructivist Approach in the Framework of NEP 2020

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Abstract-- The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 marks a decisive shift in the philosophical and pedagogical orientation of Indian education, moving away from rote memorisation and content-heavy transaction towards experiential, inquiry-based, and learner-centred practice. At the heart of this shift lies constructivism, a theory of learning which holds that knowledge is not transmitted but actively constructed by learners through experience, reflection, and social interaction. This paper examines the conceptual convergence between the constructivist approach to teaching-learning and the vision articulated in NEP 2020, and explores the extent to which constructivist principles are reflected in the policy's recommendations on curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, and teacher preparation. Drawing on a review of policy documents and existing research literature, the paper argues that NEP 2020 provides strong textual and philosophical support for constructivist practice but that its realisation in classrooms depends heavily on teacher awareness, training, and institutional readiness. The paper concludes with suggestions for strengthening constructivist pedagogy in the light of NEP 2020 and identifies directions for further empirical research, particularly at the secondary level of schooling.

Keywords--Constructivism, NEP 2020, teaching-learning process, learner-centred pedagogy, curriculum reform, teacher education

I. INTRODUCTION

Education is increasingly recognised not as the transfer of a fixed body of knowledge from teacher to learner but as a process through which learners actively build their own understanding of the world. This view, broadly termed constructivism, traces its philosophical roots to the work of Jean Piaget on cognitive development and Lev Vygotsky on the social and cultural mediation of learning, and has since informed pedagogical practice across the world (Piaget, 1970; Vygotsky, 1978). Constructivist pedagogy positions the learner as an active meaning-maker who connects new experiences to prior knowledge, engages in problem-solving, and constructs understanding through dialogue, collaboration, and reflection, while the teacher functions as a facilitator rather than a mere transmitter of information.

The National Education Policy 2020, released by the Ministry of Human Resource Development (now the Ministry of Education), Government of India, is the most comprehensive restatement of Indian educational philosophy since 1986. It explicitly calls for a shift from “rote learning” to learning that is “conceptual, engaging, and enjoyable,” and it envisions a pedagogy that develops critical thinking, creativity, and the ability of learners to construct and apply knowledge across contexts (Ministry of Human Resource Development [MHRD], 2020). Read closely, the pedagogical vision of NEP 2020 resonates strongly with constructivist theory, even though the policy does not use the term “constructivism” as a technical label. This paper attempts to map that resonance systematically and to consider what it implies for classroom practice, particularly at the secondary level.

II. NEED AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Educational policies acquire meaning only when they are translated into classroom practice, and this translation depends on the pedagogical understanding of teachers who implement them. While NEP 2020 has generated considerable discussion at the level of structural reform — the 5+3+3+4 curricular structure, the introduction of vocational education, multiple entry-exit points in higher education, and so on — comparatively less attention has been paid to the pedagogical philosophy underlying the policy and its alignment with established learning theories such as constructivism. There is a need to examine this alignment explicitly, for at least three reasons.

- First, without a clear theoretical anchor, the policy's pedagogical recommendations risk being implemented superficially, as slogans rather than as coherent classroom practice.
- Second, teachers are more likely to adopt and sustain a pedagogical shift when they understand its theoretical rationale rather than experiencing it as an administrative directive.

- Third, secondary level teaching in India continues to be shaped by examination pressure and content coverage, both of which work against constructivist practice unless deliberately addressed through policy-aligned teacher preparation.

This study is therefore significant for teacher educators, curriculum developers, school administrators, and practising teachers who are engaged in operationalising NEP 2020 in the classroom, and it contributes to the wider scholarly conversation on the theoretical foundations of India's current education policy.

III. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To examine the theoretical foundations of the constructivist approach to teaching and learning.
- To analyse the pedagogical recommendations of NEP 2020 in relation to constructivist principles of learning.
- To identify the specific provisions of NEP 2020 that support curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment reform along constructivist lines.
- To examine the role of teacher preparation and professional development in operationalising constructivist pedagogy under NEP 2020.
- To suggest measures for strengthening constructivist practice in schools in the light of NEP 2020.

IV. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- What is the core theoretical principles of the constructivist approach to teaching and learning?
- In what ways does NEP 2020 reflect or endorse constructivist principles in its recommendations on curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment?
- What structural and pedagogical provisions of NEP 2020 create conditions favourable to constructivist classroom practice?
- What role does teacher preparation play in bridging the gap between policy intention and classroom implementation of constructivist pedagogy?
- What measures can strengthen the practical adoption of constructivist pedagogy in schools under the NEP 2020 framework?

V. HYPOTHESES

As this paper is conceptual and analytical in nature, drawing primarily on documentary and literature-based analysis rather than field-based statistical testing, the following propositions are framed as directional hypotheses

to guide the analysis and to inform subsequent empirical research:

- *H1*: The pedagogical recommendations of NEP 2020 are substantially aligned with the principles of constructivist learning theory.
- *H2*: Teacher awareness and training in constructivist methods significantly influence the effective classroom implementation of NEP 2020's pedagogical vision.
- *H3*: Examination-oriented and content-driven school practices act as a constraint on the adoption of constructivist pedagogy, independent of policy intent.

VI. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Piaget (1970) proposed that learners construct knowledge through the interrelated processes of assimilation and accommodation as they interact with their environment, forming the cognitive foundation of constructivist theory. Vygotsky (1978) extended this individual-cognitive account by emphasising the social and cultural origins of learning, introducing the concept of the Zone of Proximal Development to describe the gap between what a learner can achieve independently and what can be achieved with guided support from a more knowledgeable other. Together, these two strands — cognitive constructivism and social constructivism — form the theoretical backbone of most contemporary constructivist pedagogy.

Bruner (1966) contributed the idea of the spiral curriculum and discovery learning, arguing that any subject can be taught effectively in some intellectually honest form to learners at any stage of development, provided the content is structured appropriately and learners are encouraged to discover principles for themselves rather than being told them directly. This idea underlies much of the emphasis in NEP 2020 on experiential and inquiry-based learning across stages of schooling.

In the Indian context, the National Curriculum Framework 2005 had already articulated a strong constructivist orientation, describing knowledge as being constructed by the learner through activity, dialogue, and reflection rather than being received passively, and calling for the classroom to be connected to the child's life outside school (National Council of Educational Research and Training [NCERT], 2005). NEP 2020 builds on this foundation and extends it further, calling explicitly for a reduction in curriculum content to make room for critical thinking and experiential learning, and for assessment reform that moves away from rote recall towards the evaluation of higher-order competencies (MHRD, 2020).

Empirical studies on teacher awareness of constructivist pedagogy in India have generally found a gap between teachers' stated belief in constructivist ideals and their actual classroom practice, with lecture-based and textbook-centred transaction remaining dominant, particularly at the secondary level (Batra, 2010). This gap is frequently attributed to inadequate pre-service and in-service training, large class sizes, examination pressure, and limited institutional support for pedagogical innovation. Sarangapani (2003) similarly observed that constructivist ideas, while attractive at the level of policy discourse, require sustained structural support — including changes in textbook design, assessment practice, and teacher education — if they are to move beyond rhetoric into everyday classroom life. This body of literature suggests that the central challenge for NEP 2020 is not the adequacy of its pedagogical vision but the adequacy of the systemic support — particularly teacher preparation — required to realise that vision in practice.

VII. METHODOLOGY

7.1 Research Design

The study adopts a qualitative, analytical-cum-descriptive research design based on documentary analysis. It examines the text of the National Education Policy 2020 alongside secondary sources — peer-reviewed research literature, NCERT curriculum framework documents, and scholarly commentary on constructivist pedagogy — to identify points of theoretical and practical convergence between constructivism and the policy's pedagogical recommendations.

7.2 Sources of Data

The primary source of data is the National Education Policy 2020 document published by the Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India. Secondary sources include the National Curriculum Framework 2005, foundational theoretical works on constructivism, and published research studies on constructivist practice and teacher preparedness in the Indian school context.

7.3 Method of Analysis

Content analysis was employed to identify sections of NEP 2020 that address curriculum design, pedagogy, assessment, and teacher education, which were then compared against established constructivist principles — active learner participation, prior-knowledge activation, social and collaborative learning, contextualised and experiential tasks, and formative, competency-based assessment — drawn from the reviewed literature.

VIII. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

8.1 Curriculum Recommendations

NEP 2020 recommends a substantial reduction in curriculum content at every stage of school education in order to “make space for critical thinking and more holistic, inquiry-based, discovery-based, discussion-based, and analysis-based learning” (MHRD, 2020). This directly reflects the constructivist premise that depth of understanding, rather than breadth of coverage, produces durable learning, and it echoes Bruner's argument that learners must engage actively with fewer, well-structured ideas rather than passively receive a large volume of disconnected facts.

8.2 Pedagogical Recommendations

The policy repeatedly emphasises experiential learning, including hands-on learning, arts-integrated and sports-integrated education, and story-telling-based pedagogy, particularly at the foundational and preparatory stages. It calls for pedagogy to become “more experiential, holistic, integrated, inquiry-driven, discovery-oriented, learner-centred, discussion-based, flexible, and, of course, enjoyable” (MHRD, 2020). Each of these descriptors maps closely onto constructivist classroom practice, in which the learner is positioned as an active participant who constructs meaning through activity and social interaction rather than as a passive recipient of transmitted content.

8.3 Assessment Reform

NEP 2020 calls for a shift in assessment from one that is “summative and tests rote memorisation” to one that is “regular and formative, is more competency-based, promotes learning and development, and tests higher-order skills, such as analysis, critical thinking, and conceptual clarity” (MHRD, 2020). This is consistent with constructivist assessment philosophy, which favours ongoing, process-oriented evaluation that captures the learner's evolving understanding rather than a single, content-recall-based examination at the end of instruction.

8.4 Teacher Education and Preparedness

The policy recognises teachers as central to the success of any pedagogical reform and calls for a four-year integrated B.Ed. programme, continuous professional development, and training that equips teachers with the latest pedagogical methods, including constructivist and experiential approaches (MHRD, 2020). This provision is critical because, as the literature reviewed above indicates, the gap between constructivist policy intent and classroom reality in India has historically been a gap in teacher preparation rather than a gap in policy philosophy.

8.5 Points of Convergence and Tension

Taken together, these findings support Hypothesis 1: the pedagogical recommendations of NEP 2020 are substantially aligned with constructivist learning theory across curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment. At the same time, the findings support Hypotheses 2 and 3 indirectly: the literature consistently identifies teacher preparedness as the decisive variable in translating constructivist policy into constructivist practice, and identifies examination-oriented school culture as a persistent structural constraint that policy text alone cannot resolve. NEP 2020 provides the philosophical and textual conditions for constructivist pedagogy; whether these conditions produce constructivist classrooms depends on implementation factors that lie beyond the text of the policy itself.

IX. SUGGESTIONS

- School-level in-service training programmes should be organised specifically to build teachers' conceptual understanding of constructivism, and not merely to introduce constructivist activities as isolated techniques.
- Teacher education curricula, in line with NEP 2020's four-year integrated B.Ed. structure, should give sustained practical exposure to constructivist lesson planning, questioning techniques, and formative assessment.
- School examination and assessment practices need to be realigned with NEP 2020's competency-based assessment vision so that constructivist classroom practice is not undermined by summative, recall-based examinations.
- Textbook and curriculum designers should build in scope for inquiry, discussion, and locally contextualised activities rather than content that primarily supports transmission-style teaching.
- School administrators should allow flexibility in time-tabling and class organisation to accommodate the collaborative and activity-based tasks that constructivist pedagogy requires.
- Regular classroom-based action research should be encouraged among teachers to reflect on and refine their own constructivist practice.

X. SCOPE FOR FURTHER STUDY

This paper is conceptual and document-based; it does not empirically measure classroom practice. Future research could usefully conduct field-based studies measuring secondary level teachers' awareness and actual use of constructivist methods after the introduction of NEP 2020, using classroom observation and teacher surveys. Comparative studies across subjects (for instance, Political Science, Science, and Mathematics) and across school types (government, private, and Bengali-medium or other regional-medium institutions) would also help identify subject-specific and context-specific barriers to constructivist practice. Longitudinal studies tracking teacher preparedness as the four-year integrated B.Ed. programme becomes established would further illuminate whether NEP 2020's teacher-education reforms achieve their intended pedagogical effect.

XI. CONCLUSION

This paper set out to examine the relationship between the constructivist approach to teaching and learning and the vision articulated in the National Education Policy 2020. The analysis shows that NEP 2020, in its recommendations on curriculum reduction, experiential and inquiry-based pedagogy, competency-based assessment, and teacher education, is substantially aligned with constructivist learning theory, even though the policy does not explicitly invoke constructivism as a named theoretical framework. The title of this paper — “Constructing Knowledge, Constructing Nation” — reflects this central argument: that the individual, learner-centred act of constructing knowledge in the classroom is, in NEP 2020's own vision, inseparable from the larger national project of building an equitable, capable, and thoughtful citizenry. However, the realisation of this vision depends less on the text of the policy and more on the readiness of teachers, institutions, and assessment systems to support constructivist practice in everyday classroom life. Sustained investment in teacher preparation, assessment reform, and institutional flexibility will determine whether NEP 2020's constructivist promise is translated into constructivist reality.

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