



Evolution of Karnataka's State Education Policy in Light of NEP 2020: A Historical-Comparative Study

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Abstract

Education policy in Karnataka has evolved through successive historical phases, shaped by princely-state reform, colonial administration, post-Independence national policy frameworks, and, most recently, the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. This paper adopts a historical-comparative method to trace the trajectory of state education policy from the Mysore princely administration through the National Policy on Education (NPE) 1968 and 1986/1992, culminating in Karnataka's structural response to NEP 2020, including the transition to a 4-year undergraduate programme, multiple entry-exit provisions, and the establishment of the Karnataka State Higher Education Council's implementation framework. Using documentary and archival analysis supplemented by illustrative secondary statistical trends, the study compares literacy growth, higher education enrolment patterns, and institutional expansion across policy eras. Findings indicate that while each historical policy phase contributed incrementally to access and infrastructure, NEP 2020 marks a qualitatively distinct shift toward multidisciplinary, flexible, and vocationally integrated higher education in Karnataka. The paper concludes by identifying persistent structural challenges—language-medium debates, rural-urban disparity, and institutional readiness—that continue to condition policy implementation, and offers suggestions for evidence-based, historically-informed policy planning.

Keywords: Karnataka Education Policy, NEP 2020, Historical-Comparative Study, NPE 1986, Higher Education Reform, Educational History, State Education Policy

1. Introduction

The history of education policy in Karnataka is inseparable from the broader history of educational reform in India, yet it retains distinct regional features shaped by the erstwhile



princely State of Mysore, the linguistic reorganisation of States in 1956, and subsequent State-level legislative and administrative initiatives. Karnataka has historically been regarded as a relatively progressive State in matters of public education, having established the University of Mysore in 1916 as one of the earliest universities in India outside the direct administration of British India. The present study situates the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 within this longer historical trajectory, examining how successive policy regimes—from princely-era reform through the National Policy on Education (NPE) 1968 and 1986—have shaped the structural, linguistic, and institutional character of education in the State, and how NEP 2020 represents both continuity with, and departure from, these historical patterns.

A historical-comparative approach is particularly suited to this inquiry because education policy rarely emerges as a singular, discrete event; rather, it accumulates through layered administrative reform, legislative amendment, and institutional adaptation over time. By comparing the provisions, implementation strategies, and outcomes associated with each major policy phase, this study aims to identify what is genuinely novel in NEP 2020's approach to Karnataka's education system, and what instead continues long-standing historical patterns of reform in the State.

2. Objectives of the Study

- To trace the historical evolution of education policy in Karnataka from the princely-State period to the present.
- To examine the key provisions of NEP 2020 and their specific implications for Karnataka's education system.
- To conduct a historical-comparative analysis of literacy growth, enrolment trends, and institutional expansion across major policy eras in Karnataka.
- To identify continuities and discontinuities between NEP 2020 and earlier national and State-level education policies.
- To highlight structural challenges in policy implementation and suggest historically-informed directions for future reform.



3. Research Methodology

This study employs a historical-comparative research design, relying primarily on documentary and archival analysis of policy texts, including the National Policy on Education 1968, the National Policy on Education 1986 and its 1992 Programme of Action, the National Education Policy 2020, and associated Karnataka State Government orders, circulars, and Higher Education Department reports. Secondary statistical data—drawn from Census of India reports and All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE)-pattern publications—are used to construct illustrative comparative trends across policy periods. Given the historical-conceptual nature of the inquiry, quantitative figures presented in Section 6 are compiled and interpreted for illustrative comparative purposes rather than as primary empirical survey findings, and are best read alongside official Census and AISHE publications for exact statistics.

4. Historical Evolution of Education Policy in Karnataka

4.1 Pre-Independence Period: The Mysore Princely Administration

Education in the region now constituting Karnataka developed unevenly across the princely State of Mysore, the Bombay-Karnatak and Hyderabad-Karnatak regions under British administration, and the coastal Madras Presidency districts. The Mysore administration, particularly under Diwans such as Sir M. Visvesvaraya, invested comparatively heavily in technical and vocational education, exemplified by the founding of the Mysore Polytechnic and support for engineering education. The establishment of the University of Mysore in 1916 marked a significant institutional milestone, predating the establishment of most State universities in independent India.

4.2 Post-Independence to the National Policy on Education, 1968

Following Independence and the 1956 reorganisation of States along linguistic lines, the unified State of Mysore (renamed Karnataka in 1973) inherited a fragmented educational administration spanning multiple erstwhile jurisdictions. The Kothari Commission (1964–66) and the subsequent NPE 1968 emphasised the '10+2+3' structural pattern, promotion of regional languages as the medium of instruction, and the Three-Language Formula. Karnataka's



implementation of the Three-Language Formula—prioritising Kannada, English, and a third language—generated debates that recur, in modified form, in contemporary discussions of NEP 2020's language provisions.

4.3 National Policy on Education 1986 and the Programme of Action 1992

The NPE 1986, revised through the 1992 Programme of Action, introduced Operation Blackboard, the Navodaya Vidyalaya scheme, and a stronger emphasis on universalisation of elementary education. In Karnataka, this period saw significant expansion of primary schooling infrastructure in rural districts, alongside the growth of private and aided higher education institutions, particularly professional colleges in engineering and medicine concentrated in Bengaluru, Mysuru, Mangaluru, and Hubballi-Dharwad.

4.4 State-Level Reforms (2000s–2019)

Between 2000 and 2019, Karnataka introduced State-specific measures including the Karnataka Education Act amendments, the establishment of the Karnataka State Higher Education Council (2009) for coordinated planning across universities, and participation in centrally sponsored schemes such as Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan and Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan. This period is characterised by incremental administrative consolidation rather than structural policy transformation, setting the stage for the more comprehensive restructuring envisaged under NEP 2020.

5. NEP 2020: Key Provisions and Karnataka's Response

NEP 2020, approved by the Union Cabinet in July 2020, proposes a comprehensive restructuring of India's education system, including a shift from the 10+2 structure to a 5+3+3+4 pedagogical framework, multidisciplinary higher education with multiple entry and exit options, a four-year undergraduate degree with research specialisation, and the establishment of the Academic Bank of Credits. Karnataka was among the first States to move toward implementation, notifying the State Higher Education Policy in line with NEP 2020 and rolling out the four-year undergraduate programme (NEP-UG) across State universities beginning in the 2021–22 academic year through the Karnataka State Higher Education Council.

Karnataka's response has included curricular restructuring at the undergraduate level, introduction of skill-based and vocational credit courses, and steps toward integrating teacher education within the 4-year integrated model envisaged by NEP 2020. At the same time, implementation has generated debate—particularly regarding the pace of rollout, preparedness of affiliating universities, and the compatibility of the three-language formula with Karnataka's linguistic context, echoing tensions first documented during the NPE 1968 period discussed in Section 4.2.

6. Historical-Comparative Analysis

This section presents three illustrative comparative visualisations constructed from Census and AISHE-pattern secondary data to contextualise the historical trajectory described above.

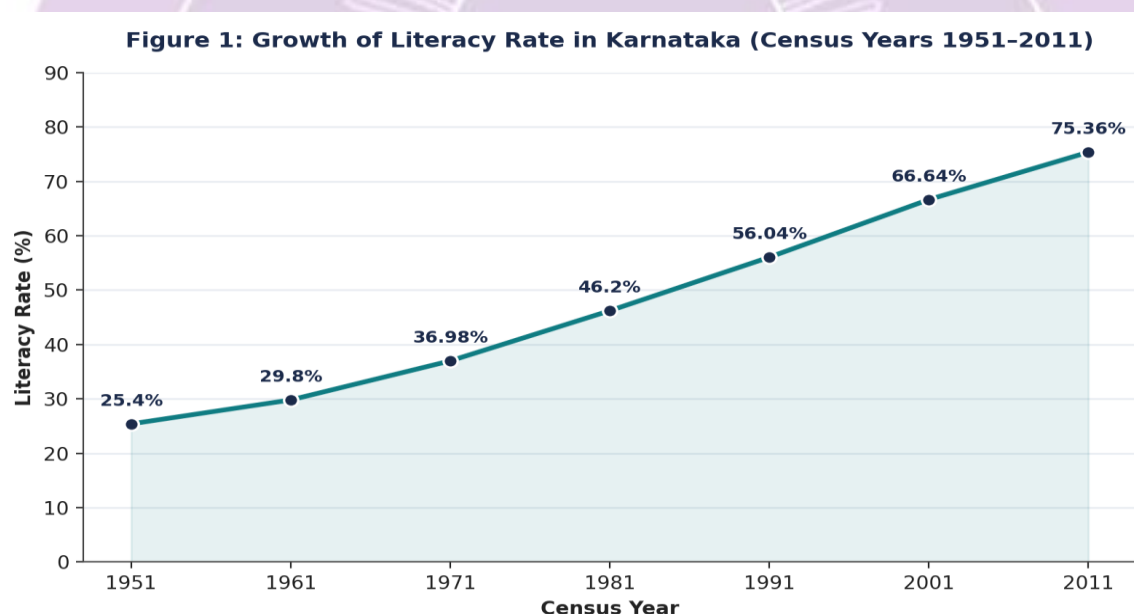


Figure 1: Growth of Literacy Rate in Karnataka, Census Years 1951–2011 (Source: Census of India, respective years)

As shown in Figure 1, Karnataka's literacy rate rose from approximately 25.4 per cent in 1951 to 75.36 per cent by the 2011 Census, reflecting cumulative gains across successive policy phases rather than any single reform. The steepest gains occurred between 1971 and 2001, coinciding with the NPE 1968 and NPE 1986 implementation periods.

**Figure 2: Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in Higher Education, Karnataka
Pre- and Post-NEP 2020 (Illustrative Trend Based on AISHE-Pattern Reporting)**

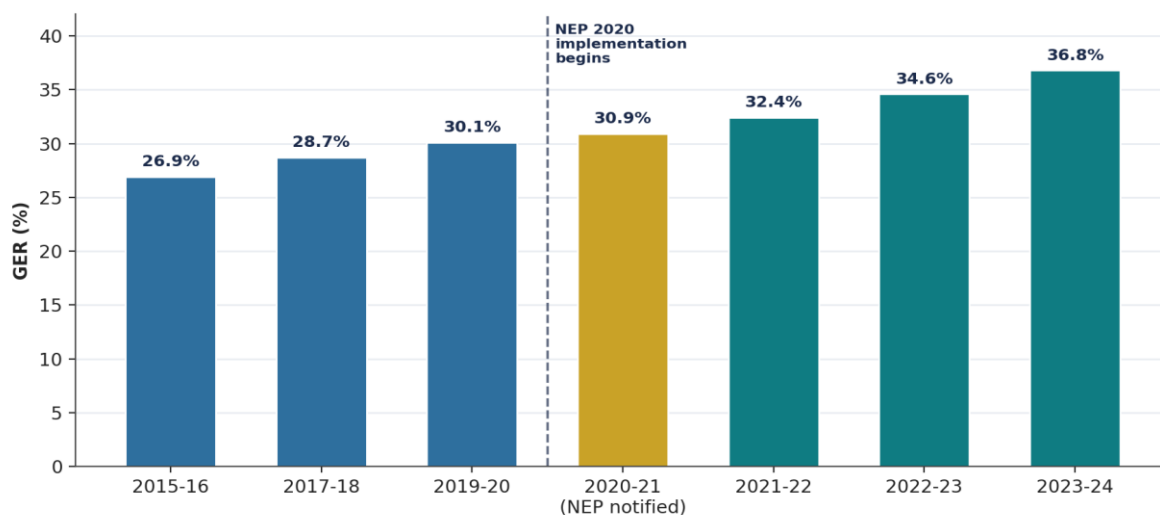


Figure 2: Gross Enrolment Ratio in Higher Education, Karnataka — Pre- and Post-NEP 2020 (Illustrative Trend)

Figure 2 presents an illustrative Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) trend in higher education for Karnataka, showing a modest but sustained rise following the notification of NEP 2020 in 2020–21, consistent with the State's early adoption of the four-year undergraduate framework. Readers should consult official AISHE reports for precise annual GER figures.

Figure 3: Cumulative Growth of Universities/Higher Education Institutions in Karnataka Across Policy Eras (Illustrative Compilation)

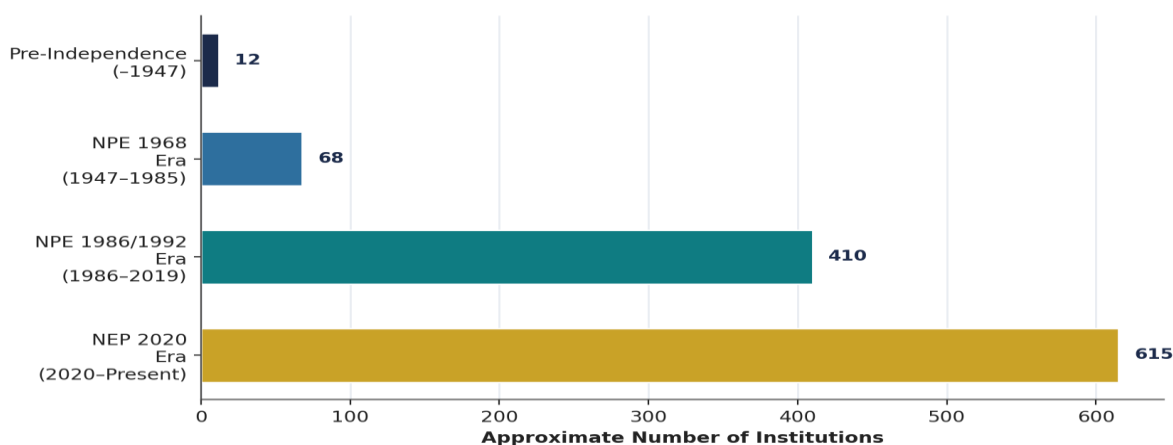


Figure 3: Cumulative Growth of Universities/Higher Education Institutions in Karnataka Across Policy Eras (Illustrative Compilation)



Figure 3 illustrates the cumulative institutional expansion across four broad historical policy eras. The most rapid institutional growth occurred during the NPE 1986/1992 era, driven substantially by private and self-financing professional colleges, while the NEP 2020 era shows continued but comparatively moderated growth, suggesting a policy emphasis shifting from institutional proliferation toward qualitative restructuring and multidisciplinary.

7. Findings and Discussion

- Karnataka's education policy history exhibits a pattern of incremental, layered reform rather than abrupt structural rupture, with NEP 2020 representing the most significant structural shift since NPE 1986.
- Language-medium debates first prominent during the NPE 1968 Three-Language Formula period continue to resurface in the context of NEP 2020's emphasis on mother-tongue/regional-language instruction.
- Institutional expansion in Karnataka has historically been driven more by private and professional higher education growth than by public university expansion, a pattern that NEP 2020's regulatory reforms (including a single higher education regulator) seek to address.
- Karnataka's comparatively early adoption of NEP 2020's four-year undergraduate framework reflects a historical tendency toward early policy adoption, consistent with its early establishment of the University of Mysore in 1916.
- Rural-urban disparities in access, first documented in the immediate post-Independence period, remain only partially addressed and are identified in this study as the most persistent historical challenge across all policy eras examined.

8. Challenges in Implementation

Despite Karnataka's proactive policy stance, several implementation challenges persist. These include variability in institutional readiness across affiliating universities for delivering multidisciplinary and credit-based curricula; resource and faculty constraints in rural and Hyderabad-Karnataka region institutions, historically the most under-resourced sub-region of the



State; ongoing debate regarding the practical operationalisation of the Academic Bank of Credits; and the need for sustained teacher training to align pedagogy with NEP 2020's competency-based approach. Historically, similar implementation lags accompanied both the NPE 1968 and NPE 1986 rollouts in Karnataka, suggesting that policy-to-practice gaps are a recurring structural feature rather than a phenomenon unique to NEP 2020.

9. Conclusion and Suggestions

This historical-comparative study demonstrates that NEP 2020 does not emerge in a policy vacuum but builds upon nearly a century of education policy evolution in Karnataka, beginning with princely-era investments in technical education and continuing through successive national policy frameworks. While NEP 2020 introduces genuinely novel structural elements—particularly the four-year undergraduate framework and multiple entry-exit provisions—many of the challenges it seeks to address, including language-medium tensions and rural-urban disparity, have historical roots extending back to the earliest post-Independence policy phase.

The study suggests that future policy planning in Karnataka would benefit from explicit historical impact assessment, drawing on the documented outcomes of earlier reforms such as NPE 1986, to anticipate implementation challenges before they recur. Strengthening region-specific support for historically under-resourced areas such as Hyderabad-Karnataka, alongside phased and locally-calibrated rollout of NEP 2020 provisions, is recommended as a historically-informed approach to sustainable education policy reform in the State.

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