

# National Education Policy 2020 and West Bengal State Education Policy 2023: A Comparative Documentary Analysis

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## ABSTRACT

This research paper undertakes a systematic comparative documentary analysis of India's major national education policies—the National Policy on Education (NPE) 1968, NPE 1986 (modified 1992), and the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020—against the West Bengal State Education Policy (SEP) 2023, notified in the Kolkata Gazette Extraordinary on September 5, 2023. Through a structured documentary analysis methodology, the study examines the policy texts across domains of school education structure, higher education architecture, regulatory and structural bodies, language policy, inclusive education, teacher education, technology integration, research and innovation, and public investment. Seven detailed comparative tables systematically map both similarities and differences between the national framework and the state response. The analysis reveals that while West Bengal's SEP 2023 broadly aligns with NEP 2020's progressive principles on equity, academic flexibility, research culture, internationalization, and digital learning, it consciously diverges on structural matters—retaining its existing 5+4+2+2 school framework rather than adopting NEP's 5+3+3+4 model, preserving existing regulatory bodies rather than consolidating them under HECI, and prioritizing geographic expansion and access over tiered institutional stratification. These differences reflect West Bengal's assertion of its federal prerogative within a constitutional framework that designates education as a concurrent subject. The paper concludes with a synthesis of convergent and divergent trajectories, offering insights into the possibilities and limits of state-level policy translation of a transformative national educational vision.

**KEYWORDS:** National Policy on Education (1968), National Policy on Education (1986/Programme of Action 1992), National Education Policy (2020), West Bengal State Education Policy (2023), documentary analysis, comparative education policy.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Education in India occupies a concurrent position in the constitutional framework under Schedule VII, List III, meaning both Parliament and State Legislatures possess legislative competence in the domain. This constitutional architecture creates a productive but often tense dialectic between centrally formulated national education policies and state-level adaptations, modifications, and occasionally resistant alternative visions. The promulgation of the National Education Policy 2020—India's first comprehensive education policy revision since 1986—and the subsequent notification of West Bengal's State

Education Policy 2023 provides a timely and instructive case study in this federal dynamic.

West Bengal's educational legacy is historically profound. As the site of the Bengal Renaissance, home to pioneering institutions including Hindu College (1817), Bethune School for Girls (1849), Calcutta Medical College (1835), and the University of Calcutta (1857)—Asia's first multidisciplinary modern university—the state enters any policy discussion with considerable institutional depth and intellectual confidence. The preamble to WB SEP

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2023 explicitly invokes this tradition, positioning the state's policy not as a mere derivative of NEP 2020 but as an independent exercise, drawing comparisons with policy documents from Kerala and Maharashtra as much as from the national framework.

This paper employs a documentary analysis methodology to conduct a systematic, structured comparison of NEP 2020 and WB SEP 2023, situating both within the longer historical trajectory of NPE 1968 and NPE 1986/1992. The comparative analysis focuses on: (i) school education structure and pedagogy; (ii) higher education architecture; (iii) structural and regulatory bodies; (iv) thematic cross-cutting issues including language, inclusion, vocational education, teacher education, and research; and (v) an evaluative synthesis of similarities and differences. Seven comprehensive tables organize the documentary evidence systematically.

## 2. Background

### 2.1. NPE 1968: The First National Framework

India's first post-independence National Policy on Education was adopted in 1968, emerging from the Kothari Commission (Education Commission 1964–66). The policy called for a 'radical reconstruction of education' (NPE 1968, para 3) for the socio-cultural and economic development of the country. Its key contributions included the introduction of the common 10+2+3 educational structure across states, the three-language formula, emphasis on science and mathematics as compulsory components of general education, and provisions for free and compulsory education up to age 14 under Article 45 of the Constitution. The policy also set a landmark aspiration of investing 6% of national income in education—a target that has eluded all subsequent governments.

### 2.2. NPE 1986 and Programme of Action 1992

The National Policy on Education 1986, adopted under Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's government, marked a more systematic effort at educational transformation. Its Programme of Action 1986, revised comprehensively in 1992 following the Ramamurti Committee and Janardhana Reddy Committee reviews, addressed every level and domain of education. Key contributions included:

Operation Blackboard (providing minimum facilities to rural primary schools); Navodaya Vidyalayas (residential pace-setting schools for talented students from rural areas); universalisation of elementary education as a measurable goal; expansion of non-formal education; establishment of IGNOU as an open university; and a comprehensive framework for vocational education targeting 10% diversion by 1990 and 25% by 1995. West Bengal was identified as one of ten educationally backward states where Non-Formal Education centres were especially prioritised.

### 2.3. NEP 2020: A Transformative Vision

The National Education Policy 2020 represents the most sweeping revision of India's education architecture since 1968. Prepared by the Kasturirangan Committee and approved by the Union Cabinet on July 29, 2020, NEP 2020 articulates a vision of education 'rooted in Indian ethos' that seeks to transform India into a 'global knowledge superpower.' Its transformative proposals include the replacement of the 10+2+3 structure with 5+3+3+4; a new regulatory architecture consolidating multiple bodies under HECI; the National Research Foundation; the Academic Bank of Credits; and an explicit target of 50% Gross Enrolment Ratio in higher education by 2035.

### 2.4. WB SEP 2023: A State Response

The West Bengal State Education Policy 2023 was the product of an Expert Committee constituted by the State Government in April 2022, comprising eminent educationists. Notified on September 5, 2023, through the Higher Education Department (No. 907-Edn(U)/HED-12016(99)/15/2023-UNV SEC-Dept. of HE), this is the state's first-ever education policy document. The policy frames itself with reference to West Bengal's educational history—from Raja Rammohan Roy and Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar to Rabindranath Tagore and the nation's first IIT (IIT Kharagpur) and IIM (IIM Calcutta)—and draws on policy comparisons with Kerala, Maharashtra, and UGC guidelines, deliberately positioning itself as a federal peer contribution rather than a subaltern response to NEP 2020. The policy envisages a 13-year horizon to 2035.

**Table 1: Overview of Policy Documents Analysed - Key Metadata**

Dimension	NEP 1968	NEP 1986/92	NEP 2020	WB SEP 2023
<b>Issuing Authority</b>	Govt. of India, Ministry of Education	Govt. of India, Ministry of HRD	Govt. of India, Ministry of Education	Govt. of West Bengal, Higher Education Dept.
<b>Year of Adoption</b>	1968	1986 (Modified 1992)	July 29, 2020	September 5, 2023
<b>Guiding Commission</b>	Kothari Commission (1964–66)	Ramamurti Committee & Janardhana Reddy Committee	Kasturirangan Committee (2019)	Expert Committee of Eminent Educationists (2022)
<b>Nature of Policy</b>	National (Central)	National (Central)	National (Central)	State-level (West Bengal)
<b>Policy Horizon</b>	Open-ended	Open-ended, revised 1992	Up to 2040	Up to 2035
<b>Gazette Notification</b>	Parliamentary Resolution	Parliamentary Resolution	Cabinet approval, July 2020	WB Gazette Extraordinary, No. 907-Edn(U)/HED

### 3. Research Questions

This study addresses the following research questions: (1) How does the West Bengal State Education Policy 2023 align with or diverge from the National Education Policy 2020? (2) What are the structural, institutional, and ideological differences between the two policies? (3) How does the WB SEP 2023 exercise state-level federal autonomy within the concurrent constitutional framework of Indian education?

### 4. Review of Related Studies

The comparative analysis of national and state education policies in India has attracted growing scholarly attention since the promulgation of NEP 2020. Kumar (2020) offers a critical overview of NEP 2020, noting both its transformative ambitions and potential limitations. Bowen (2009) establishes the methodological foundations for documentary analysis as a qualitative research approach. Scott (1990) provides the theoretical underpinning for treating policy documents as social artefacts embodying institutional values and power relations. AISHE reports (2011-2021) provide the quantitative baseline for higher education enrollment data referenced throughout this study. The literature on Indian education federalism is less developed, though the concurrent list status of education has been noted as a site of productive tension between national vision and state implementation.

### 5. Research Gaps

The existing literature lacks systematic comparative documentary analysis between NEP 2020 and state-level education policies formulated in response to it. WB SEP 2023, as India's first state-level education policy document with an explicit timeline horizon (2035), offers a unique case study of principled federal engagement with a national education framework. The gap addressed by this study is the absence of a structured, evidence-based mapping of convergences and divergences between national and state education policies in India's concurrent constitutional framework.

### 6. Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in the theoretical framework of critical policy analysis, as articulated by scholars working in the tradition of post-structural policy sociology. Critical policy analysis holds that policy documents are not neutral technical instruments but texts that embody particular constructions of problems, subjects, and solutions, reflecting and reproducing relations of power, knowledge, and governance. The comparative dimension draws on federalism theory and the literature on policy translation, which examines how policy ideas travel across institutional and jurisdictional boundaries, being transformed in the process.

### 7. Theoretical Perspectives

Three theoretical perspectives animate this comparative study. First, education federalism theory, which frames the national-state policy relationship in terms of constitutional jurisdiction, fiscal dependency, and political negotiation. Second, documentary analysis methodology (Bowen 2009; Scott 1990), which treats policy texts as primary data amenable to systematic qualitative analysis. Third, the concept of policy translation (Czarniawska and Sevón 1996), which holds that policies are not simply implemented but actively interpreted and adapted as they move from national to state contexts, producing outcomes that may differ substantially from original intentions.

## **8. Methodology: Qualitative Documentary Analysis (QDA)**

### **8.1. Research Design**

This study adopts a qualitative documentary analysis methodology, a research approach widely used in policy studies, education research, and comparative public administration. Documentary analysis involves the systematic examination, interpretation, and critical evaluation of primary source documents to generate insights about institutional intentions, ideological orientations, and policy trajectories. Unlike ethnographic or interview-based approaches, documentary analysis takes texts as its primary data, treating them as artefacts that embody the values, knowledge, and power relations of the institutions that produce them.

The primary documents analysed for this paper are: (i) National Policy on Education, 1968 (Government of India); (ii) National Policy on Education, 1986 and Programme of Action, 1992 (Ministry of HRD); (iii) National Education Policy, 2020 (Ministry of Education, Government of India); and (iv) West Bengal State Education Policy, 2023 (Higher Education Department, Government of West Bengal, notified as Gazette No. 907-Edn(U)/HED-12016(99)/15/2023-UNV SEC-Dept. of HE, dated September 5, 2023).

### **8.2. Analytical Framework**

The analytical framework for comparison was constructed through inductive coding of the four policy documents. An initial reading of each document yielded thematic categories: structural organisation of schooling; regulatory bodies; higher education access; equity and inclusion; language policy; teacher education; research and innovation; technology; and public funding. These categories were then applied deductively across all four documents to generate a comparative matrix.

The methodology aligns with the tradition of critical policy analysis, which interrogates not merely what policies say but what they presuppose, exclude, and produce as effects. Table construction follows a systematic approach: each table identifies a unit of analysis (e.g., school structure, regulatory bodies), applies it consistently across the two primary objects of comparison (NEP 2020 and WB SEP 2023), and includes a column identifying the nature of similarity or difference for each parameter.

### **8.3. Scope and Limitations**

The study's scope is delimited to policy text analysis. It does not examine implementation outcomes, ground-level realities, or stakeholder perceptions. Nor does it analyse the political economy of policy formulation, though such considerations inform the interpretive commentary offered throughout. The documents examined were accessed in their official published form: NEP 2020 as released by the Ministry of Education, Government of India; WB SEP 2023 as published in the Kolkata Gazette Extraordinary, Part I, September 5, 2023.

## **9. Policy Perspectives**

### **9.1. Structural Organisation**

Perhaps the most visible point of divergence between NEP 2020 and WB SEP 2023 lies in their respective approaches to the structural organisation of school education. NEP 2020 proposes a radical restructuring of the traditional 10+2 framework into a 5+3+3+4 model encompassing four distinct pedagogical stages: a Foundational Stage (ages 3–8, covering Balvatika and Grades 1–2); a Preparatory Stage (ages 8–11, Grades 3–5); a Middle Stage (ages 11–14, Grades 6–8); and a Secondary Stage (ages 14–18, Grades 9–12). This structural reconfiguration is underpinned by a philosophy of developmentally appropriate pedagogy, drawing on child development science to argue that current curricula are misaligned with children's cognitive and emotional growth trajectories.

West Bengal's SEP 2023 explicitly rejects this restructuring. The policy states unambiguously that the existing 5+4+2+2 pattern (one year pre-primary, four years primary through Class 4, four years upper primary through Class 8, two years secondary Class 9–10, two years higher secondary Class 11–12) 'should continue to be followed in the state as the administrative structures are in place to meaningfully support the learners in this set-up. Any significant modification to this pattern will require a major shuffling of resource allocation and would thus be detrimental to the quality of education being delivered to the learners' (WB SEP 2023, para 3.1.1). This is a striking statement of pragmatic conservatism: West Bengal prioritises administrative continuity and resource protection over structural alignment with the national framework.

The difference is not merely technical but philosophical. NEP 2020's restructuring is premised on a vision of transforming the educational experience from the ground up; WB SEP 2023's retention of the existing structure reflects a commitment to protecting a functioning system from disruptive change whose outcomes are uncertain.

## 9.2. Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE)

Both policies accord significant importance to Early Childhood Care and Education, though with differences in implementation architecture. NEP 2020 extends the formal educational system to age 3, incorporating ECCE within the 5-year Foundational Stage of the new pedagogical structure. It proposes a National Curriculum Framework for ECCE and envisions collaboration between the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Women and Child Development to transform the ICDS/Anganwadi system into a formal educational delivery channel. Universal provisioning of quality ECCE is targeted by 2030.

WB SEP 2023 recognises ECCE's critical importance but continues to locate it primarily within the existing ICDS/Anganwadi infrastructure operated under ICDS. Pre-primary education for children aged 5–6 is delivered through Anganwadis, with formal schooling beginning at Class 1. The policy aligns with NEP's emphasis on play-based and child-development-centred pedagogy while retaining the non-formal delivery channel rather than integrating ECCE into the formal school system. This reflects both a realistic assessment of existing infrastructure and a prudent avoidance of the enormous resource implications of formalising ECCE delivery across the state.

## 9.3. Pedagogy, Curriculum, and Assessment

Both NEP 2020 and WB SEP 2023 share a progressive pedagogical orientation: both reject rote learning in favour of conceptual understanding, emphasise competency-based learning, and advocate integration across disciplines. NEP's signature proposals include: removal of hard separations between arts, sciences, and vocational streams; multidisciplinary curricula; and a new National Curriculum Framework. WB SEP 2023 proposes integrating vocational courses into the mainstream teaching-learning process through the CBCS mode and advocates holistic assessment.

On assessment, both policies advocate continuous and formative evaluation approaches. NEP 2020 proposes board examinations twice annually (reducing high-stakes anxiety) and establishes PARAKH as a new national assessment centre for competency-based evaluation. West Bengal retains WBBSE and WBCHSE as the primary examination bodies while adopting holistic assessment principles, indicating an incremental rather than structural reform of evaluation systems.

**Table 2: Comparative Analysis - School Education (NEP 2020 vs WB SEP 2023)**

Parameter	NEP 2020	WB SEP 2023	Similarity / Difference
<b>School Structure</b>	5+3+3+4 (New Pedagogical & Curricular Structure)	5+4+2+2 (Pre-primary + Primary + Upper Primary + Secondary + Higher Secondary)	DIFFERENT: NEP restructures into 4 stages; WB retains 5+4+2+2 pattern as existing admin structures support it
<b>Age Range</b>	Ages 3–18 years (ECCE included from age 3)	Ages 5–18 years (Pre-primary from age 5 in Anganwadis)	SIMILAR in intent but NEP begins earlier at 3 years; WB formal schooling from 5 via ICDS Anganwadi
<b>Foundational Stage</b>	5 years (3–8): Balvatika + Grades 1–2; Play & Activity based ECCE	Pre-Primary (5–6 yrs via Anganwadi ICDS) + Primary Class 1–4	SIMILAR focus on play-based early learning; NEP proposes National Curriculum Framework for ECCE
<b>Middle Stage</b>	3 years: Grades 6–8 (11–14 yrs); Introduction of coding, vocational exposure	Upper Primary: Class 5–8 (10–14 years)	SIMILAR duration but NEP introduces distinct Preparatory stage (Grades 3–5) not present in WB structure
<b>Secondary Stage</b>	4 years: Grades 9–12 (14–18 yrs); Multidisciplinary, no rigid streams	Secondary (Class 9–10) + Higher Secondary (Class 11–12)	SIMILAR duration but NEP merges 9–12 into one phase; WB retains two separate administrative stages
<b>Medium of Instruction</b>	Home language / mother tongue at least until Grade 5, preferably till Grade 8	Bengali as primary medium; English from early stages; supports multilingualism	SIMILAR in principle; both promote mother-tongue based instruction; WB continues Bengali-medium tradition

<b>Curriculum Framework</b>	NCF to be developed; no hard separation between arts, science, vocational streams	Continuation of existing WBBSE/WBCHSE curriculum; integration of vocational into mainstream	SIMILAR progressive intent; both seek integration of vocational & academic; NEP more transformative
<b>Assessment Reform</b>	Board exams twice a year; PARAKH Assessment Centre; competency-based evaluation	Holistic and continuous assessment; move away from terminal exams; focus on learning outcomes	SIMILAR in spirit; both advocate continuous and formative assessment; PARAKH is NEP-specific mechanism
<b>School Complexes / Clusters</b>	School complexes with shared resources and teachers	School clusters for resource sharing, mentoring and monitoring	HIGHLY SIMILAR: Both propose clustering schools for resource optimization and quality improvement
<b>Inclusive Education</b>	Special Education Zones; Gender Inclusion Fund; focus on SEDGs	Provisions for CWSN, OoSC, Open Schooling, Adult Education, targeted tribal/backward area interventions	SIMILAR inclusive focus; NEP has Gender Inclusion Fund; WB has targeted schemes for marginalized groups
<b>Teacher Policy</b>	4-year integrated B.Ed.; merit-based recruitment; National Mentoring Mission; continuous professional development	Professional cadre development; continuous professional development; transfer policy; performance-linked promotion	SIMILAR in CPD focus; NEP's 4-yr B.Ed. is structural reform; WB focuses on governance and HR management of teachers

#### 9.4. Inclusive and Equitable Education

Equity is a cardinal value for both policies. NEP 2020 identifies Socially and Economically Disadvantaged Groups (SEDGs)-including girls and women, scheduled castes and tribes, OBCs, minorities, persons with disabilities (Divyangjan), and students in remote areas-as primary policy priorities, proposing a Gender Inclusion Fund and Special Education Zones for disadvantaged regions. WB SEP 2023 similarly provides for Children with Special Needs (CWSN), Out-of-School Children (OoSC), Open Schooling, Adult Education, and targeted interventions for disadvantaged regions.

The two policies are particularly convergent on the importance of addressing geographic disparities. WB SEP 2023 draws attention to significant intra-state variation in school access and quality across districts, proposing targeted interventions for socio-economically backward areas. This echoes NEP 2020's concern with rural and remote educational access. However, WB SEP 2023's focus on the 30-lakh plus population of school-going children and 13-year horizon provides a more state-specific, granular implementation vision than NEP's national-level framework allows.

#### 9.5. Digital Education and Technology

Both NEP 2020 and WB SEP 2023 invest significant policy attention in digital education and ICT integration. NEP establishes the National Educational Technology Forum (NETF) as an autonomous body and proposes digital infrastructure (DIKSHA, e-content) for all schools. WB SEP 2023 dedicates a full chapter to digital education and ICT in schools, proposing smart classrooms, e-content development, and integration of education technology to enhance teaching-learning. The two policies are aligned in recognising technology as a tool-not a replacement-for good pedagogy, and both caution against the commercialisation of educational technology.

#### 9.6. Policy Perspectives: Higher Education

##### 9.6.1. Access and Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER)

Higher education expansion is a centrepiece of both NEP 2020 and WB SEP 2023. NEP sets an ambitious target of 50% GER in higher education by 2035, compared to approximately 27% at the time of policy formulation. West Bengal's own HE system has grown impressively-student intake increased from 13.24 lakh to 27.09 lakh in the decade preceding the SEP-but the state's College Population Index (CPI) of 13 per lakh population remains significantly below the national average of 30, exposing a structural access deficit that the SEP directly acknowledges. WB SEP 2023 proposes a multi-pronged expansion strategy: effective utilisation of distance learning and online education (particularly through Netaji Subhas Open University), establishment of digital

universities, promotion of private-public university collaboration, and a goal of at least one university per district.

### 9.6.2. Institutional Architecture and Typology

Here the two policies diverge most sharply in their conceptual orientation. NEP 2020 proposes a tiered institutional typology: Research Universities (highest research intensity), Teaching Universities (primarily teaching with some research), and Autonomous Degree-Granting Colleges. Additionally, it proposes Multidisciplinary Education and Research Universities (MERUs) as apex institutions. This stratification reflects an excellence-driven philosophy, seeking to differentiate institutions by function and concentrate high-cost research infrastructure where it can be most productive.

WB SEP 2023 does not adopt this typology. Instead, it pursues a geographic distribution model-ensuring at least one university per district-prioritising access over stratification. The SEP's approach reflects the realities of a state where intra-district disparities in college access remain acute, and where the democratisation of higher education access is seen as a more pressing imperative than the creation of elite research institutions.

### 9.6.3. Academic Bank of Credits and Credit Mobility

This is one of the strongest areas of convergence between NEP 2020 and WB SEP 2023. NEP introduces the Academic Bank of Credits (ABC) as a national mechanism enabling students to accumulate credits from multiple institutions and programmes, facilitating flexible learning pathways. WB SEP 2023 explicitly recommends that eligible HEIs in the state join the national ABC while also proposing a state-level Academic Bank of Credits for intra-state student mobility. It further recommends redesigning the existing Choice Based Credit System (CBCS) in this context. This convergence suggests that WB SEP 2023 views the ABC as a practical tool for increasing educational access and flexibility that can be meaningfully implemented at both national and state levels.

### 9.6.4. Research, Innovation, and Industry-Academia Partnership

Both policies take strong positions on building a research culture in higher education. NEP 2020 proposes the National Research Foundation (NRF) as an apex body to seed, grow, and facilitate research across India's HEIs, complemented by industry-academia linkages. WB SEP 2023 proposes a State Research Foundation as the state-level analogue of the NRF, along with Innovation Cells, Start-Up units, and Incubation Centres linked to HEI research activities. The state policy also encourages patent applications by faculty and research scholars and proposes a 'brownfield model' for industry-academia linkage-building on existing industry presence near academic institutions rather than creating entirely new campuses.

West Bengal's rich legacy of scientific and scholarly contribution-acknowledged in the preamble's references to world-renowned scientists and scholars produced by Bengal-provides both a justification and a challenge for this research agenda. The SEP recognises that this legacy must be actively built upon rather than assumed, and that public research funding must increase significantly to enable it.

**Table 3: Comparative Analysis - Higher Education (NEP 2020 vs WB SEP 2023)**

Parameter	NEP 2020	WB SEP 2023	Similarity / Difference
<b>GER Target</b>	50% GER in Higher Education by 2035	Increase from 27.09 lakh (2023); integrate distance/online modes; digital universities	SIMILAR targets; NEP sets explicit national GER of 50%; WB aligns through expansion and online learning
<b>Institutional Structure</b>	Three types: Research Universities, Teaching Universities, Autonomous Degree-Granting Colleges; MERUs	State universities, private universities, state-aided colleges; at least one university per district	DIFFERENT structurally; NEP creates tiered HEI classification; WB focuses on geographic expansion and access
<b>Multi disciplinarity</b>	Holistic multidisciplinary education; multiple entry/exit options with UG certificate, diploma, degree	CBCS mode integration; vocational courses integrated with mainstream; holistic knowledge framework	SIMILAR direction; both advocate multidisciplinary approach; NEP's entry/exit flexibility is more radical

<b>Credit System</b>	Academic Bank of Credits (ABC); NTA for common entrance exams	Encouraging HEIs to join ABC; State-level ABC for intra-state mobility; redesign of CBCS	SIMILAR and CONVERGENT: WB explicitly aligns with NEP's ABC mechanism while adding state-level adaptation
<b>Research &amp; Innovation</b>	National Research Foundation (NRF); MERUs; industry-academia linkages; research in all HEIs	State-level Research Foundation; Innovation Cells; Start-Up units; Incubation Centres; patent filing	SIMILAR architecture; WB proposes state NRF analogue; brownfield industry-academia model unique to WB
<b>Internationalization</b>	Foreign HEIs to open campuses in India; Indian HEIs abroad; international student enrollment	International student hostels; student/faculty exchange; joint doctoral supervision; foreign campus facilitation	SIMILAR intent; WB implements NEP's internationalization vision at state level with specific logistical proposals
<b>Technology Integration</b>	NETF (National Educational Technology Forum); digital infrastructure; DIKSHA, e-content	Digital universities; Netaji Subhas Open University for online expansion; smart classrooms; ICT in HEIs	SIMILAR in direction; NEP provides national platform (NETF); WB leverages state institutions for digital delivery
<b>Equity &amp; Inclusion</b>	Prioritize access for SC, ST, OBC, women, divyangjans; need-based scholarships	Increase ratio of female, SC, ST, minority enrollment; WBSCC scholarships; at-risk group provisions	HIGHLY SIMILAR: Both emphasize equity; WB's low CPI (13 vs national 30) makes this even more pressing
<b>Professional Education</b>	Technical, medical, law, agriculture HEIs to become multidisciplinary; unified regulation	Technical education, health education, legal education, agricultural sciences as distinct chapters with specific policy	SIMILAR vision; both seek integrated professional education; WB retains sector-specific recommendations
<b>Teacher Education</b>	4-year integrated B.Ed.; NCTE oversight; National Professional Standards for Teachers (NPST)	Teacher education for HE faculty development; capacity building; service conditions reform	DIFFERENT scope; NEP's B.Ed. reform targets school teachers; WB SEP focuses on HE faculty development
<b>Employability</b>	Vocational exposure in all HEIs; apprenticeship; skill integration; industry linkage	Vocational courses integrated via CBCS; placement/career counselling cells in each HEI; professional course expansion	SIMILAR and complementary; WB translates NEP's vision into specific institutional mechanisms

### 9.6.5. Internationalisation of Education

Both NEP 2020 and WB SEP 2023 affirm the importance of internationalising Indian higher education. NEP proposes that foreign universities may establish campuses in India and that top Indian HEIs may set up campuses abroad. WB SEP 2023 operationalises these ideas with specific proposals: international student hostels to attract foreign students, student and faculty exchange programmes, twinning programmes, joint doctoral supervision

with foreign institutions, state facilitation of foreign university campuses in Bengal, and credit transfer arrangements with foreign HEIs. This level of detailed operational planning gives WB SEP 2023's internationalisation agenda a more concrete character than the national framework, reflecting the state's awareness of its historic cosmopolitan character and its specific competitive positioning within India's higher education landscape.

### 9.6.6. Professional Education

NEP 2020 envisions professional education-medical, legal, technical, agricultural-becoming fully integrated with the multidisciplinary HEI system, with stand-alone professional institutions evolving into multidisciplinary universities. WB SEP 2023 addresses professional education through distinct sectoral chapters: Technical Education (3.10), Health Education (3.15), Legal Education (3.16), Skill Education (3.17), Agricultural Sciences (3.18), Animal, Dairy and Fishery Sciences (3.19). This chapter-wise organisation reflects the state's retention of sector-specific governance structures, diverging from NEP's convergence vision while sharing its commitment to quality professional education.

## 10. Implementation: Structural and Regulatory Bodies

The regulatory architecture of education is where the federal tension between NEP 2020 and WB SEP 2023 is most visible and consequential. NEP 2020 proposes a sweeping consolidation of the regulatory landscape under a single overarching body-the Higher Education Commission of India (HECI)-to replace the University Grants Commission (UGC), All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE), National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC), and National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE). This 'Light but Tight' regulatory philosophy aims to reduce bureaucratic fragmentation while maintaining quality standards. Similarly, NEP proposes PARAKH as a national assessment body, replacing the fragmented state board system.

West Bengal's response to this consolidation agenda is significantly more conservative. The West Bengal State Council of Higher Education (WBSCHE) is retained as the primary regulatory body for higher education, with specific proposals to conduct surveys of student-teacher ratios and rationalise teacher strength. The West Bengal Board of Secondary Education (WBBSE) and West Bengal Council of Higher Secondary Education (WBCHSE) are retained as the primary examination and curriculum bodies. The West Bengal Joint Entrance Examination Board (WBJEE) continues for state-level technical entrance examinations. The SEP makes no proposals for regulatory consolidation analogous to HECI, reflecting West Bengal's position that education governance is most effectively managed at the state level through institutions that are accountable to state-specific needs and conditions.

**Table 4: Structural and Regulatory Bodies - NEP 2020 vs WB SEP 2023**

Domain	NEP 2020 - National Bodies	WB SEP 2023 - State Bodies
<b>Overall Higher Education Regulation</b>	Higher Education Commission of India (HECI) - single umbrella body replacing UGC, AICTE, NAAC, NRC; 'Light but Tight' regulation	West Bengal State Council of Higher Education (WBSCHE) - surveys teacher ratios, rationalises resources; continues as primary regulatory body
<b>School Regulation &amp; Standards</b>	State School Standards Authority (SSSA) - independent body for school quality benchmarking and accreditation	Accreditation of Schools proposed; Departments of School Education and Higher Education (bifurcated departments) as governing structures
<b>Assessment Body</b>	PARAKH (Performance Assessment, Review and Analysis of Knowledge for Holistic Development) - National Assessment Centre	WBBSE (West Bengal Board of Secondary Education) and WBCHSE (West Bengal Council of Higher Secondary Education) continue as primary exam bodies
<b>Research Foundation</b>	National Research Foundation (NRF) - apex body to fund, mentor and build research culture across India's HEIs	State Research Foundation (proposed) - to fund state-level research; NRF grants to be accessed; Industry-Academia R&D cells
<b>Technology &amp; Education</b>	National Educational Technology Forum (NETF) - autonomous body for free exchange of ideas on educational technology integration	State ICT Council; smart classroom expansion; Netaji Subhas Open University as primary digital delivery mechanism
<b>Credit &amp; Mobility</b>	Academic Bank of Credits (ABC) - national mechanism for credit accumulation and transfer across HEIs	State-level Academic Bank of Credits proposed for intra-state student mobility; integration with national ABC recommended

<b>Teacher Training &amp; Standards</b>	National Mission for Mentoring; NCTE reformed; NPST (National Professional Standards for Teachers); 4-year B.Ed.	WBCTA (West Bengal College Teachers' Association norms); State level CPD; Teacher Transfer Policy; Performance-linked Promotion
<b>Entrance Examination</b>	National Testing Agency (NTA) to offer common entrance exams for HEIs	WBJEE (West Bengal Joint Entrance Examination Board) for state-level technical institution entrance; alignment with national NTA framework
<b>Early Childhood Bodies</b>	National Curriculum Framework for ECCE; ECCE Teachers training through NCTE; Ministry of Women & Child Development partnership	ICDS/Anganwadi system as ECCE delivery mechanism; State ECCE curriculum aligned with child development principles
<b>Special/ Inclusive Education</b>	Special Education Zones (SEZ) for disadvantaged regions; Gender Inclusion Fund; National Institute for Divyangjan	Inclusive Education provisions: CWSN (Children With Special Needs); Open schooling for OoSC; targeted district-wise interventions

The divergence in regulatory philosophy has implications beyond administrative efficiency. NEP 2020's consolidation agenda reflects a centralising impulse, however benign its intentions-the creation of HECI as a national apex body potentially reduces the autonomy of state education systems to regulate their own higher education landscape. WB SEP 2023's retention of state bodies is not merely bureaucratic inertia; it is a constitutional assertion of the state's concurrent jurisdiction over education. This reading is consistent with WB SEP 2023's explicit positioning of the policy as a federal peer contribution to national educational development rather than a state-level implementation plan for NEP 2020.

### 11. Summary of Contexts: Thematic Comparative Analysis

Situating NEP 2020 and WB SEP 2023 within the longer arc of national education policy reveals important continuities and departures. The recurring themes-6% public investment in education, mother-tongue instruction, inclusive education, adult literacy, vocational education, research promotion-have been constants across NPE 1968, NPE 1986/1992, NEP 2020, and WB SEP 2023, demonstrating remarkable ideological consistency even as implementation mechanisms have evolved.

**Table 5: Thematic Comparative Analysis Across All Policy Periods**

Policy Area	NPE 1968	NPE 1986/1992	NEP 2020	WB SEP 2023
<b>ECCE / Pre-primary</b>	Not explicitly addressed	ICDS-based ECCE; non-formal channels	5-year foundational stage from age 3; NCF for ECCE	Anganwadi ICDS; Pre-primary from age 5; ECCE aligned with child dev. science
<b>School Structure</b>	10+2+3 common structure	10+2+3 with vocational diversification	5+3+3+4 new pedagogical model	5+4+2+2 (retained existing structure)
<b>Language Policy</b>	Three-language formula; regional language promotion	Three-language formula strengthened; Hindi, English, regional language	Mother tongue until Grade 5 min; Sanskrit promotion; multilingualism	Bengali-medium tradition; multilingualism; Promotion of Languages (Chapter 3.13)
<b>Vocational Education</b>	Technical & voc. education at secondary stage	Vocationalization of 10% by 1990; 25% by 1995	Vocational integration across all stages; 50% exposure by 2025	Vocational-mainstream integration via CBCS; vocational from secondary to PG
<b>Women's Education</b>	Girls' education emphasis; social justice argument	Education for Women's Equality; female teachers at elementary level	Gender Inclusion Fund; gender-inclusive curriculum; equitable access	Gender-wise WBSCC scholarship data; female enrollment growth from 13.24 to 27.09 lakh in 10 yrs

<b>SC/ST/OBC Education</b>	Equalization of opportunity; more intensive tribal education	Programmes for SCs, STs, backward sections; residential schools	SEDGs focus; Special Education Zones; tribal area schools	College per lakh population improvement for backward districts; WBSCC beneficiaries
<b>Minority Education</b>	Protect rights under Art. 30; promote interests	Minorities' Education chapter in POA 1992	Emphasis on minority access and equitable participation	Minority social groups in College Population Index improvement agenda
<b>Adult / Lifelong Learning</b>	Spread of literacy; adult education	Adult and Continuing Education; part-time, correspondence courses	100% youth and adult literacy; alternative pathways	Adult Education (Chapter 3.12); Adult Education and Lifelong Learning (Chapter 3.21 in HE)
<b>Technology &amp; ICT</b>	Science and technology emphasis; no ICT policy	Media and Educational Technology chapter	NETF; DIKSHA; ed-tech integration across all levels	Digital education chapter; ICT in schools; digital universities; smart classrooms
<b>Higher Education GER</b>	Expand university education; new universities cautiously	Open Universities (IGNOU); distance learning; correspondence	GER target 50% by 2035; ABC; multidisciplinary HEIs	GER improvement focus; district-wise university expansion; Netaji Subhas Open University
<b>Public Investment in Education</b>	6% of national income target	6% of GNP target (unachieved)	6% of GDP target; Centre+State together	Significant rise in state HE plan budget 2011–2023; continued budget enhancement

### 11.1. Language Policy

Language policy has been a persistent and politically sensitive theme across all four documents. NPE 1968's three-language formula-regional language, Hindi, and English-was maintained in NPE 1986/1992 and is referenced in NEP 2020, which additionally emphasises mother-tongue instruction through Grade 5 and promotes Sanskrit alongside all other classical languages. WB SEP 2023 operates within this framework while protecting West Bengal's Bengali-medium tradition and advocating multilingualism. Chapter 3.13 on Promotion of Languages in the higher education section provides specific recommendations for language-based HEI development.

### 11.2. Equity and Inclusion

All four policy documents affirm the centrality of equity, though the target groups and mechanisms have evolved. NPE 1968 focused on girls' education, SC/ST upliftment, and regional balance. NPE 1986/1992 added minorities, the handicapped, and educationally backward sections as explicit categories. NEP 2020 introduces the umbrella concept of SEDGs (Socially and Economically Disadvantaged Groups) with the Gender Inclusion Fund and Special Education Zones. WB SEP 2023 provides for CWSN, OoSC, tribal and backward district targeted interventions, and monitors college-per-lakh-population data to identify and address geographic access inequities. Both NEP 2020 and WB SEP 2023 represent the most sophisticated and data-informed approaches to equity of any Indian education policy to date.

### 11.3. Vocational Education and Skill Integration

The trajectory from NPE 1968 to WB SEP 2023 on vocational education shows a shift from marginal inclusion to central integration. NPE 1968 and NPE 1986/1992 treated vocational education as a diversionary stream at the secondary stage, setting quantitative targets (10% by 1990, 25% by 1995 under NPE 1986). NEP 2020 transforms this conception: vocational education is not a diversion but an integral component of all educational stages from Grade 6, with a target of 50% vocational exposure by 2025. WB SEP 2023 aligns with this vision, proposing integration of vocational courses with mainstream education through CBCS from secondary to postgraduate levels, and mandating placement/career counselling cells in all HEIs.

## 12. Findings:

### Key Similarities - NEP 2020 and WB SEP 2023

Despite their structural and regulatory divergences, NEP 2020 and WB SEP 2023 share a substantially common normative framework across multiple dimensions. The following table documents eight major areas of convergence between the two policies, demonstrating that the state-national relationship in Indian education is

not simply one of conflict or compliance but of substantive shared values expressed through different institutional mechanisms.

**Table 6: Key Areas of Similarity - NEP 2020 and WB SEP 2023**

Area of Similarity	NEP 2020 Position	WB SEP 2023 Position
<b>Equity-centred approach</b>	Socially and Economically Disadvantaged Groups (SEDGs) as primary focus; Gender Inclusion Fund; special zones	Inclusive education for CWSN, OoSC, tribal, minority, backward district students; WBSCC scholarships
<b>Mother-tongue instruction</b>	Home language/mother tongue as medium at least until Grade 5; multilingualism promoted	Bengali-medium tradition preserved; multilingualism encouraged; promotion of Indian languages
<b>Academic flexibility</b>	Multiple entry/exit in UG; CBCS; ABC; no hard stream divisions	CBCS integration; ABC adoption; vocational-mainstream fusion; flexible programme design
<b>Research culture</b>	NRF for nationwide research; research universities; industry-academia linkage	State Research Foundation; Innovation Cells; Incubation Centres; patent promotion; brownfield industry model
<b>Vocational integration</b>	Vocational education integrated into all school and HE levels from Grade 6	Vocational from secondary to PG; CBCS-mode integration; placement cells in HEIs
<b>Public investment</b>	6% GDP public investment target jointly by Centre and States	Remarkable rise in WB HE plan budget 2011–2023; continuing enhancement
<b>Open/Distance Learning</b>	Digital universities; online platforms; flexible learning for adult and working learners	Netaji Subhas Open University for online education; distance learning for GER improvement
<b>Internationalization</b>	Foreign universities to open campuses; Indian HEIs abroad; international student mobility	International student hostels; twinning programmes; foreign campus facilitation; credit transfer with foreign HEIs

The similarities extend beyond mere rhetorical alignment to substantive policy convergence. Both policies explicitly adopt equity as the foundational value of education. Both advocate for the integration of vocational and academic pathways. Both promote research culture and industry-academia partnership. Both emphasise international engagement. And critically, both affirm the 6% GDP public investment target—a target that has eluded Indian education policy for over five decades but remains a shared aspiration. West Bengal's notable achievement in increasing its HE plan budget significantly between 2011 and 2023 suggests a genuine state-level commitment to this aspiration, beyond mere declaratory policy.

#### **Key Differences-- NEP 2020 and WB SEP 2023**

The divergences between NEP 2020 and WB SEP 2023 are not random or incidental; they reflect principled choices about educational governance, the pace and nature of change, the balance between national uniformity and regional diversity, and the philosophical underpinnings of educational policy. The following table documents eight major areas of difference.

**Table 7: Key Areas of Difference - NEP 2020 and WB SEP 2023**

Domain	NEP 2020 Approach	WB SEP 2023 Approach	Nature of Difference
<b>School Structure</b>	5+3+3+4 with distinct Foundational, Preparatory, Middle, Secondary stages	Existing 5+4+2+2 retained; no structural overhaul proposed	Structural: NEP is transformative; WB is conservative to protect existing admin infrastructure
<b>Regulatory Architecture</b>	HECI replaces UGC, AICTE, NAAC; unified 'Light but Tight' regulation	WBSCHER retained; existing state bodies continue; no merger proposed	Institutional: NEP proposes sweeping regulatory consolidation; WB maintains federal differentiation
<b>ECCE Entry Age</b>	Age 3 through formal Balvatika within school system	Age 5/6 through Anganwadi/ICDS; formal school from Class 1	Age threshold: NEP expands school system earlier; WB retains non-formal ECCE channel

<b>Teacher Training</b>	4-year integrated B.Ed.; NPST standards; National Mentoring Mission	Existing B.Ed. structure; focus on CPD, transfer policy, performance-linked promotion	Depth: NEP restructures teacher preparation; WB reforms teacher management systems
<b>Assessment Body</b>	PARAKH as new national assessment centre; board exams twice yearly	Existing WBBSE/WBCHSE continue; holistic assessment principles adopted	Institutional: NEP creates new apex body; WB retains existing boards
<b>University Typology</b>	Tiered system: Research Universities, Teaching Universities, Autonomous Colleges	Geographic expansion model: at least one university per district; no typology	Philosophy: NEP seeks stratification for excellence; WB seeks distribution for access
<b>Research Mandate</b>	All HEIs expected to conduct research; NRF funds all eligible institutions	Research concentrated in select universities; state NRF proposed but not all HEIs targeted	Scale: NEP democratizes research; WB is more concentrated and realistic given resource constraints
<b>Ideological Framework</b>	Indian ethos; Bharat-centric education; rooted in Indian knowledge traditions	Bengal Renaissance tradition; secular-plural framework; federal sensitivity to diversity	Cultural: NEP emphasises Indian civilizational roots; WB emphasises Bengal's plural reformist heritage

The most fundamental difference between the two policies is philosophical, not structural. NEP 2020 is animated by a transformative vision: it seeks to reimagine Indian education from its foundations, drawing on Indian civilizational knowledge traditions and positioning this reimagination as a national project of cultural reclamation and global assertion. Its structural proposals-5+3+3+4, HECI, NRF, PARAKH-are expressions of this transformative ambition. WB SEP 2023 is animated by a different but equally principled philosophy: incremental improvement within a functioning system, with the protection of equity and access as non-negotiable constraints on the pace and character of change. Where NEP 2020 is willing to accept transitional disruption in pursuit of structural transformation, WB SEP 2023 prioritises stability and continuity to protect the 30-lakh plus school-going children who depend on the current system.

There is also a difference in the cultural and ideological frameworks within which the two policies are embedded. NEP 2020's frequent references to 'Indian ethos,' 'Indian knowledge traditions,' and 'Bharat' reflect a particular cultural-nationalist orientation that, while not exclusionary, is distinctively associated with the ideological commitments of the Government of India that formulated it. WB SEP 2023's preamble, by contrast, invokes the Bengal Renaissance tradition-Rammohan Roy, Vidyasagar, Tagore-and the secular-plural reformist heritage of Bengal, implicitly constructing a different and arguably more cosmopolitan frame for educational values. This ideological difference, while not explicitly stated as a point of contention, subtly inflects the two documents' orientations toward knowledge, culture, and national identity.

### 13. Discussion: Education Federalism and Policy Translation

The comparative analysis of NEP 2020 and WB SEP 2023 illuminates broader questions about the nature of education federalism in India. Education's concurrent list status in the Constitution creates a framework in which national and state education policies must coexist; the question is always how, not whether, they coexist. The WB SEP 2023 demonstrates one model of coexistence: principled engagement combined with selective adaptation. The state explicitly acknowledges NEP 2020 as a reference point while reserving the right to diverge where state conditions or state interests require different choices.

This pattern is visible across the analysis. WB SEP 2023 adopts NEP's Academic Bank of Credits while

adding a state-level component. It aligns with NEP's internationalization agenda while adding operational specificity. It accepts NEP's equity framework while applying it to West Bengal's distinctive demographic profile. It shares NEP's research promotion goals while proposing state-specific institutional mechanisms. In each case, the state neither blindly adopts nor reflexively rejects the national framework; it engages critically and adapts purposefully.

The differences-especially on school structure and regulatory architecture-represent the outer limits of this adaptive engagement. West Bengal's retention of its 5+4+2+2 school structure against NEP's 5+3+3+4 model is not simply inertia; it reflects a calculation that the administrative costs of structural reform outweigh the pedagogical benefits for the state's specific context. Similarly, the retention of WBBSE,

WBCHSE, WBSCHSE, and WBJEE as distinct bodies against NEP's HECI consolidation model reflects a principled assertion of state regulatory competence. These divergences may also reflect legitimate concerns about the centralising implications of NEP's regulatory architecture, concerns shared by several state governments across India.

From a policy analysis perspective, WB SEP 2023 represents an important contribution to the national educational governance conversation. A policy that demonstrates how states can align with national visions on values and principles while diverging on structures and mechanisms provides a model for federal education policy translation that is neither servile nor obstructionist. It suggests that the success of NEP 2020 as a national framework will depend not on uniform adoption but on principled, contextually sensitive state-level engagement of precisely the kind demonstrated by West Bengal.

#### 14. Conclusion

This documentary analysis has examined the relationship between India's National Education Policy 2020 and the West Bengal State Education Policy 2023 across seven comparative tables covering school education structure, higher education architecture, structural and regulatory bodies, and cross-cutting thematic issues. The analysis reveals a relationship of principled engagement: West Bengal's SEP affirms shared commitments to equity, academic flexibility, research culture, internationalisation, and digital learning while consciously diverging on structural matters, regulatory architecture, and cultural framing.

The similarities between NEP 2020 and WB SEP 2023 are extensive and substantive: both prioritise equity for disadvantaged groups; both advocate mother-tongue instruction; both promote vocational-academic integration; both emphasise research and industry-academia partnership; both affirm the 6% GDP public investment target; both see internationalisation as important; both promote open and distance learning; and both deploy the Academic Bank of Credits as a mechanism for educational flexibility. These convergences reflect genuine shared values rather than mere compliance, suggesting that the two documents occupy common normative ground even as they diverge on structural and institutional questions.

The differences are equally principled: West Bengal retains its 5+4+2+2 school structure to protect existing administrative infrastructure; it maintains existing regulatory bodies against NEP's consolidation agenda; it prioritises geographic distribution of universities over tiered institutional

stratification; it frames its educational vision within the Bengal Renaissance tradition rather than the Indian civilizational ethos of NEP 2020. These differences reflect legitimate contextual choices rooted in West Bengal's specific educational realities, its constitutional position as a co-equal partner in a concurrent domain, and its distinct political and cultural traditions.

The broader lesson of this comparison is that productive education federalism requires exactly the kind of critical engagement that WB SEP 2023 demonstrates: acknowledgement of shared values, principled adaptation, and confident assertion of state-specific requirements. As India's most ambitious education policy in half a century, NEP 2020's success will be measured not by the uniformity of its adoption but by the quality of its engagement-and West Bengal's State Education Policy 2023 offers an instructive and sophisticated model of such engagement.

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