



## **Reimagining Primary Education in Uttar Pradesh: Major Reforms Required for Foundational Learning, Teacher Effectiveness and Future-Ready Schools**

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### **Abstract**

Primary education is the foundation upon which the entire educational development of a child is constructed. Uttar Pradesh, India's most populous state, has made significant efforts to strengthen school education through programmes related to foundational literacy and numeracy, school infrastructure, teacher development and educational technology. However, substantial challenges remain in ensuring that every child acquires age-appropriate reading, writing, numeracy, and communication, problem-solving and socio-emotional competencies. Recent evidence indicates that learning outcomes in Uttar Pradesh have improved considerably, particularly in government schools, but a large proportion of children continue to experience foundational learning gaps. This conceptual research paper examines the major changes required in primary education in Uttar Pradesh with particular emphasis on foundational literacy and numeracy, teacher effectiveness, classroom pedagogy, multilingual education, assessment, digital and technological integration, parental participation, school leadership, local learning resources and competency-based education. The study adopts a qualitative, policy-oriented review methodology using government frameworks and large-scale educational evidence as major sources. The paper argues that the next stage of educational reform in Uttar Pradesh should move beyond an emphasis on enrolment, infrastructure and textbook completion towards measurable learning outcomes and child-centred classroom practices. It proposes a comprehensive **UP Primary Education Transformation Framework (UP-PETF)** consisting of ten interconnected reform areas: foundational learning, teacher professionalism, classroom pedagogy, language development, assessment reform, experiential learning, technology, parental engagement, school leadership and continuous monitoring. The paper concludes that sustainable improvement requires a district- and school-level approach in which teachers are supported rather than merely monitored and children are provided with meaningful opportunities to read, think, communicate, create and solve problems.

**Keywords:** primary education, Uttar Pradesh, foundational literacy, foundational numeracy, teacher effectiveness, educational reform, NIPUN Bharat, experiential learning, competency-based education, school innovation

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### **Introduction**

Primary education represents the most critical stage in the development of a child's academic foundation. During these years, children acquire the basic competencies required for reading, writing, mathematics, communication, reasoning and independent learning. If these competencies are not established adequately during the primary years, students may continue to face learning difficulties even when they progress to higher grades. The National Education Policy 2020 and NIPUN Bharat have placed foundational literacy and numeracy at the centre of school education reform. NIPUN Bharat identifies universal foundational literacy and numeracy as a national priority and seeks to ensure that children acquire foundational competencies by the end of Grade 3. For Uttar Pradesh, this agenda has particular importance because of the state's enormous and diverse school system. Schools operate across metropolitan areas, towns, villages and geographically difficult regions. Children also enter school with considerable differences in language exposure, preschool experience, socioeconomic circumstances, parental education and learning readiness. Consequently, a

uniform approach to primary education may not produce uniform outcomes. The question for Uttar Pradesh is therefore no longer simply: **"How many children are enrolled in school?"** The more important question is: **"What can every child actually read, understand, calculate, communicate and apply by the end of primary education?"**

Evidence from ASER 2024 shows that Uttar Pradesh has made notable progress. Government-school reading ability at the relevant foundational level increased substantially between 2018 and 2024, while basic arithmetic performance also improved. However, the absolute levels demonstrate that a considerable learning gap remains. This creates a strong argument for the next generation of reforms. The objective should not be to criticise the existing system but to identify where **the next major improvements should occur**.

### **Background of Primary Education in Uttar Pradesh**

Uttar Pradesh has undertaken multiple initiatives to improve school education. These include efforts associated with foundational literacy and numeracy, teacher training, school infrastructure, learning materials and technology-enabled education. NIPUN Bharat's implementation framework itself highlights several critical conditions: adequate teachers, sufficient teaching-learning time, timely learning materials, basic school facilities, teacher mentoring, functional libraries, academic support through SCERT/DIET/BRC/CRC structures and community participation. This is significant because educational quality cannot be produced by changing textbooks alone. A successful primary school requires an ecosystem consisting of:

#### **Teacher + Time + Pedagogy + Learning Materials + Assessment + Leadership + Family + Community**

If any major component remains weak, learning outcomes can suffer. The available evidence also suggests that UP has been making progress. According to reporting on ASER 2024, the percentage of children in government schools in Uttar Pradesh able to read at the specified foundational level increased from 12.3% in 2018 to 27.9% in 2024, while basic arithmetic increased from 26.9% to 40.7%. These gains should be recognised. At the same time, they reveal that improvement must continue at a much greater scale.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Despite improvements in enrolment, infrastructure, teacher training and foundational-learning initiatives, many primary-school children continue to experience learning gaps. The major concern is that children may progress from one grade to another without mastering competencies expected at earlier stages. This phenomenon creates a **grade progression–learning progression gap**. Therefore, primary education in Uttar Pradesh requires reforms that prioritise actual competency acquisition rather than merely grade completion.

### **Objectives of the Study**

1. To examine the major challenges affecting primary education in Uttar Pradesh.
2. To analyse the importance of foundational literacy and numeracy.
3. To identify areas requiring major pedagogical reform.
4. To examine the role of teachers in improving primary education.
5. To propose reforms in assessment and classroom practices.

### **Research Questions**

1. What are the major challenges confronting primary education in Uttar Pradesh?
2. Why do foundational learning outcomes require continued attention?



3. What changes are required in primary classroom pedagogy?
4. How can teachers become more effective learning facilitators?
5. How should assessment practices change?

### **Research Methodology**

The study adopts a **qualitative, conceptual and policy-review methodology**.

The paper analyses official educational frameworks and publicly available large-scale educational evidence concerning foundational learning and primary education. Major reference sources include:

- National Education Policy 2020;
- NIPUN Bharat framework and implementation resources;
- Foundational Learning Study;
- NCERT foundational-stage resources;
- ASER evidence;
- Government educational policy documents.

### **Major Changes Required in Primary Education in Uttar Pradesh**

#### **First Change: Move from Enrolment to Learning**

For many years, educational discussion has appropriately focused on school access and enrolment. The next phase must focus more strongly on: **What children learn after entering school**. Every primary school should maintain a simple learning profile showing whether each child can:

- read;
- comprehend;
- write;
- count;
- compare numbers;
- perform basic operations;
- solve simple problems;
- Communicate ideas.

NIPUN Bharat already emphasises measurable foundational competencies and tracking children's progress. UP should strengthen this approach at the school level.

#### **Second Change: Make Reading a Daily Habit**

Reading should become a daily classroom activity rather than an occasional language lesson. Every primary school should have a functional reading environment. Children should receive regular opportunities to:

- read stories;
- read poems;
- discuss pictures;
- read local information;
- retell stories;



- create their own stories;
- read silently;
- read aloud;
- Discuss what they have understood.

A classroom with 40 children should not depend entirely on one textbook. Even a small collection of locally developed story cards can substantially expand children's reading experiences. NIPUN Bharat's implementation planning specifically identifies functional libraries and children's literature as important enablers for foundational learning.

### **Third Change: Mathematics Must Move Beyond Memorisation**

Primary mathematics should not become an exercise in copying algorithms. Children should understand:

#### **Why?**

Before merely learning:

#### **How?**

For example, instead of teaching:

$$25 - 8 = 17$$

Only through a written procedure, teachers can first present:

"A shopkeeper has 25 mangoes and sells 8. How many are left?" Children can use objects, drawings or number lines before learning the formal algorithm.

Mathematics should involve:

- objects;
- games;
- measurement;
- patterns;
- puzzles;
- estimation;
- mental mathematics;
- everyday situations;
- Reasoning.

### **Fourth Change: Reduce Excessive Rote Learning**

Memorisation has a legitimate place in education, but primary learning should not be dominated by rote reproduction. The classroom should gradually move:

**Copy → Understand → Explain → Apply → Create**

For example, instead of asking children to copy ten sentences, teachers can ask them to create five sentences from a picture. Instead of copying ten mathematical problems, children can create their own word problem. Such changes require minimal financial investment but substantial pedagogical change.

### **Fifth Change: Teacher Should Become a Learning Designer**

The teacher is the most important classroom resource. Teacher development should therefore move beyond occasional training sessions.

Teachers need continuous support in:

- lesson planning;
- differentiated instruction;
- classroom questioning;
- formative assessment;
- multilingual teaching;
- activity-based pedagogy;
- inclusive education;
- learning-gap remediation;
- Technology use.

NIPUN Bharat identifies teacher capacity building and academic mentoring as critical components of implementation.

### **Sixth Change: Reduce Non-Teaching Burden**

Teachers should spend maximum professional time on:

#### **Teaching + Assessment + Feedback + Planning**

The official NIPUN framework specifically identifies reduction of teacher administrative burden and non-teaching deployment as important enabling conditions. For UP, reducing unnecessary administrative burden can potentially release valuable classroom time.

### **Seventh Change: Introduce Daily Foundational Learning Time**

Every primary school should protect dedicated daily time for foundational literacy and numeracy. A possible structure is:

| Time                    | Learning Focus                 |
|-------------------------|--------------------------------|
| <b>First 30 minutes</b> | Reading and oral language      |
| <b>Next 30 minutes</b>  | Mathematics                    |
| <b>Next 20 minutes</b>  | Activity/experiential learning |
| <b>Regular lessons</b>  | Curriculum learning            |
| <b>Last 10 minutes</b>  | Reflection/assessment          |

The exact timetable may vary by school, but the principle should remain: **Foundational learning must receive protected instructional time.**



## **Proposed UP Primary Education Transformation Framework**

### **UP-PETF**

#### **Uttar Pradesh Primary Education Transformation Framework**

**Pillar 1 — Foundational Learning:** Reading, writing and numeracy.

**Pillar 2 — Teacher Professionalism:** Continuous development and mentoring.

**Pillar 3 — Activity-Based Pedagogy:** Learning through doing.

**Pillar 4 — Language Development:** Multilingual and communication-rich classrooms.

**Pillar 5 — Assessment Reform:** Competency-based formative assessment.

**Pillar 6 — Learning Recovery:** Individualised support for children with gaps.

**Pillar 7 — Local Learning:** Use of community and local resources.

**Pillar 8 — Technology:** Digital tools supporting teachers and learners.

**Pillar 9 — Parent Participation:** Home-school learning partnership.

**Pillar 10 — School Leadership:** Learning-focused management and monitoring.

**Proposed Model for an Ideal UP Primary School:** An ideal primary school in Uttar Pradesh should aim to become a: **"Reading, Thinking, Speaking, Doing and Creating School."** Such a school should have:

- daily reading;
- daily mathematics practice;
- activity-based teaching;
- child-friendly classrooms;
- functional library;
- locally developed TLM;
- regular formative assessment;
- teacher mentoring;
- parent participation;
- basic digital resources;
- clean and safe infrastructure;
- Inclusive learning practices.

This does not necessarily require expensive infrastructure. The most important investment is **quality human interaction and purposeful teaching**.



## Discussion

The evidence indicates that Uttar Pradesh has already demonstrated the capacity to improve learning outcomes. The gains reported in ASER 2024 are encouraging and suggest that focused interventions can produce measurable progress. However, improvement should not be interpreted as completion of the reform agenda. If the goal is to transform primary education, the state must move from isolated programmes towards a coherent school-level learning ecosystem. The official NIPUN planning framework provides an important foundation because it recognises that foundational learning depends on multiple conditions: adequate teachers, instructional time, learning materials, facilities, mentoring, libraries, academic support and community participation. The central argument of this paper is therefore that **UP does not need only more educational programmes; it needs stronger integration among existing educational efforts.**

**Policy Recommendations:** The following recommendations are proposed for strengthening primary education in Uttar Pradesh:

1. Establish measurable foundational competencies for every grade.
2. Protect dedicated daily time for literacy and numeracy.
3. Develop school-level child competency profiles.
4. Strengthen continuous teacher mentoring.
5. Reduce unnecessary non-teaching responsibilities.
6. Establish functional reading corners in every primary classroom.
7. Promote low-cost locally developed teaching-learning materials.
8. Increase activity-based mathematics instruction.

**Future Research Directions:** Future researchers may investigate:

1. Effectiveness of activity-based mathematics in UP primary schools.
2. Impact of daily reading programmes.
3. Effectiveness of school-level competency dashboards.
4. Role of parents in foundational learning.
5. Teacher mentoring and learning outcomes.

## Conclusion

Primary education in Uttar Pradesh stands at an important point of transition. The state has demonstrated measurable progress in foundational learning, and this progress should be acknowledged. At the same time, the remaining learning gaps indicate that the reform process cannot stop. The next stage requires a deeper transformation of what happens **inside the classroom**. The primary classroom of the future should not be dominated by copying from the blackboard, memorising answers and completing textbooks. It should be a place where children: **read, speak, think, calculate, question, experiment, collaborate and create**. Teachers should be supported as professionals. Assessment should identify learning needs rather than merely produce marks. Parents should become learning partners. Schools should use local resources. Technology should strengthen—not replace—teachers. And educational monitoring should ultimately answer one question:

**Is every child actually learning?**



The transformation of primary education in Uttar Pradesh will not be achieved through one programme or one policy. It will require sustained improvement in teaching, assessment, leadership, family participation, and teacher support and classroom practice. The most important reform, therefore, is a change in the definition of educational success: **From schooling children to ensuring that children learn.**

*“That shift can provide the foundation for a stronger, more equitable and future-ready education system in Uttar Pradesh.”*

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