

## **Chapter 2:**

### **Review of Related Literature**

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#### **2.1 Introduction**

A review of related literature provides a foundation for understanding the existing research and policy discussions relevant to the topic. This chapter presents an overview of studies, reports, and theoretical perspectives related to syllabus reduction, the National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020), teachers' roles in policy implementation, critical thinking in school education, and the relationship between curriculum and competitive exam preparation. By engaging with both national and international literature, this review identifies the key themes that inform the present study and highlights the gaps that justify the need for this research.

#### **2.2 Studies on Syllabus Reduction**

Several studies have highlighted the need to simplify school curricula to improve learning outcomes and reduce student stress. Overloaded syllabi have often been associated with rote learning, lack of conceptual clarity, and a reduction in student motivation. Miller (2019) found that a streamlined curriculum promotes deeper conceptual learning and student engagement by giving teachers more time to explore fewer topics in greater depth. Similarly, during the COVID-19 pandemic, temporary rationalised syllabi were introduced in many countries, including India. These temporary reductions helped teachers and students focus on core concepts while making room for more creative, activity-based, and reflective learning strategies (NCERT, 2020).

Internationally, China has also undertaken syllabus reforms. Recent studies have shown that China's approach to curriculum streamlining emphasizes core competencies and aims to reduce the academic burden on students (Chen & Zhao, 2022). This comparative insight underscores that syllabus reduction is not only a national concern but a global one, especially in countries grappling with exam-centric education models.

#### **2.3 Literature on NEP 2020 and Policy Awareness**

The National Education Policy 2020 represents a major shift in Indian education. One of its key features is a competency-based curriculum that prioritizes understanding over memorization. It also stresses syllabus reduction to help learners focus on essential content and develop key life skills (Ministry of Education, 2020). According to NCERT, the reduced content aims to promote clarity, reduce stress, and make learning more engaging and relevant.

However, policy awareness among teachers varies. While some have attended workshops or training sessions, others rely on informal sources like peer discussions or personal reading. Studies by Mehta and Kumar (2021) reveal that without structured

professional development, teachers may struggle to interpret policy documents and implement reforms as intended. The gap between policy goals and classroom reality remains significant in many schools.

## **2.4 Role of Teachers in Policy Implementation**

Teachers are the cornerstone of any educational reform. According to Fullan (2007), meaningful reform cannot occur without teacher ownership and participation. Their understanding of the policy, willingness to adapt, and ability to apply new methods directly influence whether reforms succeed or fail. In India, however, studies (Reddy & Sinha, 2021; Ghosh, 2022) indicate that implementation is often hindered by limited in-service training, unclear operational guidelines, and unequal access to resources across school types.

These challenges affect how effectively teachers can implement NEP 2020 reforms, including syllabus reduction. Lack of hands-on training and the pressure of administrative duties further reduce their capacity to innovate in the classroom. The disconnect between policy designers and classroom practitioners needs to be addressed through collaborative policy development and feedback systems.

## **2.5 Syllabus Reduction and Critical Thinking**

Research shows that overloaded curricula limit the time available for higher-order thinking tasks. Reducing syllabus content can make space for deeper learning, creativity, and problem-solving activities. Shoshani and Steinmetz (2014) observed that students exposed to lighter, well-structured syllabi developed better critical thinking skills and demonstrated improved mental well-being. Embse et al. (2013) found that when academic pressure was reduced, teachers reported greater flexibility to adopt innovative teaching strategies.

In the Indian context, NEP 2020 aims to foster critical thinking by reducing memorization-based learning. Teachers are expected to use inquiry-based and experiential methods. However, as Singh and Ranjan (2022) point out, the success of this approach depends on adequate teacher training, reduced classroom sizes, and the availability of interactive learning resources. Without these supports, syllabus reduction alone may not achieve the intended transformation.

## **2.6 Curriculum and Competitive Examination Preparation**

One of the key concerns raised by both educators and parents is whether a reduced syllabus will impact students' readiness for competitive exams like NEET and JEE. Competitive exams often cover broad content and require extensive practice.

NEP 2020 addresses this concern by promoting holistic development and conceptual understanding, aiming to reduce reliance on external coaching. Yet, as noted by Bhatt (2021), there is skepticism about whether school-based learning alone can meet the rigorous demands of entrance exams. Teachers play a vital role in bridging this gap. Their views on whether syllabus reduction aligns with exam requirements can offer insight into how curriculum reforms impact exam preparedness.

## **2.7 Summary of Literature and Research Gap**

The reviewed literature supports the idea that thoughtfully implemented syllabus reduction can enhance learning outcomes, promote mental well-being, and foster higher-order thinking. However, most existing studies focus either on the theoretical benefits of reduced content or on student outcomes. Very few explore the perspectives of teachers, particularly within the Indian context where NEP 2020 is still being rolled out.

There remains a gap in understanding how teachers perceive syllabus reduction, how well they are prepared to implement it, and what challenges or expectations they foresee. This study addresses that gap by focusing on teachers from central government schools in Bhopal and exploring their perspectives in detail. It aims to contribute to policy discussions and inform future teacher training and curriculum planning efforts.