



# DAILY EDITORIAL ANALYSIS

TOPIC

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**BRIDGING INDIA'S NUMERACY GAP**

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## BRIDGING INDIA'S NUMERACY GAP

### Context

- The persistent learning gap in Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN) that threatens the broader educational reform agenda under **National Education Policy (NEP) 2020**.

### About the Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN)

- It refers to the **ability of children** to read with **understanding** and **perform basic mathematical operations**.
- These skills are considered essential for all future learning and personal development.
  - ♦ **Literacy**: Reading fluently with comprehension, writing coherently, and expressing ideas.
  - ♦ **Numeracy**: Understanding numbers, performing basic operations, and applying math in daily life.
- FLN development **typically targets children aged 3 to 8 years** (by Grade 3), a critical window for cognitive growth.
- The **National Education Policy (NEP) 2020** declared **FLN as the highest priority**, leading to the launch of the **NIPUN Bharat Mission**:
  - ♦ **NIPUN Bharat (2021)**: Aims to achieve universal FLN for all children in Grades 1–3 by 2026–27.
  - ♦ **Diksha Platform**: Offers digital resources for FLN, including teacher training and learning materials.
  - ♦ **NISHTHA FLN**: A capacity-building program for educators to improve delivery of foundational learning.
  - ♦ **EAC-PM Report**: Highlights the long-term benefits of early FLN interventions and tracks state-level progress.

### Concerns & Issues Surrounding FLN

- **Numeracy-Literacy Divide**: According to the **Annual State of Education Report (ASER) 2024**, while **48.7% of Class 5 students** can read fluently, only **30.7%** can solve a basic division problem — a striking **18 percentage-point gap**.
  - ♦ No state in India reports higher numeracy than literacy outcomes.
  - ♦ It indicates that while children may read words, they struggle to 'read numbers'.
  - ♦ It underscores the need for **targeted interventions in numeracy** — the missing link in India's foundational learning framework.
- **Hierarchical Nature of Mathematics**: The root of the numeracy problem lies in the **cumulative and hierarchical nature of mathematics**.
  - ♦ In language, partial understanding can still enable progress.
  - ♦ In mathematics, missing a basic concept such as **place value** can make later topics like **addition, fractions, or decimals** incomprehensible.
  - ♦ Traditional **syllabus-driven teaching**, which progresses irrespective of students' conceptual readiness, deepens this problem.
- **Real-World Disconnect**: Evidence from the **Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL)** highlights another dimension:
  - ♦ Students who score well in classroom math assessments often fail to apply this knowledge in **real-life contexts**, such as making market calculations.
  - ♦ Conversely, children who handle real transactions (e.g., in family shops) often cannot translate those experiences into formal math problems.
  - ♦ This **two-way disconnect** points to the urgent need for **integrated learning** that connects classroom mathematics with everyday problem-solving.
- **High Failure Rates & Drop Out**: Students weak in basic numeracy struggle in **mathematics** and **science**, leading to **high failure rates** in board exams.
  - ♦ Many adolescents **drop out** of school before Class 10, not due to lack of interest, but because instruction becomes incomprehensible.

- ♦ It creates a **cycle of fear and disengagement**, closing off access to higher education and employability pathways.

### Way Forward: Toward a Multi-Pronged Response

- **Extend FLN Beyond Early Grades:** Limiting foundational interventions to Class 3 is insufficient. With nearly **70% of Class 5** and **over 50% of Class 8** students unable to perform basic division (ASER 2024), interventions must extend **up to Class 8**.
  - ♦ Evidence from **Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Daman and Diu**, where FLN efforts were expanded into middle grades, shows **notable improvement in outcomes** (Parakh Rashtriya Survekshan 2024).
- **Introduce FLN+ Skills:** The next phase should move beyond basic skills to **FLN+** — including **fractions, decimals, percentages, ratios, and integers**. These are essential not just for board exams but also for functional literacy and life skills.

#### FLN+ Approach

- It builds on the **goals of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020** and the **NIPUN Bharat Mission**, which aim to ensure that every child attains foundational skills by Grade 3.
- **Key Components of the FLN+ Model:**
  - ♦ **Strengthening middle-grade support:** Interventions should not stop at Grade 3. **Students in Grades 4 and 5** need continued scaffolding to consolidate their numeracy skills.
  - ♦ **Contextualizing math in everyday life:** Making math relatable through real-world applications—like budgeting, measurements, and local problem-solving—can enhance engagement and retention.
  - ♦ **Teacher empowerment:** Equipping teachers with diagnostic tools, training in differentiated instruction, and access to peer learning networks is essential for effective delivery.
- **Rethink Pedagogy:** Child-friendly, **activity-based learning methods** proven effective in early grades should be adapted for upper primary levels. Teaching must respond to **students' actual learning levels**, not rigid curricula.
- **Connect Learning With Life:** Mathematics should be taught through **context-rich problems** that reflect real-world scenarios. Embedding literacy and numeracy in everyday life enhances both relevance and retention.

### Conclusion

- India's numeracy challenge is **deep, systemic, and urgent**. It stems from the layered nature of mathematics and is perpetuated by traditional teaching practices that leave many learners behind.
  - ♦ The consequences — poor performance, dropouts, and inequity — threaten the very goals of the NEP 2020.
- The **NIPUN Bharat Mission** has demonstrated that **focused, evidence-based interventions** can improve foundational learning at scale.
  - ♦ The next step must be to **extend these gains into upper primary** and embed **FLN+ numeracy** as a national priority.
- It is a **social and economic necessity** along with an academic imperative that directly influences India's human capital, equity, and future growth.

### Daily Mains Practice Question

**[Q] Discuss the key challenges contributing to India's numeracy gap and evaluate the effectiveness of current government initiatives like NIPUN Bharat in addressing these issues.**

Source: TH

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