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Reimagining Education for Democratic Citizenship in India: NEP 2020, Political Participation and Constitutional Values

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ABSTRACT

Education in a constitutional democracy has a purpose that goes beyond imparting knowledge, skills, and professional abilities. It also helps individuals understand public institutions, recognize their rights and duties, respect differences, and take part in collective decision-making. In India, this broader role has become particularly important after the introduction of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. The policy gives importance to constitutional values, ethical understanding, critical thinking, inclusion, pluralism, scientific temper, democratic spirit, and responsible citizenship. This paper explores the role of NEP 2020 in promoting democratic citizenship in India, with special emphasis on political participation and constitutional values. It argues that citizenship education should not be restricted to theoretical lessons on the Constitution and electoral processes. Students should instead experience democratic practices through discussion, debate, participation in institutional activities, community involvement, and constitutional reasoning. The paper examines Articles 14, 19, 21, 21A, 25, 29, 30 and 51A of the Constitution and their relevance to citizenship-oriented education. It further discusses important judicial decisions, including Mohini Jain v. State of Karnataka (1992), Unni Krishnan, J.P. v. State of Andhra Pradesh (1993), Bijoe Emmanuel v. State of Kerala (1986), Aruna Roy v. Union of India (2002), and T.M.A. Pai Foundation v. State of Karnataka (2002), highlighting their significance for education, freedom, pluralism, and institutional autonomy. The paper also focuses on student participation, constitutional literacy, deliberative pedagogy, and digital citizenship. It concludes that NEP 2020 can strengthen democracy only when educational institutions actively practice equality, dialogue, freedom of expression, dissent, responsibility, and inclusion, supported by teacher preparation, media literacy, community engagement, and institutional accountability.

◆ **KEYWORDS:** NEP 2020; Civic education; Constitutional literacy; Political education; Democratic citizenship education.

1. INTRODUCTION

Democracy is sustained not merely by elections, political institutions and constitutional procedures. It also depends upon the quality of citizens who participate in those institutions. A constitutional democracy requires citizens capable of understanding public affairs, distinguishing evidence from propaganda, respecting disagreement, recognizing the rights of others and exercising political freedoms responsibly. These capacities do not emerge automatically with age. They are cultivated through social experience, family, community, public institutions and, significantly, education.

The relationship between education and democracy is particularly important in India because the country combines an enormous and socially diverse population with universal adult franchise, a written Constitution, parliamentary government, federalism, judicial review, independent constitutional institutions and an extensive system of local government. Democratic participation therefore requires more than familiarity with the mechanics of voting. Citizens must also understand why equality matters, why constitutional rights constrain state power, why minorities possess equal citizenship, why dissent can be legitimate, and why public institutions must remain accountable.

The National Education Policy 2020 represents an important opportunity in this context. The policy explicitly states that curriculum and pedagogy should develop respect for Fundamental Duties and Constitutional values and cultivate awareness of citizens' roles and responsibilities (Ministry of Education, 2020). NEP 2020 also places emphasis on critical thinking, ethical reasoning, constitutional values, pluralism, equality, justice, liberty, responsibility and democratic spirit.

This orientation is significant because conventional approaches to civic education have frequently treated citizenship as a subject to be memorized rather than a capacity to be practiced (Mazumdar, 2025). Students may learn the names of constitutional

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bodies, the number of Fundamental Rights or the stages of an election while having limited opportunities to deliberate on real public questions, conduct institutional elections, examine competing arguments or participate in community decision-making.

The central argument of this paper is that democratic citizenship education in India needs to be reimagined from a knowledge-centered model to a knowledge-plus-practice model. Constitutional literacy remains indispensable, but it should be combined with deliberative skills, political awareness, ethical reasoning, media literacy, community participation and institutional experience. The school and university should not simply teach democracy; they should provide structured opportunities for students to experience democratic principles.

The argument also requires an important qualification. Education for democratic citizenship must not become political indoctrination. A democratic education system should cultivate constitutional commitments while leaving legitimate political choices open. Students should learn how institutions work, how constitutional rights operate and how public arguments can be evaluated without being compelled to adopt the political ideology of a particular party, government or movement.

NEP 2020 provides a strong normative foundation for this approach, but policy language alone cannot transform citizenship education. Its effectiveness depends upon teachers, curricula, assessment practices, institutional cultures, access to education and the wider democratic environment.

2. METHODOLOGY

The paper adopts a qualitative and doctrinal research methodology. It relies principally on analysis of primary and secondary sources. Primary sources include the Constitution of India, NEP 2020, the National Curriculum Framework for School Education (NCF-SE) 2023 and selected judgments of the Supreme Court of India. Secondary materials include academic literature on democratic education, citizenship education, political participation and constitutionalism, together with publications of UNESCO and other institutional bodies.

The research follows a conceptual-analytical approach rather than an empirical survey design. The purpose is to examine how education policy, constitutional principles and democratic participation intersect and to develop an interpretive framework for future educational practice.

The study also uses case-study analysis. Judicial decisions have been selected because they illustrate concrete constitutional tensions involving education, freedom of conscience, secularism, equality, institutional autonomy and the right to education.

2.1 Objectives of the Study

The study has five principal objectives:

a) To examine the relationship between education and democratic citizenship in the Indian constitutional framework.
b) To analyze the provisions of NEP 2020 that are directly or indirectly relevant to democratic citizenship and political participation.
c) To examine the relationship between constitutional values and educational practices.
d) To analyze selected judicial decisions concerning education, freedom, equality, pluralism and constitutional values.
e) To propose an institutional and pedagogical framework for strengthening democratic citizenship education in India.

2.2 Research Questions

The paper addresses the following questions:

a) How can education contribute to the development of democratic citizenship in India?
b) To what extent does NEP 2020 provide a framework for developing constitutional values and political participation?
c) How can constitutional literacy be translated into meaningful democratic practice?
d) What challenges restrict the development of participatory citizenship through education?
e) What reforms can make schools and higher educational institutions more effective sites of democratic learning?

3. EDUCATION AND DEMOCRATIC CITIZENSHIP: A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Citizenship has traditionally been understood in legal terms: a citizen possesses particular rights and bears particular obligations within a political community. Contemporary democratic theory, however, treats citizenship as a more active relationship between individuals and public institutions (Held, 2006). Citizens are not merely beneficiaries of government; they are participants in the political community.

Marshall's classic account connected citizenship with civil, political and social rights (Marshall, 1950). Political rights include participation in the exercise of political power, while social citizenship concerns the conditions necessary for individuals to participate as members of society. Education is therefore not external to citizenship. It contributes to the social conditions in which citizenship becomes meaningful.

Dewey (1916) viewed education and democracy as deeply interconnected. For Dewey, democracy was not simply a governmental arrangement; it was a mode of associated living requiring communication, cooperation and shared inquiry. This insight

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remains relevant to Indian education. If students experience classrooms in which questions are discouraged, disagreement is punished and authority is never explained, they may learn a very different lesson about democracy from the one presented in a civics textbook.

Gutmann (1999) similarly emphasized the importance of democratic education in developing citizens capable of participating in collective decision-making. Biesta (2011) further argues that education involves questions of subjectivity and democratic participation rather than merely measurable learning outcomes.

The contemporary international literature reinforces this relationship. UNESCO identifies active citizenship as dependent upon knowledge, values and capabilities developed through education (UNESCO, 2015). It also stresses that knowledge alone is insufficient: democratic learning requires opportunities for voice, discussion and participation.

This distinction between knowing democracy and doing democracy is central to the present study.

A student may know that India is a parliamentary democracy. That is civic knowledge. A student who can listen to a competing argument, ask a relevant question, distinguish evidence from assertion and reach a reasoned position demonstrates a democratic capacity. A student who can organize a peaceful campaign concerning a local problem, engage public authorities through lawful procedures and accept a majority decision while protecting minority rights demonstrates democratic practice (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004).

The objective of citizenship education should therefore encompass at least four dimensions, extending the familiar distinction between civic knowledge, civic skills and civic dispositions (Branson, 1998):

First, constitutional knowledge. Students should understand the Constitution, institutions, rights, duties and democratic procedures. Second, civic skills. Students need skills of dialogue, public reasoning (Sen, 2009), negotiation, evidence evaluation, communication and collective problem-solving. Third, democratic dispositions. These include tolerance, empathy, fairness, respect for diversity, willingness to listen and acceptance of lawful disagreement. Fourth, participatory experience. Students need structured opportunities to practice democratic behavior through school councils, debates, community projects, mock legislatures, social audits, public consultations and student elections.

4. NEP 2020 AND THE DEMOCRATIC PURPOSE OF EDUCATION

NEP 2020 is particularly important because it explicitly places constitutional values within its educational vision. The policy seeks to create an education system capable of producing engaged, productive and contributing citizens for an equitable, inclusive and plural society (Ministry of Education, 2020).

The policy's language concerning democratic spirit, liberty, equality, justice, pluralism, responsibility and scientific temper provides a broad foundation for citizenship education. It also rejects excessive dependence upon rote learning and encourages conceptual understanding and critical thinking (Ministry of Education, 2020).

This shift is important for political education. Democracy cannot be adequately understood through memorization of definitions. Political concepts such as liberty, equality, secularism, federalism, representation and justice contain competing interpretations and practical consequences. Students should therefore encounter these ideas through examples, constitutional disputes, historical events, judicial decisions and contemporary public problems.

NEP 2020's emphasis on multidisciplinary education is also relevant. Democratic citizenship cannot be confined to political science. Literature can develop empathy and expose students to different social experiences. History can help them understand constitutional development and political conflict. Economics can illuminate inequality and public policy. Geography can reveal regional disparities and resource conflicts. Science education can cultivate evidence-based reasoning and scientific temper. Digital education can develop the capacity to evaluate online information.

The policy's emphasis on experiential learning offers another opportunity. If implemented seriously, experiential learning can connect classroom knowledge with civic life. A class studying local government could conduct a structured study of municipal services. Students studying environmental governance could examine a local water body and prepare recommendations. Students studying Fundamental Rights could analyze a judicial judgment and simulate a constitutional hearing.

NEP 2020 therefore offers the ingredients of a democratic education model. The challenge lies in translating broad principles into institutional practice.

5. CONSTITUTIONAL VALUES AS THE FOUNDATION OF CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION

The Constitution provides the normative foundation for democratic citizenship in India (Constitution of India, 1950). The Preamble articulates justice, liberty, equality and fraternity, while the Fundamental Rights establish legally enforceable protections. Directive Principles provide broader social and economic objectives, and Fundamental Duties articulate responsibilities expected from citizens.

Article 14 establishes equality before the law and the equal protection of the laws. Article 19 protects important freedoms, including speech and expression and peaceful assembly, subject to constitutional restrictions. Article 21 protects life and personal

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liberty, while Article 21A establishes the constitutional right to education for children between six and fourteen years of age. Articles 25 to 30 provide protections relating to religion, culture and educational institutions.

Article 51A is particularly relevant to citizenship education. It includes duties concerning respect for the Constitution, promotion of harmony, preservation of India's composite culture, scientific temper, humanism, public property and excellence. The educational importance of Article 51A is not that students should merely memorize the Fundamental Duties. Rather, these duties can provide a framework for discussing the reciprocal relationship between rights and responsibilities.

For example, freedom of expression can be studied alongside responsibility to respect the dignity and rights of others. Environmental rights can be discussed with the duty to protect the natural environment. Freedom of religion can be examined alongside constitutional equality and fraternity. Public criticism of government can be studied alongside peaceful and lawful political participation.

This approach avoids treating rights and duties as opposing concepts. Constitutional citizenship requires both.

6. CONSTITUTIONAL LITERACY AND THE SCHOOL CURRICULUM

Constitutional literacy should be understood more broadly than knowledge of constitutional terminology. A constitutionally literate student should be able to answer practical questions:

a) What happens when an individual believes that a public authority has violated a right?
b) Why are elections necessary but insufficient for democracy?
c) Why does the Constitution protect minorities?
d) Why are courts empowered to review government action?
e) What is the difference between a Fundamental Right and a Fundamental Duty?
f) Why can freedom of speech have reasonable restrictions?
g) How can citizens participate in governance outside elections?

These questions make constitutional knowledge relevant to everyday life.

The NCF-SE 2023 is significant in this regard (National Council of Educational Research and Training [NCERT], 2023). It identifies democratic outlook, liberty, equality, justice, fairness, diversity, inclusion, social responsibility, scientific temper, constitutional means of social action and respect for rights as important values and dispositions. The framework also incorporates themes such as the Constitution, separation of powers, constitutional bodies, participatory democracy, public opinion, media and the role and responsibilities of citizens.

This is a substantial conceptual development. It suggests that citizenship education should not remain isolated in one chapter of a social science textbook. It should become a cross-curricular concern.

7. POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND EDUCATION

Political participation is frequently reduced to voting. Voting is essential, but democratic participation has a much wider meaning. Citizens participate by joining associations, discussing public policy, contacting representatives, attending local meetings, filing grievances, using lawful protest, engaging in community organizations, participating in public consultations and contributing to political debate. Education influences these behaviors by developing political efficacy, the belief that one's participation can make a difference. A young person who understands how a municipal corporation works is more likely to know where to direct a civic complaint. A student who understands legislative procedures is better prepared to evaluate political claims. A student who has participated in a school council may develop confidence in collective decision-making.

Political participation should therefore be introduced progressively.

At the primary stage, students can learn cooperation, fairness, turn-taking and collective decision-making.

At the middle stage, students can engage in classroom elections, group problem-solving and local community projects.

At the secondary stage, students can study constitutional institutions, public policy, elections, political communication, media and contemporary issues.

At university level, students can participate in structured debates, student governance, public policy research, community engagement, legislative simulations and civic internships.

The objective is not to turn schools into partisan political arenas. The objective is to create informed and constitutionally responsible citizens.

8. JUDICIAL PERSPECTIVES ON EDUCATION AND CONSTITUTIONAL VALUES

Indian constitutional jurisprudence provides several important examples of the relationship between education and constitutional democracy.

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8.1 Mohini Jain v. State of Karnataka (1992)

In Mohini Jain v. State of Karnataka (1992), the Supreme Court connected education with constitutional values and dignity. Although the case concerned the issue of capitation fees, the judgment helped establish the broader constitutional significance of education. The importance of the decision lies in its recognition that education cannot be treated as an ordinary commercial commodity. Education contributes to the development of the individual and enables meaningful participation in society.

8.2 Unni Krishnan, J.P. v. State of Andhra Pradesh (1993)

The decision in Unni Krishnan, J.P. v. State of Andhra Pradesh (1993) developed the constitutional understanding of the right to education under Article 21 before the later insertion of Article 21A. The Court recognized education as essential to the effective enjoyment of other constitutional rights. The democratic significance is straightforward. Formal political rights have limited practical value when citizens lack the educational capacities necessary to understand and exercise them.

8.3 Bijoe Emmanuel v. State of Kerala (1986)

Bijoe Emmanuel v. State of Kerala (1986) is particularly valuable for citizenship education because it illustrates the constitutional protection of conscience. Three schoolchildren belonging to the Jehovah's Witnesses faith were expelled for refusing to sing the national anthem on religious grounds, although they stood respectfully during its recital. The Supreme Court protected their rights under Article 19(1)(a) and Article 25. The case provides an excellent pedagogical example of the relationship between national commitment, freedom of conscience and constitutional tolerance. Citizenship does not require uniformity of belief. Constitutional patriotism must be compatible with legitimate diversity.

8.4 Aruna Roy v. Union of India (2002)

The Court considered challenges to value education and curriculum development in Aruna Roy v. Union of India (2002). The judgment is particularly relevant to the question of whether value education is compatible with secularism. The Court distinguished value education from religious indoctrination. This distinction remains essential. Teaching constitutional values such as equality, tolerance, fraternity and respect for human dignity is different from promoting a particular religious or partisan ideology.

8.5 T.M.A. Pai Foundation v. State of Karnataka (2002)

T.M.A. Pai Foundation v. State of Karnataka (2002) addressed the constitutional position of educational institutions and minority educational rights. It demonstrates that education in India operates within a constitutional framework that must balance institutional autonomy, regulation, equality and minority rights. For citizenship education, the lesson is that educational institutions themselves are constitutional spaces. Their governance practices influence the democratic habits of students.

9. CASE STUDY I: STUDENT VOICE AND INSTITUTIONAL DEMOCRACY

One practical method of strengthening democratic citizenship is to institutionalize student voice. School councils, student parliaments and elected class representatives can provide controlled environments in which students learn representation. Such bodies should not become symbolic structures in which adults retain complete decision-making authority. Students should have clearly defined areas of responsibility. For example, students could participate in decisions concerning library use, environmental initiatives, cultural activities, campus cleanliness, sports scheduling and peer-support programs. The educational value is greater when the process includes elections, manifestos, public discussions, voting, committee meetings, minutes and accountability reports. A student representative who promises to improve library access should later explain what was achieved and what could not be achieved. This creates an early understanding of representation and accountability. Such practices can also demonstrate an important democratic principle: representation does not mean unlimited power.

9.1 Case Study II: Constitutional Literacy Through Judicial Decisions

Judicial decisions can be converted into educational resources. Instead of asking students to memorize case names, teachers can provide simplified factual scenarios and ask students to reason constitutionally. *For example:* A student is asked to sing a song that conflicts with their religious conscience. What constitutional interests arise?

A school wishes to restrict a peaceful student demonstration. What considerations should be examined?

A public authority treats two similarly situated students differently. What questions of equality arise?

A government regulation affects the cultural practices of a minority educational institution. What constitutional rights may be relevant?

Such exercises develop constitutional reasoning rather than merely constitutional memory.

The *Bijoe Emmanuel* judgment is particularly suitable because it raises questions of freedom, national identity, religious conscience and tolerance. The *Aruna Roy* case can introduce debates concerning secularism and value education.

9.2 Case Study III: Digital Citizenship and Political Participation

Political participation increasingly takes place through digital platforms. Young citizens encounter political information through social media, video platforms, messaging applications and online communities. This creates new opportunities but also serious risks.

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Digital platforms can expand access to political information and allow citizens to organize quickly. At the same time, misinformation, manipulated content, online harassment, hate speech and algorithmic amplification can distort political understanding. UNESCO's work on education for democratic societies similarly emphasizes the importance of critical thinking, empathy, collaboration and digital citizenship in contemporary education (UNESCO, 2015). Digital citizenship education should therefore teach students to ask:

a) Who produced this information?
b) What evidence supports the claim?
c) Is the source identifiable?
d) Does another reliable source report the same information?
e) Is the content designed to inform, persuade, provoke or manipulate?
f) Has an image or video been taken out of context?
g) What constitutional and ethical responsibilities accompany online speech?

This is not simply computer education. It is democratic education for a digital public sphere.

10. DIVERSITY, INCLUSION AND DEMOCRATIC CITIZENSHIP

India's social diversity presents both a challenge and an educational opportunity. Democracy requires citizens to coexist despite differences of language, religion, caste, region, gender, culture and political opinion. Citizenship education must therefore teach not merely tolerance but equal civic status (Banks, 2008). The constitutional ideal of fraternity is particularly important (Ambedkar, 1949). Fraternity implies that citizens are not simply legal individuals but members of a shared political community. NEP 2020's emphasis on inclusion, equality, diversity and pluralism provides a basis for this approach. Schools should therefore consciously create opportunities for students from different social backgrounds to work together. Cultural exchange programs, collaborative projects, multilingual learning and community activities can contribute to this objective. The educational environment itself should reflect constitutional equality. If students are taught equality but experience discrimination within their institution, the contradiction weakens the credibility of citizenship education.

11. TEACHERS AS DEMOCRATIC EDUCATORS

No citizenship curriculum can succeed without teachers capable of facilitating democratic learning. Teachers should not be expected to provide partisan political opinions. Their role is to create conditions in which students can investigate questions, compare arguments and develop reasoned conclusions.

Teacher education should therefore include constitutional literacy, classroom deliberation, conflict resolution, media and information literacy, handling controversial issues, inclusive pedagogy, child rights, democratic assessment and community-based learning.

UNESCO's (2021) State of the Education Report for India, No Teacher, No Class, has highlighted the complexity of the teaching profession and the importance of professional development for India's large teaching workforce. The teacher's authority should not disappear in a democratic classroom. Rather, authority should be exercised through fairness, expertise and transparent reasoning.

12. ASSESSMENT AND DEMOCRATIC LEARNING

One of the greatest obstacles to democratic education is the examination system. If students receive high marks for reproducing textbook paragraphs, schools have little incentive to cultivate debate, research and civic participation. Assessment should therefore include tasks such as constitutional case analysis, policy briefs, public issue presentations, debates, community research, mock parliamentary proceedings, local governance projects, media-literacy exercises, reflective journals and group problem-solving. Assessment of democratic learning must be designed carefully. Schools should assess reasoning and evidence rather than whether a student agrees with the teacher.

This is particularly important when teaching controversial political questions. A student who provides a well-supported argument that differs from the teacher's view should not be penalized simply for disagreeing. Indeed, respectful disagreement can be evidence that democratic learning is functioning.

13. CHALLENGES IN IMPLEMENTING DEMOCRATIC CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION

13.1 Risk of Political Indoctrination

The most serious danger is the politicization of citizenship education. If constitutional education becomes an instrument for promoting a particular party or ideological position, democratic education loses credibility. The solution is a constitutional rather than partisan framework.

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13.2 Rote Learning

Although NEP 2020 explicitly seeks to move away from rote learning, examination-oriented practices remain influential. Constitutional education can easily become another memorization exercise unless assessment changes.

13.3 Teacher Capacity

Teachers require training in controversial-issue pedagogy, constitutional reasoning and digital literacy. Without professional support, even well-designed curricular material may produce superficial results.

13.4 Unequal Access

Democratic education cannot be separated from educational inequality. Students who lack reliable internet access, safe learning environments, qualified teachers or adequate learning resources face barriers to meaningful participation.

NEP 2020 itself recognizes access, equity, quality, affordability and accountability as central pillars (Ministry of Education, 2020).

13.5 Digital Polarization

The contemporary information environment makes citizenship education considerably more complicated. Students need to understand not only formal institutions but also how political information circulates.

13.6 Institutional Culture

A school cannot convincingly teach democracy if students have no voice, rules are arbitrary and disciplinary decisions lack procedural fairness. The democratic character of an institution is therefore part of its curriculum, whether formally recognized or not.

14. REIMAGINING POLITICAL EDUCATION UNDER NEP 2020

A more effective model of democratic citizenship education could be organized around six pillars.

Pillar One: Constitutional Literacy. Every student should gradually develop knowledge of the Preamble, Fundamental Rights, Directive Principles, Fundamental Duties, constitutional institutions and democratic procedures.

Pillar Two: Deliberative Learning. Classrooms should provide structured opportunities for students to discuss public issues, compare arguments and justify conclusions.

Pillar Three: Participatory Institutions. Schools and colleges should create meaningful student representative structures with clearly defined responsibilities.

Pillar Four: Community Engagement. Students should connect learning with local problems. Civic projects can involve sanitation, heritage conservation, environmental protection, public libraries, road safety, water management and awareness campaigns.

Pillar Five: Digital Citizenship. Media literacy, misinformation detection, ethical online communication and constitutional responsibilities should become integral components of education.

Pillar Six: Constitutional Institutional Culture. Equality, transparency, non-discrimination, student voice and fair procedures should be reflected in institutional governance.

These six pillars convert democratic education from a curricular topic into an institutional practice.

15. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The following measures can strengthen democratic citizenship education under NEP 2020.

First, constitutional literacy should be introduced as a continuous learning objective from the foundational stage through higher education.

Second, schools should establish student councils with clearly defined consultative and participatory responsibilities.

Third, teacher education programs should include specialized modules on democratic pedagogy, constitutional law, controversial issues and digital citizenship.

Fourth, assessment frameworks should reward reasoning, evidence, dialogue and problem-solving rather than simple recall.

Fifth, every secondary school could undertake at least one community-based civic project each academic year.

Sixth, constitutional case studies should be incorporated into social science, language and interdisciplinary education.

Seventh, students should be taught how local government functions because municipal and Panchayati Raj institutions provide some of the most accessible spaces for civic participation.

Eighth, digital citizenship should become an explicit component of civic education.

Ninth, institutions should establish transparent procedures for student grievances and participation. Students should experience due process rather than merely read about it.

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Tenth, educational authorities should evaluate citizenship education through indicators such as student participation, civic knowledge, constitutional literacy, community engagement and democratic school culture.

16. A PROPOSED MODEL: FROM CONSTITUTIONAL KNOWLEDGE TO DEMOCRATIC ACTION

The paper proposes a five-stage model.

Stage 1 (Know): Students learn constitutional concepts, institutions and rights.

Stage 2 (Question): Students examine constitutional dilemmas and public problems.

Stage 3 (Deliberate): Students compare evidence, listen to opposing views and construct arguments.

Stage 4 (Participate): Students engage in school governance, community projects and civic activities.

Stage 5 (Reflect): Students evaluate the consequences of their participation and consider how democratic institutions can be improved.

This model can be represented as:



Figure 1. *The proposed five-stage model of democratic citizenship education: from constitutional knowledge to democratic action*

The model is deliberately non-partisan. It does not prescribe what political opinion a student should hold. It develops the capacity to form political opinions responsibly.

17. DISCUSSION

The central challenge facing citizenship education in India is not the absence of constitutional language. The Constitution is already present in educational policy, textbooks, public ceremonies and institutional discourse. The deeper question is whether students experience the principles they are asked to learn.

A child cannot fully understand equality if institutional practices consistently communicate hierarchy. A student cannot easily appreciate freedom of expression if questions are discouraged. A young citizen cannot understand accountability if representative institutions do not explain their decisions.

Democratic education therefore has a performative dimension. Institutions communicate values through their everyday practices. The NCF-SE 2023 (NCERT, 2023) is significant because it explicitly connects values and dispositions with the overall culture of school education rather than treating them as isolated content. This is consistent with the wider international understanding that democratic education requires opportunities for participation, voice and discussion, not simply civic information. NEP 2020 should therefore be interpreted not merely as an educational restructuring program but also as an opportunity to reconsider the civic purpose of education. Its emphasis on multidisciplinary learning is especially promising. Political education can no longer be restricted to conventional civics. Democracy intersects with economics, technology, history, literature, environmental studies and social relations.

At the same time, the democratic purpose of education requires institutional safeguards. Constitutional values must not be interpreted as permission for ideological conformity. The strength of constitutional democracy lies partly in its ability to protect disagreement. The appropriate goal is therefore not to produce politically identical citizens. It is to produce citizens who can disagree without abandoning constitutional commitments.

18. CONCLUSION

The future of Indian democracy depends not only upon the design of political institutions but also upon the capacities of citizens who inhabit them. Education is one of the most important institutions through which those capacities can be developed. NEP 2020 provides a significant policy foundation for this task. Its emphasis on constitutional values, democratic spirit, critical thinking, ethical reasoning, equality, justice, liberty, pluralism and responsibility is consistent with the broader objectives of constitutional citizenship. The NCF-SE 2023 further develops this orientation by connecting democratic values and dispositions with curriculum, pedagogy and school culture.

Yet policy documents cannot create democratic citizens by themselves. The decisive question is implementation. If constitutional education remains limited to memorizing provisions, its democratic effect will remain modest. If, however, students are encouraged to question, deliberate, investigate, disagree respectfully, participate in institutional decision-making and engage with real community problems, education can become a training ground for democratic life. The constitutional promise of India is not simply that every citizen possesses political rights. It is that citizens are equal members of a democratic political community. Education can make

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that promise more meaningful by developing the knowledge, skills, dispositions and confidence required to participate in that community.

Reimagining education for democratic citizenship therefore requires a movement from teaching about democracy to learning through democracy. NEP 2020 creates an important policy opening for this transformation. The next task is to build classrooms, schools and universities capable of turning constitutional ideals into lived democratic experience. The ultimate measure of citizenship education should not be how many constitutional articles a student can recall. A more meaningful measure is whether that student can recognize injustice, respect difference, evaluate evidence, defend legitimate rights, accept reasoned disagreement, participate peacefully in public life and assume responsibility for the constitutional community of which they are a part. In this sense, education is not merely preparation for citizenship. It is one of the places where citizenship itself is learned and practiced.

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