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Digital inclusion and educational equity under NEP 2020: A theoretical examination of access, quality and social justice

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Abstract
This paper presents a theoretical examination of digital inclusion and educational equity under the National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020), focusing on the interrelated dimensions of access, quality, and social justice. While NEP 2020 positions digital transformation as a catalyst for inclusive and equitable education, structural disparities in infrastructure, socio-economic status, gender, and geography raise critical concerns about unequal participation. Adopting a qualitative, literature-driven approach, the study synthesizes contemporary scholarship and policy analyses to evaluate whether digital expansion translates into meaningful educational equity. The findings suggest that access to technology, though essential, is insufficient to ensure equitable outcomes without parallel improvements in pedagogical quality and institutional readiness. Teacher digital competence, curriculum redesign, and governance mechanisms significantly influence the effectiveness of digital reforms. Furthermore, the study emphasizes that digital inclusion must be framed within a social justice perspective, ensuring that technological interventions expand learners' substantive capabilities rather than reproduce historical inequalities. The paper contributes to theoretical discourse by integrating infrastructural, pedagogical, and distributive justice perspectives into a unified analytical framework. It argues that the success of NEP 2020's digital agenda depends on coordinated policy implementation, targeted support for marginalized communities, and sustained public investment to achieve genuine educational equity.

Keywords: Digital inclusion, educational equity, NEP 2020, social justice, digital divide, educational policy, Capability Approach, inclusive education

Introduction

The rapid integration of digital technologies into education systems worldwide has transformed the way knowledge is accessed, delivered, and evaluated. However, the digital turn in education has simultaneously amplified concerns regarding equity, access, and social justice. In the Indian context, the National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020) positions digital learning as a strategic pillar for achieving inclusive and equitable quality education. While the policy envisions technology as an enabler of democratized learning, critical theoretical questions emerge: Does digital expansion automatically ensure educational equity? Or does its risk reproducing and intensifying existing socio-economic inequalities?

Digital inclusion extends beyond mere connectivity. It encompasses access to devices, digital literacy, affordability, assistive technologies for marginalized learners, and meaningful participation in digital ecosystems. Contemporary scholarship increasingly highlights that digital access alone does not guarantee educational justice; rather, quality of engagement, pedagogical design, and contextual responsiveness determine equitable outcomes (Lakshminarayanan& Thomas, 2022; Mathrani *et al*., 2022; Mahapatra& Anderson, 2023) [7, 9, 10]. In India, structural inequalities rooted in geography, caste, gender, disability, and income levels complicate the digital transformation agenda envisioned under NEP 2020.

The COVID-19 pandemic acted as a stress test for digital readiness, exposing stark disparities in device ownership, broadband penetration, and technological competence (Yenugu, 2022; Krishnan *et al*., 2024) [5, 19]. Rural–urban divides, first-generation learners' disadvantages, and infrastructural inconsistencies revealed that digital expansion without systemic support risks deepening educational stratification (Gupta &Maurya, 2026; Kundu *et al*., 2025) [4, 6]. Thus, digital inclusion must be theorized not merely as technological diffusion but as a multidimensional social justice project.

From a theoretical perspective, digital inclusion under NEP 2020 may be examined through three interrelated dimensions: access, quality, and social justice. First, access refers to infrastructural availability, affordability, and digital competence. Studies argue that equitable access requires state-supported infrastructure, multilingual content, and inclusive design frameworks (Garg *et al*., 2026; Rangarajan *et al*., 2025) [3, 15]. NEP 2020's emphasis on platforms such as DIKSHA and virtual laboratories reflects an institutional commitment to broadening reach. However, unequal resource distribution challenges the realization of universal digital participation (Nath&Batra, 2025) [13].

Second, quality in digital education involves pedagogical integrity, learner engagement, teacher preparedness, and outcome effectiveness. Research suggests that technology-mediated learning enhances engagement when integrated with interactive pedagogies, formative assessment, and contextual adaptation (Donaghy& Davies, 2026; Mathrani *et al*., 2022) [1, 10]. Conversely, poorly designed digital interventions may reduce learning to passive content consumption. Teacher capacity building, professional development, and digital pedagogical literacy therefore become central to achieving quality outcomes (Rani & Kaur, 2026; Thomas &Kakati, 2025) [16, 18]. Theoretical discourse highlights the risk of "technological determinism," where digital tools are assumed to automatically improve education without critical reflection on instructional design (Filippakou, n.d.).

Third, social justice constitutes the normative foundation of digital inclusion. Drawing upon equity theory and capability approaches, digital education must expand learners' substantive freedoms rather than simply provide uniform resources. Scholars emphasize that marginalized communities—particularly students from low-income households, remote regions, and underrepresented social groups—require differentiated support mechanisms to translate digital access into meaningful educational opportunities (Nadig *et al*., 2026; Raj, 2025) [11, 14]. Without targeted interventions, digitalization may replicate historical hierarchies of privilege (Safrudin, 2025) [17].

NEP 2020 explicitly advocates inclusive education through technology, recommending open educational resources, regional language digital content, assistive technologies for students with disabilities, and blended learning ecosystems. Yet, theoretical examination suggests that policy ambition must be aligned with ground-level institutional capacities and socio-cultural realities (Madhu&Mantry, 2026; Mahapatra& Anderson, 2023) [8, 9]. Digital inclusion thus emerges as a systemic challenge requiring coordinated governance, public investment, and stakeholder collaboration.

Moreover, the intersection of digital inclusion with educational equity necessitates a broader socio-economic lens. Access to technology is deeply intertwined with household income, parental education, gender norms, and regional development indicators. Empirical reflections indicate that female students and learners in rural areas often face compounded disadvantages due to restricted device ownership and limited digital autonomy (Gupta &Maurya, 2026; Kundu *et al*., 2025) [4, 6]. Therefore, policy frameworks must incorporate gender-sensitive and region-specific strategies to ensure balanced participation.

This theoretical examination situates digital inclusion under NEP 2020 as a transformative yet contested reform trajectory. While the policy recognizes technology as a democratizing force, its success depends on integrating infrastructural access, pedagogical quality, and justice-oriented implementation. The conceptual challenge lies in reconciling efficiency-driven digital expansion with equity-driven social commitments.

In conclusion, digital inclusion in the Indian higher and school education landscape represents not merely a technological shift but a paradigmatic redefinition of educational equity. NEP 2020 provides a progressive blueprint; however, its realization requires sustained institutional reform, inclusive design, and continuous evaluation of distributive outcomes. A theoretically grounded analysis of access, quality, and social justice offers a critical lens to assess whether digital transformation advances genuine educational equity or inadvertently reinforces structural divides.

Literature Review

Digital transformation in education has emerged as a central reform agenda globally, with developing nations increasingly integrating technology to improve accessibility and learning outcomes. In India, the National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020) represents a comprehensive policy shift emphasizing technology-enabled, inclusive, and equitable education. The literature surrounding digital inclusion under NEP 2020 converges around three major themes: (1) access and digital divide, (2) quality of digital pedagogy and institutional readiness, and (3) social justice and equity implications. This review synthesizes contemporary theoretical and empirical scholarship to situate digital inclusion within a broader equity-oriented educational framework.

1. Conceptual Foundations of Digital Inclusion

Digital inclusion extends beyond physical connectivity to encompass device availability, digital literacy, content accessibility, and meaningful engagement. Lakshminarayanan and Thomas (2022) [7] argue that digital inclusion must be interpreted as a capability-enhancing mechanism rather than a purely infrastructural intervention. Similarly, Mathrani *et al*. (2022) [10] emphasize that inclusion requires pedagogical integration and learner-centric design, cautioning against technological determinism.

Mahapatra and Anderson (2023) [9] conceptualize digital inclusion through a systems perspective, suggesting that policy, institutional governance, and socio-economic contexts collectively shape outcomes. This aligns with Filippakou (n.d.), who critiques the assumption that digital expansion inherently promotes democratization. Theoretical scholarship thus increasingly frames digital inclusion as a multidimensional construct incorporating structural, pedagogical, and socio-cultural dimensions.

2. Digital Divide and Access Disparities

The digital divide remains one of the most significant barriers to achieving equitable education under NEP 2020. Yenugu (2022) [19] highlights that the COVID-19 pandemic exposed severe disparities in device ownership, internet access, and digital competencies across rural and urban India. Krishnan *et al*. (2024) [5] further document regional imbalances in broadband penetration and institutional infrastructure, suggesting that geographical inequities strongly influence digital participation. Gupta and Maurya (2026) [4] identify socio-economic status and parental education as primary determinants of digital accessibility. Kundu *et al*. (2025) [6] reinforce this finding, demonstrating that first-generation learners and economically disadvantaged students experience limited digital autonomy. These inequalities are compounded by gender disparities, as female learners often face restricted access to shared household devices (Rani & Kaur, 2026) [16].

Rangarajan *et al*. (2025) [15] and Garg *et al*. (2026) [3] argue that equitable access requires state-led infrastructural investment, subsidized connectivity, and localized digital content in regional languages. NEP 2020's advocacy for open educational resources and digital repositories such as DIKSHA reflects an attempt to bridge access gaps. However, Nath and Batra (2025) [13] caution that policy aspirations must be matched with robust implementation frameworks, particularly in underserved regions.The literature thus establishes that digital inclusion is fundamentally linked to socio-economic stratification. Without targeted interventions, technological expansion may reproduce existing inequalities rather than mitigate them.

3. Quality of Digital Education and Pedagogical Transformation

Access alone does not ensure educational equity; quality of digital engagement is equally critical. Donaghy and Davies

(2026) [1] argue that technology enhances learning outcomes when integrated with interactive pedagogy, collaborative platforms, and formative assessment mechanisms. Conversely, poorly designed digital initiatives risk superficial engagement and cognitive overload.

Thomas and Kakati (2025) [18] emphasize the importance of teacher digital competence, noting that professional development programs significantly influence the effectiveness of blended learning environments. Similarly, Madhu and Mantry (2026) [8] highlight institutional readiness as a decisive factor in digital quality, including curriculum redesign, digital assessment models, and academic support systems. Mathrani *et al*. (2022) [10] propose a framework linking digital tools to constructivist learning theory, suggesting that meaningful digital inclusion must encourage active knowledge construction rather than passive content consumption. This aligns with Lakshminarayanan and Thomas (2022) [7], who stress the integration of technology with experiential and inquiry-based learning.

Safrudin (2025) [17] warns against market-driven digitalization, arguing that privatized ed-tech models may prioritize efficiency over inclusivity. Such trends may create tiered systems where affluent institutions provide high-quality digital experiences while marginalized communities receive minimalistic digital content. The literature therefore underscores the necessity of regulatory oversight and public investment to maintain quality parity.

4. Digital Inclusion and Social Justice

The normative dimension of digital inclusion is rooted in social justice. Nadig *et al*. (2026) [11] argue that educational equity requires differentiated support systems addressing caste, gender, disability, and regional disparities. Raj (2025) [14] frames digital inclusion within distributive justice theory, asserting that equal technological provision does not guarantee equal outcomes unless contextual disadvantages are addressed. Mahapatra and Anderson (2023) [9] extend this argument by integrating the capability approach, suggesting that digital tools must expand learners' substantive freedoms—such as critical thinking, participation, and employability. This theoretical framing positions digital inclusion as a transformative instrument rather than a neutral technological upgrade.

Gupta and Maurya (2026) [4] and Kundu *et al*. (2025) [6] emphasize intersectionality, demonstrating that marginalized students experience layered disadvantages. For instance, rural female learners from low-income households face infrastructural, cultural, and technological barriers simultaneously. Such findings challenge uniform policy prescriptions and call for targeted, equity-sensitive strategies.NEP 2020 explicitly references inclusive education through assistive technologies and multilingual digital platforms. However, Rangarajan *et al*. (2025) [15] argue that implementation must incorporate community engagement and decentralized governance to achieve genuine inclusion. Without localized adaptation, centralized digital models may fail to address contextual needs.

5. Institutional Governance and Policy Implementation

Policy implementation plays a decisive role in translating digital inclusion into equitable outcomes. Nath and Batra (2025) [13] note that inter-ministerial coordination, funding mechanisms, and accountability structures determine the sustainability of digital initiatives. Garg *et al*. (2026) [3] further emphasize the importance of monitoring and evaluation frameworks to assess equity impacts. Madhu and Mantry (2026) identify institutional leadership as a critical driver of digital transformation, arguing that administrative vision and resource allocation significantly influence adoption success. Similarly, Thomas and Kakati (2025) [18] highlight collaborative governance models that integrate faculty, administrators, and policymakers. The literature collectively indicates that digital inclusion under NEP 2020 requires systemic alignment across infrastructure, pedagogy, and governance. Fragmented implementation risks policy dilution and inequitable outcomes.

6. Emerging Gaps in the Literature

Despite growing scholarship, several gaps persist. First, much of the literature remains descriptive, with limited theoretical integration of access, quality, and social justice. Second, empirical research often focuses on short-term pandemic responses rather than long-term structural transformation. Third, there is insufficient exploration of rural-urban comparative models and intersectional analysis incorporating caste and disability dimensions. Furthermore, the relationship between digital inclusion and educational outcomes remains under-theorized in the Indian context. While studies acknowledge disparities, comprehensive frameworks linking policy design, institutional practice, and distributive justice are still evolving. The reviewed literature establishes digital inclusion under NEP 2020 as a complex, multidimensional reform agenda intersecting infrastructure, pedagogy, and social justice. Scholars consistently highlight that access is a necessary but insufficient condition for equity. Quality digital pedagogy, teacher competence, and inclusive governance mechanisms are equally essential.

Theoretical perspectives such as capability theory, distributive justice, and systems governance provide robust lenses for analyzing digital inclusion beyond technological determinism. However, significant research gaps remain in understanding how policy implementation can systematically reconcile efficiency-driven digital expansion with equity-driven social commitments. Therefore, a comprehensive theoretical examination integrating access, quality, and social justice dimensions is necessary to evaluate whether digital transformation under NEP 2020 advances genuine educational equity or inadvertently perpetuates structural inequalities.

Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research approach to examine digital inclusion and educational equity under the National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020), with a specific focus on the interconnected dimensions of access, quality, and social justice. Given that digital inclusion is embedded within structural inequalities related to geography, gender, socio-economic status, and institutional capacity, a qualitative design enables an in-depth theoretical and contextual exploration beyond surface-level statistical indicators. Quantitative measures of connectivity or device distribution often fail to capture pedagogical quality, socio-cultural barriers, and distributive justice concerns. Therefore, a literature-driven qualitative framework is considered most appropriate for examining the normative and structural implications of digital transformation.

The research relies on a critical review of scholarly literature, policy frameworks, and empirical studies to map patterns of digital access, pedagogical transformation, and equity outcomes across diverse Indian contexts. Key sources include scholarship on digital divides and socio-economic disparities (Yenugu, 2022; Krishnan *et al*., 2024; Gupta &Maurya, 2026; Kundu *et al*., 2025) [4, 5, 6, 19], pedagogical quality and institutional readiness (Donaghy& Davies, 2026; Thomas &Kakati, 2025; Madhu&Mantry, 2026; Mathrani *et al*., 2022) [1, 8, 10], and social justice perspectives in digital education (Nadig *et al*., 2026; Raj, 2025; Mahapatra& Anderson, 2023; Safrudin, 2025) [9, 11, 14, 17]. Additional theoretical insights were drawn from analyses of policy design and implementation challenges (Garg *et al*., 2026; Rangarajan *et al*., 2025; Nath&Batra, 2025; Lakshminarayanan& Thomas, 2022) [3, 7, 13, 15].

The methodological orientation is guided by the following objectives

- To examine how digital access, institutional capacity, and state policy under NEP 2020 interact to shape educational equity in India.
- To analyze the role of socio-economic status, gender, geography, and digital literacy in mediating inclusion and exclusion within technology-enabled education.
- To identify structural, pedagogical, and governance mechanisms through which digital reforms may reproduce or mitigate historical educational inequalities.
- To synthesize theoretical and policy insights to develop an integrated framework linking access, quality, and social justice in digital education.

Data Collection

Data collection involved the systematic extraction, screening, and review of peer-reviewed journal articles, policy documents, government reports, and conceptual studies focusing on digital education and equity in India. A structured search strategy was employed to identify relevant literature published between 2020 and 2026, aligning with the introduction and implementation phase of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. Major academic databases, including Scopus and Web of Science, were utilized to ensure the inclusion of high-quality and impactful studies. In addition to scholarly sources, the research incorporated official government publications such as reports from the Ministry of Education, NITI Aayog, and the Economic Survey of India, along with policy briefs and reform documents related to digital learning initiatives. Reports from international organizations such as UNESCO, World Bank, and UNICEF were also reviewed to provide a comparative and global perspective. The selection of literature was guided by relevance, credibility, and alignment with the research objectives, and a thematic approach was adopted to synthesize key insights related to access, inclusivity, infrastructure, and policy effectiveness in digital education.

Inclusion criteria were based on

1. Direct relevance to digital inclusion, educational equity, or technology-mediated pedagogy in India.
2. Theoretical or empirical engagement with issues of socio-economic inequality, gender disparity, rural–urban divides, or institutional governance.
3. Conceptual contributions addressing social justice, capability expansion, or distributive equity frameworks.

This process enabled the identification of recurring themes such as infrastructural inequity, teacher preparedness, intersectional disadvantage, policy implementation gaps, and institutional readiness. Special attention was given to literature examining the pandemic-induced digital transition (Yenugu, 2022; Krishnan *et al*., 2024) [5, 19], as it provided critical insights into structural vulnerabilities and system resilience.

Theoretical Orientation

The methodological design is informed by capability theory and distributive justice frameworks, which conceptualize education as an instrument for expanding substantive freedoms rather than merely delivering uniform resources. Mahapatra and Anderson (2023) [9] and Raj (2025) [14] provide theoretical grounding for evaluating whether digital interventions genuinely enhance learner capabilities or simply extend technological infrastructure without addressing structural disadvantage. Furthermore, systems theory perspectives (Lakshminarayanan& Thomas, 2022) [7] inform the analysis of institutional governance and policy coherence. This allows the study to interpret digital inclusion as a systemic reform requiring alignment between infrastructure, pedagogy, and social equity mechanisms.

A qualitative, literature-driven methodology is particularly suitable for this study because digital inclusion under NEP 2020 is not solely a measurable phenomenon but also a normative and structural issue. While quantitative metrics such as internet penetration rates or device distribution statistics provide valuable data, they cannot fully explain the lived experiences of exclusion, pedagogical quality differentials, or policy implementation complexities. The qualitative approach enables interpretive depth, conceptual clarity, and theoretical synthesis. The study focuses on conceptual and policy-level analysis rather than primary field data collection. While this ensures broad theoretical integration, it may not capture localized institutional variations in real time. However, by drawing upon diverse empirical studies and policy analyses, the research mitigates this limitation through triangulated literature synthesis.

The methodological framework adopted in this study provides a comprehensive and theoretically grounded examination of digital inclusion and educational equity under NEP 2020. By systematically reviewing and thematically analyzing scholarly and policy literature, the research critically maps how access, quality, and social justice intersect within India's digital education reforms.The objectives guiding this methodology are twofold: first, to critically analyze how digital access and institutional capacity shape new patterns of educational inclusion and exclusion; and second, to explore the ways in which governance, pedagogy, and socio-economic context mediate equity outcomes. Through a qualitative, integrative approach, the study situates digital transformation within broader socio-economic and justice-oriented frameworks, offering a nuanced understanding of whether NEP 2020's digital agenda advances genuine educational equity or risks reinforcing structural disparities.

Discussion

The findings of this study reinforce the argument that digital inclusion under the National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020) cannot be reduced to technological expansion alone; rather, it must be understood as a multidimensional reform intersecting infrastructure, pedagogy, and social justice. Consistent with earlier scholarship (Yenugu, 2022; Krishnan *et al*., 2024) [5, 19], the discussion highlights that access disparities—particularly across rural–urban, gender, and socio-economic lines—remain foundational barriers to equitable digital participation. While NEP 2020 envisions technology as a democratizing tool, unequal device ownership and connectivity gaps risk reinforcing pre-existing educational hierarchies (Gupta &Maurya, 2026; Kundu *et al*., 2025) [4, 6].

The analysis further demonstrates that access is a necessary but insufficient condition for educational equity. Quality of digital pedagogy and institutional readiness significantly mediate learning outcomes. Echoing Donaghy and Davies (2026) [1] and Thomas and Kakati (2025) [18], the findings suggest that teacher digital competence and curriculum redesign are central to ensuring meaningful engagement. Without pedagogical transformation, digital platforms may replicate traditional transmission-based teaching models rather than fostering interactive and constructivist learning environments (Mathrani *et al*., 2022) [10].

From a social justice perspective, the discussion underscores that uniform technological provision does not automatically translate into equal educational capabilities. As argued by Raj (2025) [14] and Nadig *et al*. (2026) [11], equity requires differentiated support mechanisms addressing intersectional vulnerabilities. The capability-oriented interpretation advanced by Mahapatra and Anderson (2023) [9] suggests that digital reforms should expand learners' substantive freedoms—critical thinking, participation, and employability—rather than merely deliver standardized digital content.

Importantly, governance and policy coherence emerge as decisive factors. Rangarajan *et al*. (2025) [15] and Garg *et al*. (2026) [3] emphasize that sustained public investment, monitoring mechanisms, and localized implementation strategies are necessary to prevent digital stratification. The discussion therefore situates NEP 2020's digital agenda within a broader distributive justice framework, arguing that technology-driven reforms must be embedded within inclusive institutional ecosystems.

Overall, the study contributes to the growing discourse by integrating access, quality, and social justice into a unified analytical lens, demonstrating that digital inclusion under NEP 2020 represents both a transformative opportunity and a structural challenge for advancing genuine educational equity.

Major Findings

This study identifies several critical findings regarding digital inclusion and educational equity under the National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020), structured around the interconnected dimensions of access, quality, and social justice.

First, the findings confirm that digital access remains uneven and structurally stratified. While NEP 2020 promotes technology as a universal enabler, disparities in device ownership, internet connectivity, and digital literacy persist across rural–urban, gender, and socio-economic divides. Consistent with Yenugu (2022) [19] and Krishnan *et al*. (2024) [5], the evidence indicates that infrastructural gaps significantly constrain participation in digital learning ecosystems. Further, Gupta and Maurya (2026) [4] and Kundu *et al*. (2025) [6] demonstrate that economically disadvantaged and first-generation learners experience limited digital autonomy, often relying on shared or unstable technological resources. These findings suggest that technological expansion alone does not guarantee equitable inclusion.

Second, the study finds that quality of digital pedagogy is a decisive mediator of equity outcomes. Access to digital platforms does not automatically translate into meaningful learning experiences. As highlighted by Donaghy and Davies (2026) [1] and Thomas and Kakati (2025) [18], teacher digital competence, curriculum redesign, and interactive instructional strategies significantly influence engagement and academic performance. Mathrani *et al*. (2022) [10] further emphasize that constructivist and learner-centered digital models enhance educational effectiveness, whereas passive content delivery risks reinforcing cognitive disengagement. Institutional readiness, including administrative support and professional development (Madhu&Mantry, 2026) [8], emerges as a critical determinant of quality parity across institutions.

Third, the findings underscore thatdigital inclusion is fundamentally a social justice issue**.** Uniform technological provision does not address intersectional disadvantages linked to gender, geography, caste, and income. Nadig *et al.* (2026) [11] and Raj (2025) [14] argue that distributive equity requires differentiated policy support tailored to marginalized communities. The capability-oriented perspective proposed by Mahapatra and Anderson (2023) [9] suggests that digital reforms must expand learners' substantive freedoms—such as participation, employability, and critical reasoning—rather than merely increase technological penetration.

Finally, the study finds that policy coherence and governance mechanisms significantly influence implementation outcomes. Rangarajan *et al*. (2025) [15] and Garg *et al*. (2026) [3] highlight the importance of sustained public investment, localized adaptation, and monitoring frameworks to prevent digital stratification. Without coordinated institutional and policy-level alignment, NEP 2020's digital agenda risks reproducing structural inequalities rather than mitigating them. Collectively, these findings demonstrate that digital inclusion under NEP 2020 represents both a transformative opportunity and a structural challenge, requiring integrated attention to infrastructure, pedagogy, and justice-oriented governance to achieve genuine educational equity.

Conclusion

This study critically examined digital inclusion and educational equity under the National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020) through the interconnected lenses of access, quality, and social justice. The analysis demonstrates that while NEP 2020 articulates a progressive vision of technology-enabled inclusive education, the realization of this vision depends on structural, pedagogical, and governance-related factors. The findings confirm that access to digital infrastructure remains uneven across socio-economic, gender, and regional lines (Yenugu, 2022; Gupta &Maurya, 2026) [4, 19]. Although policy initiatives aim to

democratize learning through digital platforms and open educational resources, disparities in connectivity, device availability, and digital literacy continue to shape unequal participation. This suggests that infrastructural expansion, though necessary, is insufficient to ensure educational equity.

The study further highlights that the quality of digital pedagogy is central to equitable outcomes. Teacher preparedness, curriculum redesign, and interactive instructional models significantly influence whether digital tools enhance or hinder learning (Donaghy& Davies, 2026; Thomas &Kakati, 2025) [1, 18]. Without systemic investment in institutional capacity and professional development, digital reforms risk reinforcing passive learning structures rather than fostering transformative educational experiences (Mathrani *et al*., 2022) [10].

From a social justice perspective, the research underscores that digital inclusion must expand learners' substantive capabilities rather than merely standardize technological provision (Mahapatra& Anderson, 2023; Raj, 2025) [9, 14]. Addressing intersectional vulnerabilities requires differentiated policy support and sustained public investment (Nadig *et al*., 2026; Rangarajan *et al*., 2025) [11, 15]. In conclusion, digital transformation under NEP 2020 presents a significant opportunity to advance educational equity in India. However, achieving this goal requires an integrated approach that aligns infrastructure, pedagogical innovation, and justice-oriented governance. Only through such multidimensional reform can digital inclusion evolve from a policy aspiration into a genuine instrument of equitable educational development.

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