

## Mapping NCF 2023 against the Seven Tensions of the Delors Commission

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### Abstract

*“Learning: The Treasure Within,” was commissioned by the invitation of the UNESCO General Conference, as an idea from Director-General Federico Mayor, to serve as the outcome of the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century under the chairmanship of Jacques Delors. The commission took on the herculean task of overcoming the obstacles of the world embedded with diverse situations, and reaching universally accepted analyses and conclusions. The NCF 2023 intends to redefine education for a contemporary India. At this juncture, the study analyses the degree of alignment of NCF 2023 with the seven tensions mentioned in Delors Commission report. For this purpose, a problem-driven content analysis design including five elements namely, unitizing, sampling, recoding/coding, abductive inferring, and narrating was adopted. The design was followed by determining degree of alignment of each part of the framework with each tension and assigning appropriate scores accordingly. The study puts forward creative suggestions to improve the parts of the NCF which showed only moderate or no alignment with the tensions.*

**Keywords:** Content Analysis, Delors Commission Report, NCF 2023, NEP 2020, Seven Tensions, Curriculum Alignment

### Introduction

“Learning: The Treasure Within,” was commissioned by the invitation of the UNESCO General conference, as an idea from Director-General Federico Mayor, to serve as the outcome of the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century under the chairmanship of Jacques Delors. The report was intended to study and reflect on the impending challenges of the system of Education and to formulate suggestions and recommendations in the context of unemployment, inequalities, and war. But the commission took on the herculean task of overcoming the obstacles of the world embedded with diverse situations, and reaching universally accepted analyses and conclusions. How

can we learn to live together in the ‘global village’ if we cannot manage to live together in the communities to which we naturally belong – the nation, the region, the city, the village, the neighbourhood? Do we want to make contribution to public life, and can we do so? That question is central to democracy. The will to participate must come from each person’s sense of responsibility. These great challenges should be a cause for concern in educational policy-making. The report outlines seven tensions that must be addressed while developing policies on education to create a better world by contributing to sustainable human development, mutual understanding among peoples, and a renewal of practical democracy. To confront the challenges of twenty-first century, we must overcome the following tensions: the tension between the global and the local; the tension between the universal and the individual; the tension between tradition and modernity; the tension between long-term and short-term considerations; the tension between competition and equality of opportunity; the tension between the extraordinary expansion of knowledge and human beings’ capacity to assimilate it; and the tension between the spiritual and the material.

National Education Policy 2020 is the first education policy of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and aims it to address the many growing developmental imperatives of India. This policy proposes the revision and revamping of all aspects of the education structure, including its regulation and governance, to create a new system that is aligned with the aspirational goals of 21<sup>st</sup> century education, including SDG4, while building upon India’s traditions and value systems. Prime Minister Narendra Modi (2021) highlighted that the foundational aim of the NEP 2020 policy is to “bring education out from the limits of narrow thought-process and to integrate it with the modern ideas of the 21<sup>st</sup> century” while inaugurating a three-day seminar in Varanasi where more than 300 educationalists are discussing the policy’s implementation. The NCF 2023 aligns with this vision, with its goal of redefining education for a contemporary India.

The global principles, particularly those expressed by the Delors Commission in its seminal report, are also incorporated into the endeavor to modernize and innovate India's educational system. While the vision outlined in the report is arguably still a relevant guiding framework for education development in today’s world, it would be important to revisit the report in the light of multifaceted societal shifts observed worldwide since the 1990s. There is a lack of research on tension-wise alignment with Indian frameworks. Henceforth, as NCF 2023 is the recent curriculum framework for school education in India, the present study analyses how NCF 2023 aligns with the tensions outlined in the Delors Commission Report 1996.

**Objective**

To analyze the degree of alignment of NCF 2023 with the seven tensions mentioned in Delors Commission report 1996.

**Learning: The Treasure Within**

“Learning: The Treasure Within,” prepared by the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century under the chairmanship of Jacques Delors to determine the kind of education needed for the future society. The report would suggest approaches to both policy and practice that are both innovative and feasible while taking into account the wide diversity of situations, needs, means, and aspirations existing in countries and in regions. The Commission would focus its reflection on one central and all-encompassing question: what kind of education is needed for what kind of society of tomorrow? It would consider the new roles of education and the new demands made on education systems in a world of accelerating economic, environmental, and social change and tension. There are mainly seven tensions that are central to the Twenty-first Century to be confronted.

**The Tensions**

- The tension between the global and the local: people need gradually to become world citizens without losing their roots and while continuing to play an active part in the life of their nation and their local community.
- The tension between the universal and the individual: culture is steadily being globalized, but as yet only partially. We cannot ignore the promises of globalization nor its risks, not the least of which is the risk of forgetting the unique character of individual human beings; it is for them to choose their own future and achieve their full potential within the carefully tended wealth of their traditions and their own cultures which, unless we are careful, can be endangered by contemporary developments.
- The tension between tradition and modernity, which is part of the same problem: how is it possible to adapt to change without turning one’s back on the past, how can autonomy be acquired in complementarity with the free development of others and how can scientific progress be assimilated? This is the spirit in which the challenges of the new information technologies must be met.
- The tension between long-term and short-term considerations: this has always existed but today it is sustained by the predominance of the ephemeral and the instantaneous, in a world where an over-abundance of transient information and emotions continually keeps the spotlight on immediate problems. Public opinion cries out for quick answers and ready solutions, whereas many problems call for a patient, concerted, negotiated

strategy of reform. This is precisely the case where education policies are concerned.

- The tension between, on the one hand, the need for competition, and on the other, the concern for equality of opportunity: this is a classic issue, which has been facing both economic and social policy-makers and educational policy-makers since the beginning of the century. Solutions have sometimes been proposed but they have never stood the test of time. Today, the Commission ventures to claim that the pressures of competition have caused many of those in positions of authority to lose sight of their mission, which is to give each human being the means to take full advantage of every opportunity. This has led us, within the terms of reference of the report, to rethink and update the concept of lifelong education so as to reconcile three forces: competition, which provides incentives; co-operation, which gives strength; and solidarity, which unites.
- The tension between the extraordinary expansion of knowledge and human beings' capacity to assimilate it: the Commission was unable to resist the temptation to add some new subjects for study, such as self-knowledge, ways to ensure physical and psychological well-being or ways to an improved understanding of the natural environment and to preserving it better. Since there is already increasing pressure on curricula, any clear-sighted reform strategy must involve making choices, providing always that the essential features of a basic education that teaches pupils how to improve their lives through knowledge, through experiment and through the development of their own personal cultures are preserved.
- The tension between the spiritual and the material: often without realizing it, the world has a longing, often unexpressed, for an ideal and for values that we shall term 'moral'. It is thus education's noble task to encourage each and every one, acting in accordance with their traditions and convictions and paying full respect to pluralism, to lift their minds and spirits to the plane of the universal and, in some measure, to transcend themselves. It is no exaggeration on the Commission's part to say that the survival of humanity depends thereon.

### **National Curriculum Framework (2023)**

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 is a transformative initiative to usher India to prepare itself to meet the challenging demands of a 21<sup>st</sup> century knowledge society. The NCF-SE (2023) (in short NCF) is one of the key offshoots of NEP 2020, that enables and energizes this transformation, informed by its aims, principles, and approach. Its objective is to realize the highest quality education for all children, consistent with realizing an

equitable, inclusive, and plural society as envisaged by our Constitution. This is the first ever integrated Curriculum Framework for children between ages 3-18 in India. It is a direct outcome of the 5+3+3+4 'curricular and pedagogical' structure that NEP 2020 has come out with for School Education. The document of NCF 2023 is broadly divided into five parts. Part A lays the foundation of the framework. Part B discusses cross-cutting themes such as rootedness in India and Indian Knowledge Systems, value and dispositions, learning about and caring for the environment, inclusion in schools, guidance and counselling in schools, and educational technology in schools. Part C addresses the school subjects with the details of its aims, nature, principles of the approach, and most crucially, the Learning Standards with curricular goals and stage-wise competencies to be achieved. Stage-wise pedagogical and assessment strategies have also been highlighted. Part D outlines ways in which a school can cultivate a rich, vibrant, and shared life of learning for all its members. Furthermore, it discusses various aspects of administrative and academic functioning that schools can consider to become effective in achieving their organizational and educational goals. Part E briefly describes the kind of ecosystem needed for the implementation of the NCF including capacity building, infrastructure and learning resources, empowerment of teachers and engagement of parents and the community.

### **The Research Gap**

The report *Learning the Treasure Within* (1996) found that 'learning to live together in the world and development of the will to participate in democracy and contributing to the public life by individuals' are the great challenges. The challenges should be a cause for concern in educational policy-making. Therefore, the commission found the main seven tensions that, although not new, are central to the problems of the twenty-first century to overcome the great challenges through educational policies. Creating educational policies to confront the tensions can help create a better world by contributing to sustainable human development, mutual understanding among peoples, and a renewal of practical democracy.

There is a lack of research on tension-wise alignment with Indian frameworks. Henceforth, NCF 2023 being the recent curriculum framework for school education in India, the present study analyses how NCF 2023 aligns with the tensions outlined in the Delors Commission Report 1996.

### **Research Design**

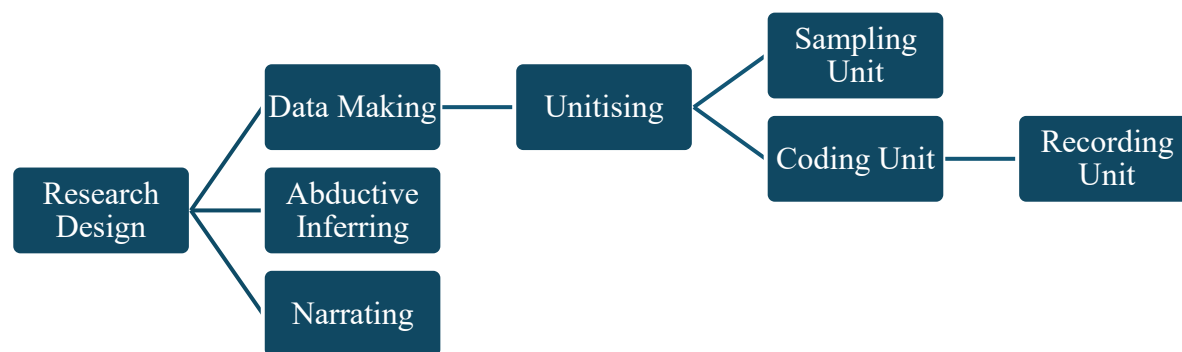
Problem-driven content analyses are motivated by epistemic questions about currently inaccessible phenomena, events, or processes that the analysts

believe texts could answer. Analysts start from research questions and proceed to find analytical paths from the choice of suitable texts to their answers (Krippendorff, 2019).

The present study adopted a problem-driven content analysis design to analyze how NCF 2023 aligns with the seven tensions outlined in the Delors Commission report by constructing context-bound stable correlations that classify texts. The design contains five elements of content analysis such as unitizing, sampling, recoding/coding, abductive inferring, and narrating.

The research design is presented in figure 1.

**Figure 1**  
**Research Design**



The first three components are collectively called data making. NCF 2023 was the sampling unit of the present study. The purposive sampling technique takes the sampling unit into consideration. The study used pre-defined coding units to categorize the recording units. Here, the coding units are the seven tensions outlined in the Delors Commission report of 1996. However, for more reliable and clear results, the seven units are further divided into the areas of emphasis in each tension. That is the coding units were reduced to more manageable representations. Furthermore, the excerpts from NCF 2023 that align with the coding units served as the recording units.

Abductive inference is Sherlock Holmes's logic of reasoning as well (Bonfantini & Proni, 1988; Truzzi, 1988). Abductive inference bridges the gap between descriptive accounts of texts and what they mean, refer to, entail, provoke, or cause. It proceeds across logically distinct domains, from particulars of one kind to particulars of another kind. In the present study, the abductive inferring approach was followed by starting with the conceptual framework of seven tensions mentioned in the Delors Commission report of 1996, preceded by the iterative reading of NCF 2023 to construct meaningful interpretations. This approach helped the analyst to explain how the text aligns with each tension in

context. After inferring, narrating the findings was done by presenting how each part of NCF 2023 aligns with each tension in a systematic way.

Moreover, the degree of alignment of each part of the framework with each tension was found out, assigned the scores three, two, and one for strong alignment, moderate alignment, and no alignment, respectively. Since the NCF contains five parts, the maximum mark for one tension was fifteen. Marks between one and five were considered weak alignment, between six and ten considered moderate alignment, and between eleven and fifteen as strong alignment.

### Analysis and Discussion

**The tension between the global and the local:** People need gradually to become world citizens without losing their roots and while continuing to play

Part	Degree of Alignment	Interpretation
Part A	Strong	Emphasizes rooting students in Indian culture while encouraging engagement with global outlook. The curriculum framework integrates civic, cultural and economic participation.
Part B	Strong	For reinforcing local identity uses local TLMs, school practices and community engagement. Integrates global environmental and social awareness.
Part C	Strong	Different school subjects start with local context, progressing through regional, national and global levels. The school subjects familiarise various Indian contributions to the students along with global perspectives.
Part D	Strong	Promotes local community engagement, heritage club and events. The part deals with the opportunities for state, national and international participation.
Part E	No alignment	No excerpts align with the tension

an active part in the life of their nation and their local community.

### Table 1

Degree of Alignment of NCF 2023 with the Tension between the Global and the Local

Table 1 demonstrates the strong alignment of the tension between the global and the local with NCF 2023. The curriculum framework offers strong emphasis on cultural rootedness, civic responsibility, social awareness, community engagement and progressive context from regional to global levels

simultaneously. Part E which describes the kind of ecosystem needed for the implementation of the NCF does not show any alignment with the tension.

**The tension between the universal and the individual:** Culture is steadily being globalized, but as yet only partially. We cannot ignore the promises of globalization nor its risks, not the least of which is the risk of forgetting the unique character of individual human beings; it is for them to choose their own future and achieve their full potential within the carefully tended wealth of their traditions and their own cultures which, unless we are careful, can be endangered by contemporary developments.

**Table 2:** Degree of Alignment of NCF 2023 with the Tension between the Universal and the Individual

Part	Degree of Alignment	Interpretation
Part A	Moderate	Encourages student individual student autonomy through rational thought and self management along with focusing on learning in democratic and societal values
Part B	Strong	The framework glorifies the Indian Knowledge System which incorporates unique individual cultural backgrounds which including tribal and indigenous knowledge with universal learning competencies, mainly through art education
Part C	Moderate	Focuses on self discipline, home language for literacy and independent reading, which embraces individuality.
Part D	Moderate	Emphasizes student autonomy through participation in assembly and other school processes. The part encourages preservation of cultural diversity in school activities.
Part E	No alignment	No excerpts align with the tension

Table 2 illuminates a moderate alignment of the tension between the universal and the individual by highlighting the student autonomy, self management and various cultural backgrounds. The framework could not provide necessary emphasis on universal competencies. Part E addresses the importance of teachers, parents, community and infrastructure for the implementation of the NCF; however the part does not align with the tension.

**The tension between tradition and modernity:** How is it possible to adapt to change without turning one's back on the past, how can autonomy be acquired in complementarity with the free development of others and how can scientific

progress be assimilated? This is the spirit in which the challenges of the new information technologies must be met.

**Table 3:** Degree of Alignment of NCF 2023 with the Tension between Tradition and Modernity

Part	Degree of Alignment	Interpretation
Part A	Strong	Integrates traditional pedagogy with modern technologies.
Part B	Strong	Harmonizes respect for Indian traditions with immersive technology. The part focuses on digital literacy and even AI integration in pedagogical strategies.
Part C	Strong	Integrates both traditional Indian contributions with modern scientific knowledge through various school subjects
Part D	No alignment	No excerpts align with the tension
Part E	Moderate	Emphasizes modern assistive technologies in education to ensure appropriate environment for learning.

A strong alignment of the tension between tradition and modernity is shown in Table 3 as it integrates traditional pedagogy with modern advancements like AI technology and tries to adapt to the technological shift while withstanding traditional Indian contributions. Part D handles school culture and processes that enable a positive learning environment, even though does not show any alignment with the tension.

**The tension between long-term and short-term considerations:** This has always existed but today it is sustained by the predominance of the ephemeral and the instantaneous, in a world where an over-abundance of transient information and emotions continually keeps the spotlight on immediate problems. Public opinion cries out for quick answers and ready solutions, whereas many problems call for a patient, concerted, negotiated strategy of reform. This is precisely the case where education policies are concerned.

**Table 4:** Degree of Alignment of NCF 2023 with the Tension between Long-Term and Short-Term Considerations

<b>Part</b>	<b>Degree of Alignment</b>	<b>Interpretation</b>
<b>Part A</b>	Strong	Gives explicit attention to short-term learning besides ensuring long-term competencies through formative and summative assessments, grade progression, Holistic Progress Cards, competency based promotion and board examination reforms.
<b>Part B</b>	Strong	Addresses long-term goals such as inclusive education, digital learning, online courses and AI readiness while supporting the diverse learners immediately through various accommodations
<b>Part C</b>	Moderate	Deals with critical long-term goals for lifelong learning such as early access to quality ECCE and Foundational Literacy and Numeracy Mission.
<b>Part D</b>	Strong	Focuses on short-term school improvement planning to enhance current status with awareness of long-term vision.
<b>Part E</b>	No alignment	No excerpts align with the tension.

Table 4 illustrates a strong alignment of the tension between long-term and short-term considerations. The framework gives explicit attention to short-term learning besides ensuring long-term competencies through various reforms in assessment, considering supporting mechanisms for diverse learners, providing opportunities for lifelong learning and various school improvement planning. As part E outlines the requirements for an overall ecosystem of schooling that would enable the achievement of the aims of the NCF, it shows the necessity of harmony between long-term and short-term considerations. However the part shows no alignment with the tension.

**The tension between, on the one hand, the need for competition, and on the other, the concern for equality of opportunity:** This is a classic issue, which has been facing both economic and social policy-makers and educational policy-makers since the beginning of the century. Solutions have sometimes been proposed but they have never stood the test of time. The Commission ventures to claim that the pressures of competition have caused many of those in positions of authority to lose sight of their mission, which is to give each human being the means to take full advantage of every opportunity. This has led us, within the terms of reference of the report, to rethink and update the

concept of lifelong education to reconcile three forces: competition, which provides incentives; co-operation, which gives strength; and solidarity, which unites.

**Table 5:** Degree of Alignment of NCF 2023 with the Tension between the Need for Competition and the Concern for Equality of Opportunity

<b>Part</b>	<b>Degree of Alignment</b>	<b>Interpretation</b>
<b>Part A</b>	Strong	Promotes both individual and cooperative work. It also encourages respectful and sportive competition along with equal access and participation.
<b>Part B</b>	Moderate	Advocates inclusive participation, teamwork, respect for diversity and equity in access.
<b>Part C</b>	Strong	Focuses on equality especially in sports, arts and vocational education
<b>Part D</b>	Strong	Integrates competition with empathy and cooperation to promote inclusive participation in all school processes.
<b>Part E</b>	No alignment	No excerpts align with the tension.

A strong alignment of the tension between the need for competition and concern for equality of opportunity is demonstrated in Table 5 by encouraging the students for respectful and sportive competition along with equal participation. Assurance of equal participation is one of the major foundational bases of the framework. Part E does not exhibit any alignment with the tension.

**The tension between the extraordinary expansion of knowledge and human beings' capacity to assimilate it:** The Commission was unable to resist the temptation to add some new subjects for study, such as self-knowledge, ways to ensure physical and psychological well-being or ways to an improved understanding of the natural environment and to preserving it better. Since there is already increasing pressure on curricula, any clear-sighted reform strategy must involve making choices, providing always that the essential features of a basic education that teaches pupils how to improve their lives through knowledge, through experiment and through the development of their own personal cultures are preserved.

**Table 6:** Degree of Alignment of NCF 2023 with the Tension between the Extraordinary Expansion of Knowledge and the Human Beings' Capacity to Assimilate It

Part	Degree of Alignment	Interpretation
Part A	Strong	Addresses the ways to overcome the challenge of expanding knowledge based on the capacity through developmental appropriateness, flexibility, intellectual development, choice and curriculum design.
Part B	Moderate	Only in chapter 3 'Learning About and Caring for the Environment' mention that learning must build on the foundations laid in previous classes. The chapter focuses more on content staging to manage complexity.
Part C	Strong	Encourages play-based, enquiry-based and concept-oriented learning which help to manage excessive content and reduce rote learning.
Part D	No alignment	No excerpts align with the tension.
Part E	No alignment	No excerpts align with the tension.

Table 6 indicates a moderate alignment of the tension between the extraordinary expansion of knowledge and human beings' capacity to assimilate it. The framework offers developmental appropriateness in content, flexibility in choosing subjects and methods of learning for managing excessive content. It also focuses on reducing rote learning. School culture and processes, and an overall school ecosystem are discussing in Part D and Part E. But these parts do not show any alignment with the tension.

**The tension between the spiritual and the material:** Often without realizing it, the world has a longing, often unexpressed, for an ideal and for values that we shall term 'moral'. It is thus education's noble task to encourage everyone, acting in accordance with their traditions and convictions and paying full respect to pluralism, to lift their minds and spirits to the plane of the universal and, in some measure, to transcend themselves. It is no exaggeration on the Commission's part to say that the survival of humanity depends thereon.

**Table 7:** Degree of Alignment of NCF 2023 with the Tension between the Spiritual and the Material

<b>Part</b>	<b>Degree of Alignment</b>	<b>Interpretation</b>
<b>Part A</b>	Moderate	Highlights love, compassion, humility and inner awareness as integral to human development.
<b>Part B</b>	Moderate	Deals with Indian Knowledge Systems that include practices and knowledge of yoga to show how the spiritual traditions inform education, ethics and well-being.
<b>Part C</b>	No alignment	No excerpts align with the tension.
<b>Part D</b>	No alignment	No excerpts align with the tension.
<b>Part E</b>	No alignment	No excerpts align with the tension.

Table 7 exhibits a weak alignment of the tension between the spiritual and the material. The framework emphasizes the importance of spiritual values and yoga to improve such values. The practical implications for improving the spiritual side of individuals by balancing the material needs could not be offered by NCF 2023. Moreover Part C, Part D, and Part E do not indicate any alignment.

### **Conclusion**

The NCF 2023 is a forward-looking and philosophically grounded framework that demonstrates a commendable effort to address the competing demands of contemporary education, which are the seven tensions outlined in the Delors report. However, there is a need for enhanced implementation strategies to overcome the existing gaps alongside keeping both national identity and global consciousness. The appropriate institutional support, policy alignment, and continuous teacher empowerment can shift Indian education into a well-balanced, inclusive, and future-ready system.

Part A exhibited strong alignment with the majority of the tensions and moderate alignment with the tension between the global and the local, and the tension between the extraordinary expansion of knowledge and human beings' capacity to assimilate it. Part B demonstrated strong alignment with first four tensions and moderate alignment with remaining ones. Part C showed strong and moderate alignment with most tensions but no alignment with the tension between the spiritual and the material. Part D indicated moderate alignment with the tension between the individual and the universal, strong alignment with three tensions and no alignment with other three. Part E displayed moderate alignment with the tension between tradition and modernity and no

alignment with remaining six tensions. The study has brought to light certain areas that lack alignment with the outlined tensions. Therefore, the researchers had certain suggestions in this regard.

### **Suggestions**

- To effectively overcome the tension between the global and the local, include facilitating international collaborations, student exchange programmes, or cross-cultural discussions; focusing more on multilingualism in everyday school life; incorporating materials from diverse global contexts; expanding heritage clubs for heritage explorations; and providing teacher training in global methodologies.
- To overcome the tension between the universal and the individual include the methods to develop self-discipline, creating more cross-cultural global student forums, and revamping teacher training programmes to develop strategies to triumph over the tension.
- To overcome the tension between long-term and short-term considerations include orientation programmes for stakeholders of education to value the long-term reforms and buffer schools against demands for quick fixes. Also, teacher education programmes could reform to familiarise the reformations mentioned in the curriculum framework.
- NCF 2023 could suggest how to prepare the teachers to create a competitive setting in the school culture by providing equal opportunities and maximum advantage of every opportunity to all children.
- To overcome the tension between the extraordinary expansion of knowledge and human being's capacity to assimilate it, include building a school environment in which students feel mentally and emotionally safe, providing capacity-building programmes for teachers on balancing the extraordinary expansion of knowledge with students' capacity to assimilate it, and including mechanisms to preserve essential features of basic education.
- To overcome the tension between the spiritual and the material, include addressing mechanisms to elevate one's mind to a universal perspective and promote pluralism, integrating spiritual development with each school subject, developing a school environment that gives opportunity to uplift students' minds to the plane of the universal, and introducing programmes for teachers to know how to nurture the balance of the spiritual and material aspects.
- Courses to transmit Indian contributions and disseminate the Indian Knowledge System to the children can be integrated with the capacity building of teachers and the engagement of parents and the community.

- Field-based research on assessing how well the principles and reforms outlined in the NCF 2023 are being implemented in real classroom settings, study on finding the reforms in teacher education programmes for the effective implementation of NCF 2023, study on finding perception of students about the impact of implementation of NCF 2023 and a long-term research study to evaluate the effectiveness of NCF 2023 in meeting its goals in light of the Delors tensions can be conducted.

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