

Historical Development of Educational Guidance and Counselling Services in India: A Policy Perspective Aligned with NEP 2020

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Abstract

Guidance and Counselling (G&C) have emerged as essential components of modern education, with global models offering valuable frameworks that emphasize academic, socio-emotional, and vocational development. This paper examines the evolution of G&C starting from international perspectives, transitioning to the Indian context, and finally exploring the future directions outlined by the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. The historical trajectory of G&C in India is traced across four key phases: foundation, policy formalization, implementation, and transformation. From the ancient Gurukul system to the pioneering counselling program at the University of Calcutta in 1954 and the influential recommendations of the Kothari Commission, India's guidance services have steadily progressed toward inclusivity and career preparedness. The paper also highlights recent innovations like Delhi's Science of Living framework, which offers a more holistic approach to student well-being by integrating emotional, mental, and digital wellness. The NEP 2020 further strengthens the G&C landscape by promoting structured career guidance, vocational education linkages from school to higher education, and socio-emotional learning, aligning with both national priorities and global best practices to foster holistic student development.

Keywords- *Guidance and Counselling, Socio-Emotional Development, National Education Policy 2020, Career Guidance, Indian Education System, Holistic Development, Vocational Education*

Introduction

Globally, the importance of Guidance and Counselling (G&C) has gained recognition as an essential component of education. Countries like the USA, UK, Singapore, and Australia have well-structured school counselling frameworks that not only focus on academic achievements but also on the social, emotional, and vocational development of students. These international models have demonstrated how systematic guidance services can shape the life skills and career readiness of young learners.

An essential aspect of the evolving Guidance and Counselling (G&C) framework is the seamless linkage between vocational education at the school level and higher education pathways. Globally and within India, there is growing recognition of the need to equip students with practical, employable skills early in their academic journey, ensuring smooth transitions into higher education and the workforce. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 emphasizes the integration of vocational training within school curricula and provides students with flexible opportunities to explore skill-based education that can be pursued further at higher levels. This structure connection between school and higher education aims to promote career readiness, lifelong learning, and a more competent workforce, which are crucial objectives of the current educational reforms.

Children are not only the future of the nation—they are its current assets. In a developing country like India, every child must be viewed as a builder of the national fabric. As per the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2024), India has over 250 million students enrolled in schools, making it home to the world's largest school-age population. The enormity of this demographic reinforces the importance of embedding structured guidance and counselling services within educational institutions. Adolescents in particular face complex academic, psychological, and career-related pressures, and school-based G&C is essential in equipping them to navigate these challenges.

If we look at the international scenario, in Singapore the guidance system is an integral part of schooling, where counsellors work closely with students on career awareness and emotional support. Australia's National Career Education Strategy focuses on students' transitions from school to higher education or the workforce, ensuring every child is equipped with the knowledge, skills, and resilience to thrive. Similarly, the United States follows the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) model that addresses students' academic, career, and socio-emotional needs in a comprehensive way.

While in the Indian context, in contrast, the guidance services in India, though evolving, still face several challenges. School counselling is not yet fully institutionalized and lacks trained professionals, consistent monitoring frameworks, and a holistic delivery approach. However, progressive initiatives like Delhi's Happiness Curriculum and its recent Science of Living framework have added a new dimension to emotional and life skills education.

The Science of Living is considered a more holistic upgrade to the Happiness

Curriculum. According to Shruti Bansal (2025), this approach is designed to address real challenges students face today, especially in our hyper-digital world. It equips them with emotional, mental, and digital wellness tools essential for modern life (India Today, 2025).

National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 and Future Directions The NEP 2020 marks a transformative shift in the Indian education system by formally integrating Guidance and Counselling into school curricula. It emphasizes providing vocational exposure from an early age, ensuring that students develop practical skills aligned with their interests and societal needs.

NEP 2020 encourages multidisciplinary education, focusing on flexibility and the removal of rigid boundaries between academic and vocational streams. It proposes establishing career guidance cells in schools and higher education institutions to support students in making informed career choices.

Importantly, the policy outlines the vertical and horizontal linkages between vocational education at school and higher education levels. This includes skill development programs, internships, and academic credits that are transferable across disciplines and educational stages, creating seamless pathways for lifelong learning and employability.

Role of Educational Guidance and Counselling Services (EGCS)

Educational guidance and counselling services (EGCS) aim to promote self-awareness, support academic achievement, aid career exploration, and ensure social inclusion and mental well-being. These services prepare students to make informed life choices, fostering holistic development aligned with national and global educational frameworks like the NEP 2020 and the United Nation Sustainable Development Goals.

Concept and Origin of Guidance and Counselling in India

The conceptual underpinnings of guidance and counselling (G&C) in India are deeply intertwined with both indigenous philosophical traditions and the evolving demands of a modernizing education system. Historically, Indian thought emphasized holistic development through the Gurukul system, where teachers (gurus) nurtured not only academic knowledge but also moral, spiritual, and vocational competencies in their disciples (shishyas). This informal mentoring, rooted in value-based education, can be considered the earliest manifestation of guidance-oriented education (Gupta, 2014).

The formal introduction of structured G&C services in India, however, was influenced significantly by global trends in vocational guidance in the early 20th century. The first explicit recognition of vocational guidance as a formal need emerged post-independence during India's efforts at national reconstruction and planned economic development. The University of Calcutta's pioneering Counselling Program in 1954 marked the institutional beginning of counselling education in India, emphasizing vocational choices and career decision-making. This initiative was soon bolstered by the establishment of the Directorate General of Employment and Training (DGE&T) in the 1950s, which rolled out National Vocational Guidance Services to align education with labour market needs (Kochhar, 1984).

Parallel to these developments, the Kothari Commission (1966) laid a foundational philosophical framework by defining guidance as "an integral part of education" essential for preparing learners for life in a rapidly changing world (Kothari Commission, 1966). The Commission recognized that the education system needed to address students' varied psychological, social, and career-related challenges—not merely academic knowledge dissemination. This broadened understanding catalysed the integration of educational, vocational, and personal-social guidance into the Indian educational landscape.

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, India's approach to G&C expanded further with NCERT and Regional Institutes of Education (RIEs) initiating structured counsellor training programs, and the Central Bureau of Vocational Guidance (CBVEG) standardizing career counselling practices. Thus, India's G&C system evolved from a singular focus on vocational support towards a comprehensive model incorporating career guidance, academic counselling, and socio-emotional support, a trajectory that continues to shape current policies like NEP 2020.

This conceptual evolution highlights that guidance and counselling in India is not an imported framework but a hybrid model—rooted in indigenous pedagogical ethos and responsive to post-independence developmental needs. As contemporary policy moves toward holistic, student-centric education, understanding these origins is crucial to contextualize and strengthen the future trajectory of educational guidance and counselling services in India.

Historical Development of Guidance and Counselling in India

The evolution of guidance and counselling in India has occurred in a phased manner, reflecting the socio-political priorities and educational reforms of the time.

Phase- 1: Foundation (1951-1985)

Five Years Plan & Early Frameworks

Year	Policy/Initiative	Key Contribution to Counselling
1951–56	1st Five-Year Plan	Links education to employment needs
1952	Mudaliar Commission	First formal push for vocational guidance in schools
1954	University of Calcutta Program	India's first university-level counselling initiative
1956–61	2nd Five-Year Plan	Funds pilot vocational guidance units
1950s	DGE&T (Directorate General of Employment & Training)	Launches national vocational guidance services
1960s	NCERT & RIEs	Begin structured counsellor training programs
1961–66	3rd Five-Year Plan	Expands vocational education; adds career guidance
1964	Kothari Commission	Declares guidance "essential" for education
1966	Central Bureau of Vocational Guidance (CBEVG)	National standardization of career counselling
1969–74	4th Five-Year Plan	Directly funds development of guidance services
1974	IEDC Scheme	Counseling for children with disabilities

The Foundation Phase (1951–1985) began with the realization that education must be aligned with national development goals. The First Five-Year Plan (1951–1956) emphasized human capital formation and initiated vocational guidance. The Mudaliar Commission (1952–53) formally recommended vocational guidance as a key aspect of secondary education. The Kothari Commission (1964–66) further reinforced the necessity of integrating educational and vocational guidance at all stages of schooling (Government of India, 1966). During this period, the Central

Bureau of Vocational Guidance (CBVEG) was established under the Ministry of Labour to coordinate vocational guidance services. In 1974, the Integrated Education for Disabled Children(IEDC) scheme introduced counselling support for children with special needs, marking the beginning of inclusive guidance services.

PHASE-2: Policy Formalization (1986-2011)

Mandates & Global Alignment

Year	Policy/Initiative	Key Contribution to Counseling
1986	National Policy on Education (NPE)	Mandated counseling in schools
1988	Centrally Sponsored Scheme (CSS)	Funded vocational guidance in secondary education
1992	Rehabilitation Council of India (RCI) Act	Regulated training for disability counselors
2000	NCFSE (National Curriculum Framework)	Introduced life skills education
2006	UN CRPD (ratified 2007)	Legally binding inclusive education mandates (Article 24)
2009	RMSA Launched (operational by 2012)	Funded counseling services in secondary schools

The Policy Formalization Phase (1986–2011) was institutionalized by the National Policy on Education (1986), which mandated guidance and counselling as essential components of the school curriculum. This policy shift recognized the psychological, emotional, and vocational needs of learners. The Rehabilitation Council of India (RCI) Act of 1992 professionalized the training and licensing of special educators and counsellors, ensuring standardized service delivery. The National Curriculum Framework (2000) introduced life skills education, expanding the scope of counselling to include emotional and social competencies. By 2009, the Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA) made provisions for structured guidance and counselling services at the secondary school level, emphasizing equity and access.

PHASE-3 Implementation 2010-2019

Structural Reforms & Right Expansion

Year	Policy/Initiative	Key Contribution to Counseling
2010	CBSE Affiliation Bye-Laws	Mandated 1 counselor per 500 students in CBSE schools
2012	Draft RPWD Bill	Proposed 19 disability categories (vs. 5 in 1995 Act)
2013	NSQF (National Skills Qualification Framework)	Integrated career counseling with skill development
2016	RPWD Act (Rights of Persons with Disabilities)	Enforced inclusive counseling (Sec 17)
2018	Happiness Curriculum (Delhi)	Pioneered socio-emotional learning in schools

The Implementation Phase (2010–2019) was marked by concrete actions and regulations. The CBSE Bye-laws (2010) made it mandatory for affiliated schools to appoint at least one counsellor per 500 students. This was a pivotal step in normalizing psychological support in mainstream education. The draft Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPWD) Bill (2012) expanded the definition of disability and emphasized support services, culminating in the RPWD Act (2016), which mandated inclusive education and psychological support for 19 categories of disabilities. The National Skills Qualifications Framework (NSQF) in 2013 aligned skill development with career counselling. The Delhi Government’s launch of the Happiness Curriculum in 2018 marked a shift towards socio-emotional learning (SEL) as part of daily education, focusing on mindfulness, empathy, and emotional well-being.

PHASE-4 Transformation (2020-Present)

NEP-2020 & Holistic well-being

Year	Policy/Initiative	Key Contribution to Counseling
2020	National Education Policy (NEP)	Integrated mental health, vocational guidance, and inclusion: • Foundational Stage: Early identification of learning needs • Inclusion Fund: Dedicated budgets for disability counseling • Vocational Integration: Career guidance from Class 6
2020	Manodarpan Initiative	National mental health program for students (post- COVID)
2023	NEP Implementation Guidelines (NCFSE)	Mandated counselor recruitment in all states
2025	Science of Living	Emphasises mindfulness, Emotional awareness, Yoga, Value driven discussion for Students well-being.

The Transformation Phase (2020–Present) is being shaped by the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, which places guidance and counselling at the core of holistic, multidisciplinary education. NEP 2020 envisions early career exposure from Grade 6, individualized progress tracking, and the creation of a National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC). The policy also mandates the recruitment of trained counsellors and wellness experts in every school. In response to the psychological toll of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Ministry of Education launched the Manodarpan initiative in 2020 to support mental health and well-being. The NEP Implementation Guidelines of 2023 called for state-level action plans, making EGCS integral to systemic education reform. These developments indicate a shift from reactive support to proactive, developmental counselling embedded in school culture.

Comparative Global Perspectives: Guidance and Counselling Policies in Developed Countries

Around the world, guidance and counselling (G&C) services are regarded as essential components of student development, academic success, and emotional well-being. Developed countries such as Denmark, Norway, the United Kingdom, Ireland,

Finland, and Germany have implemented structured, inclusive, and institutionalized guidance frameworks that can inform and inspire similar reforms in India. In Denmark, the 2004 Danish Guidance Act mandates impartial and coordinated guidance across all educational levels, from compulsory schooling through adult education. These services, overseen by the Danish Agency for Higher Education and Science, are made accessible through digital platforms like e Guidance, ensuring nationwide reach regardless of geography.

Norway, through its Education Act (*Opplæringsloven*), guarantees the right to educational and career guidance for all students. Schools are required to provide personal, academic, and vocational counselling, which is further supported by municipal counselling centres and professional development programs for counsellors. In the United Kingdom, particularly in England, the Gatsby Benchmarks serve as a national quality standard for career guidance. Initiated through the 2017 Careers Strategy, secondary schools must offer impartial career advice from Year 8, ensure student interaction with employers and higher education institutions, and assess effectiveness using tools like Compass.

Ireland adopts a whole-school approach to counselling, integrating academic, personal, and career guidance within a unified school guidance plan. These services are funded and supported by the Department of Education and receive professional and research backing from the National Centre for Guidance in Education (NCGE). Similarly, Finland's national curriculum embeds guidance as a core educational component, with counsellors placed in every school to support student well-being and career planning. Germany follows a decentralized model where the Federal Employment Agency collaborates with schools to provide personalized career guidance and internships, backed by current labour market data.

These countries collectively emphasize several core principles: legally mandated guidance services, nationwide coordination across education and labour sectors, highly trained professionals, digital integration for broader access, and equitable service delivery. As highlighted by Gupta (2014) and the OECD (2021), the effectiveness of these models lies in their ability to be proactive, inclusive, and continuously improved through regular evaluation. These international best practices offer valuable insights for strengthening India's evolving Educational Guidance and Counselling Services (EGCS) in alignment with the objectives outlined in the National Education Policy 2020.

Sarthak Policy Implementation Timelines for EGCS

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 implementation is operationalized through two key strategic documents—Sarthak Volume 1 and Volume 2—published by the Ministry of Education. These volumes offer actionable timelines to integrate guidance and counselling services holistically into India’s education system. Under Sarthak Volume 1 (2021), immediate and short-term measures for 2021–2023 include the development of a national framework for school-based career guidance and counselling services, the inclusion of career guidance, life skills education, and socio-emotional learning in the National Curriculum Framework (NCF), and the recruitment and capacity building of school counsellors and wellness experts in all schools. It also emphasizes the establishment of state-level and district-level counselling resource centres and the expansion of the Manodarpan initiative for student mental health support.

In Sarthak Volume 2 (2022), medium- and long-term actions spanning 2023–2030 mandate the appointment of qualified counsellors and career guidance experts in every school by 2025, the integration of digital career guidance platforms to ensure equitable access across rural and urban areas, and cross-sector collaboration with the Ministry of Labour & Employment and industry partners to align counselling with evolving labour market needs. Furthermore, it outlines the development of a national counsellor accreditation and professional development framework, and the establishment of a nationwide monitoring and evaluation mechanism for EGCS through NAAC (National Assessment and Accreditation Council). By 2030, comprehensive guidance and counselling services are envisioned to be fully operational and integrated into the holistic school curriculum as mandated under NEP 2020.

In alignment with these objectives, Task 70 of the SARTHAK document explicitly mandates the establishment of dedicated counselling cells and the recruitment of trained counsellors in every school to address academic, emotional, and career-related needs of students. Complementing this, Task 239 calls for the development and implementation of a robust national career guidance framework, integrating psychometric assessments, career awareness programs, and digital platforms to ensure accessibility and inclusivity in career counselling services (Ministry of Education, 2021; 2022). These structured tasks and timelines reflect India’s commitment to institutionalizing EGCS as a transformative tool for inclusive, equitable, and future-ready education.

Conclusion

Globally, well-established Guidance and Counselling (G&C) frameworks in countries like Singapore, Australia, and the United States have demonstrated the transformative impact of structured guidance systems on students' academic success, emotional well-being, and career readiness. These international models highlight the importance of early career exposure, seamless transitions between educational stages, and the integration of socio-emotional support within school systems.

In the Indian context, G&C services are gradually gaining prominence, though challenges such as the lack of trained professionals and insufficient institutional support still persist. Recent developments like Delhi's Science of Living framework have introduced a more holistic approach by addressing students' emotional, mental, and digital wellness needs, reflecting a step forward in creating meaningful, student-centered learning environments.

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 marks a significant milestone by formalizing the role of G&C in the Indian education system. It emphasizes vocational exposure from early schooling, the creation of career guidance cells, and the establishment of strong linkages between school-level vocational training and higher education opportunities. NEP 2020's focus on multidisciplinary learning and flexibility between academic and vocational streams aims to provide students with both personal and professional growth opportunities.

An essential aspect of the evolving G&C framework is the seamless integration of vocational education from school to higher education pathways. There is an increasing emphasis on equipping students with practical, employable skills early in their academic journey, ensuring smooth transitions into higher education and the workforce. This structured connection aims to promote career readiness, lifelong learning, and the development of a more competent workforce, which aligns with the broader objectives of educational reforms in India.

Moving forward, the success of Guidance and Counselling in India will depend on collaborative efforts among policymakers, educators, school leaders, and counsellors to establish comprehensive, accessible, and student-centric services. Continuous capacity building, professional training, and proper monitoring will be

key to transforming G&C from a supportive initiative to a core pillar of the Indian education system. By integrating global best practices with India's unique educational and cultural contexts, a well-structured G&C framework can significantly contribute to the holistic development of students and prepare them to thrive in an increasingly complex, competitive, and interconnected world.

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