



A Critical Discourse Analysis of Political Speeches and Policy Implementation on Youth Empowerment in India

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Abstract

India has one of the world's youngest populations, with youth representing a critical driver of economic growth and social change. Political leaders frequently emphasize youth empowerment in their public addresses. This study explores the relationship between political rhetoric and policy implementation in India by analyzing Prime Minister Narendra Modi's speeches on youth empowerment, skilling, and education. The aim of the research is to assess whether the promises and narratives presented in political speeches align with the actual progress of youth-focused policies such as the National Education Policy (NEP 2020), the Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY), and emerging initiatives in artificial intelligence and innovation. The methodology follows Van Dijk's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) model, which examines discourse at textual, cognitive, and social levels. Four key speeches delivered between 2021 and 2023 were analyzed, and the narratives were compared with official policy documents, government press releases, and secondary research to identify overlaps and gaps. The main findings indicate that while speeches consistently highlight inclusive, future-oriented themes of skill development, education reform, and technological advancement, the pace of implementation is uneven. Many initiatives mentioned remain in pilot or early stages, with limited rural reach and disparities across states. This reflects a recurring gap between political ambition and policy reality. The study implies that political discourse often amplifies successes while underplaying challenges. Future research should include youth perspectives and quantitative evaluation of policy outcomes to strengthen accountability in political communication.

Keywords: *Youth Empowerment; Political Rhetoric; Critical Discourse Analysis; Policy Implementation, India*

1. Introduction

India is acknowledged for its demographic topography where youth (ages 15–29) comprises about 27.5% of the population that offers a powerful driver for socio-economic transformation (Malik, 2015). The youth contribute significantly to the economic growth of the country. This was exemplified by

under-30 entrepreneurs who raised USD 5.2 billion in funding and created over 64,000 jobs, advancing India's startup ecosystem (ETech, 2025). In the realm of innovation, young leaders are advancing in numerous sectors. One such sector is sustainable technologies which includes eco-friendly building materials and wheelchair-accessible solutions, driving a wave of green, socially conscious entrepreneurship (The Times of India, 2025a). For social transformation, Indian youth are at the forefront of shaping democratic engagement, redefining freedom, and championing inclusion by questioning norms and advocating for marginalized groups, all while leveraging digital platforms to promote justice and equality (The Times of India, 2025).

Youth empowerment strengthens human capital and boosts entrepreneurship and innovation by equipping young people with the skills, motivation, and opportunities they need to contribute meaningfully to the economy and society. When youth gain access to education, vocational training, and real-world programs, they build practical abilities and confidence that directly enhance workforce productivity and adaptability (Williams, 2013). Entrepreneurship training and support combining mentorship, funding, and proven business models enable youth to launch startups, generate employment, and translate innovative ideas into successful startups (Malik, 2015). Together, these investments create a circle: as empowered youth become job creators and innovators, they diversify the economy, address local challenges with creative solutions, and fuel a dynamic culture of growth. This integrated approach ensures that India's demographic advantage evolves into doable economic and social progress.

Over the past decade, India has implemented several policies to empower the young population through skill development, education, and civic engagement. The Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY), launched in 2015, was designed to enhance employability by providing industry-relevant skills. The National Policy on Skill Development emphasizes large-scale skilling through industrial training institutes (ITIs) and public-private partnerships. While it has significant outreach, there remains a need for stronger alignment with market demands and a balance between urban and rural contexts. Similarly, the Rajiv Gandhi Scheme for Empowerment of Adolescent Girls (2011) demonstrated success in building life skills, self-confidence, and future readiness among adolescent girls. More recently, the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 has promoted multidisciplinary education, early exposure to technology, and strong emphasis on psychological wellness for students (Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2020).

In India, political speeches have historically played a powerful role in shaping public opinion and inspiring collective action. One of the most iconic speeches is Jawaharlal Nehru's "Tryst with Destiny" delivered on August 14, 1947, which marked India's independence and instilled hope, unity, and a vision for the nation's future (Nehru, 1947). Similarly, Mahatma Gandhi's "Quit India" speech on August 8, 1942, delivered at the Gowalia Tank Maidan in Bombay, called for determined, passive resistance against British colonial rule, emphasizing the urgency of India's independence (Gandhi, 1942). Both speeches demonstrate how political oratory in India has been central to driving social transformation and strengthening democratic identity.

However, there is a gap where these speeches do not always translate into actual change, leading to difficulties in policy implementation. This happens due to the involvement of multiple stakeholders across government, organisations, and communities who often have different perspectives. For instance, this can be observed in the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, which aims to transform India's education system by promoting holistic, multidisciplinary learning, skill development, and equitable access for all students. What can be observed is that while the policy sets clear goals for practical and inclusive education, challenges such as limited resources, varying regional capacities, and differences in interpretation can make it difficult to achieve these objectives fully. Despite these hurdles, the NEP reflects a strong vision to prepare youth for future challenges and create a more equitable and skilled society (Kumar, 2024).

While there is a growing body of literature on political communication and public policy in India, there remains a clear gap of not analyzing enough political rhetoric and policy implementation for the youth of the country. Existing studies focus on political rhetoric and policy evaluation in isolation, but limited studies explore the relation between the two. The present study seeks to bridge that gap by examining Prime Minister Narendra Modi's discourse on youth empowerment covering skilling, education, and civic participation and comparing it with actual policy implementation and effectiveness. The study aims to use Van Dijk's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) model, which explores the intersection of language, ideology, and social understanding. The study will analyse four speeches of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's speech before the 2024 elections to reflect on the political intent and whether they align with real policy progress (Bharatiya Janata Party, 2024; Sudhakar & Mate, 2023).

2. Methodology

The current study follows Van Dijk's critical discourse analysis model, which focuses on the connection between language, power, social image and ideology (van Dijk, 2001). The aim of the study is to understand how Prime Minister Narendra Modi constructs narrative around youth centric policies. The main objective of the study is to critically examine how prime minister Narendra Modi constructs a political narrative around youth development and youth centric policies through his speeches and to examine whether this rhetoric vision aligns with the actual implementation of public policies. This research seeks to explore how discourse is used to assess whether political rhetoric translates into effective inclusive policy. Patterns of the speech will be compared to the existing youth policies introduced or enhanced during his tenure in order to see the gap between rhetoric and policy (van Dijk, 2001; Modi, n.d.).

2.1 Data Collection

This study uses four speeches by PM Modi from 2021-2024. These include post budget webinar, world youth skills day, skill development and pariksha pai charcha. Speeches are chosen based on relevance i.e. before 2024 elections, youth issues education, skilling, entrepreneurship and civic participation. Videos have been sourced from official YouTube channels and transcripts are verified (Modi, 2011). The data for the study consists of officially released video recordings and textual transcripts of speeches delivered by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The speeches were originally delivered in Hindi and later transcribed into English using transcription platforms sourced from official government platforms (Prime Minister's Office, n.d.). Other sources include publicly accessible platforms such as YouTube (Modi, 2011). The demographics of the speeches are mentioned below.

Table 1: A description of the speeches given by Prime Minister Narendra Modi prior to 2024 elections

| Name of Speaker | Designation | Occasion | Date | Term in Office |
|-----------------|----------------|----------------------------------|---------------------|----------------|
| Narendra Modi | Prime Minister | Post-budget webinar | 25th February, 2023 | 9 years |
| Narendra Modi | Prime Minister | G20 education ministers' meeting | 22th June, 2023 | 9 years |
| Narendra Modi | Prime Minister | World youth skills day | 15th July, 2021 | 7 years |
| Narendra Modi | Prime Minister | Inauguration of GPAI Summit | 12th December, 2023 | 9 years |

2.2 Ethical Considerations

All data whether in the form of video recordings, official transcripts, or translated versions has been accessed from verified government platforms such as the Prime Minister's Office (PMO, 2023) (Prime Minister's Office, n.d.), Press Information Bureau (PIB, 2023) (Prime Minister's Office, n.d.), and publicly available platforms like YouTube (Modi, 2011). These materials are already part of the public domain and open to public interpretation. The goal is to examine the speeches using Van Dijk's Critical Discourse Analysis framework without imposing any political bias or personal agenda. All efforts have been made to present the content faithfully.

2.3 Data Analysis

This study employs Van Dijk's (1993) socio-cognitive model of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to examine Prime Minister Narendra Modi's speeches on youth development, education, skilling, and national progress. Van Dijk's CDA framework analyzes political communication through three interconnected levels textual, cognitive, and social enabling a comprehensive exploration of language, ideology, and power dynamics (Van Dijk, 2001).

Textual Analysis focuses on the strategic construction of language, examining themes such as youth development, skilling, and education. It analyzes linguistic devices, including lexical choices (positive vs. negative terms), pronouns ("we" for inclusivity), voice (active to convey urgency), and modality (certainty or obligation), to reveal how commitment is expressed. Rhetorical devices like metaphors, repetition, and emotional appeals are assessed to understand persuasive strategies (Van Dijk, 1993).

Cognitive Analysis explores the beliefs, assumptions, and values embedded in discourse, such as framing education as a national investment or youth as agents of change. It identifies ideologies, like nationalism, that shape public perceptions of governance (Van Dijk, 2001).

Social Analysis examines how discourse reinforces power dynamics, such as state-citizen hierarchies. For instance, collective pronouns may foster inclusivity, while repeated government references establish authority, shaping citizens' expectations (Van Dijk, 1993). This multi-layered approach is ideal for analyzing Indian political communication, as it captures how Modi's rhetoric constructs nationalistic narratives and state-led empowerment while addressing implementation gaps. The dataset comprises four speeches delivered by Prime Minister Modi between 2021 and 2023, selected for their focus on youth-centric issues (Table 1). The Post-Budget Webinar (February 25, 2023) emphasized budgetary priorities for skill development and entrepreneurship (Modi, 2023a). The G20 Education Ministers' Meeting speech (June 22, 2023) highlighted India's vision for technology-driven education and global collaboration (Modi, 2023b). The World Youth Skills Day speech (July 15, 2021) celebrated vocational training under Skill India, linking skills to employment and human capital (Modi, 2021). The GPAI Summit inauguration (December 12, 2023) focused on responsible AI use and youth innovation (Modi, 2023c). Speeches were sourced from verified platforms, including the Prime Minister's Office YouTube channel and Press Information Bureau transcripts (PMO, 2023; PIB, 2023).

Table 2: Structure of Critical Discourse Analysis

| Level Of Analysis | Focus Area | Details |
|--------------------|--------------------|---|
| Textual Analysis | Topic and Theme | Consistency of youth development, skilling, education focus |
| | Lexical Choices | Positive vs negative terms used. |
| | Pronouns | Use of ‘we’, ‘us’ for inclusivity |
| | Voice | Active vs Passive to show urgency and agency |
| | Modality | Degree of certainty, obligation |
| | Rhetorical Devices | Metaphors, promises, future visioning, repetition, emotional appeal |
| Cognitive Analysis | Beliefs | The main ideas or things that leaders strongly think are true. For example, the belief that India’s young people are the country’s biggest strength for progress. |
| | Assumptions | The hidden expectations behind what is said. |
| | Values | The important things that are given priority. For example, innovation, self-reliance, unity, and equal opportunities for all. |
| Social Analysis | Ideology | The bigger set of ideas or way of thinking that guides the message |
| | Power Dynamics | Relationship between government and citizens |

3. Results and Discussion

This section presents a detailed analysis of PM Modi’s speeches, illustrating how his language, rhetorical strategies, and ideological framing emphasize youth-centric policies. It explores the connection between political discourse, policy implementation, and its broader social impact.

3.1 Textual Analysis

Textual analysis, as outlined by Van Dijk (2015), examines the strategic use of language in Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s four speeches (2021–2023) to construct narratives around youth empowerment, education, and technology. By analyzing lexical choices, pronouns, voice, modality, and rhetorical devices, this section reveals how Modi persuades audiences and fosters a sense of collective action, aligning with nationalistic ideologies like Atmanirbhar Bharat (self-reliant India).

Across the speeches, positive lexical choices such as “future-ready,” “inclusive,” and “self-reliant” convey optimism and progress, while negative terms like “rigid and outdated” (Post-Budget Webinar, Modi, 2023a) critique existing systems to justify reforms. Collective pronouns (“we,” “our”) foster inclusivity, as seen in “We must build a strong culture of internships” (Modi, 2023a), positioning youth as partners in national development. Active voice dominates, enhancing urgency, as in “We will transform education” (G20 Education Ministers’ Meeting, Modi, 2023b), while modal verbs like “must” and “will” signal commitment and certainty.

Rhetorical devices amplify persuasion. Repetition of “skilling, reskilling, upskilling” in the World Youth Skills Day speech (Modi, 2021) emphasizes continuous learning, aligning with Skill India’s goals. Metaphors, such as “Education is the architect of humanity’s future” (Modi, 2023b), frame education as a global and national priority, reinforcing India’s leadership aspirations. Cultural references, like Lord Vishwakarma in the World Youth Skills Day speech, connect skilling to Indian heritage, enhancing emotional appeal (Modi, 2021). In the GPAI Summit speech, addressing the audience as “Friends” and emphasizing “responsible” AI use creates a friendly yet authoritative tone (Modi, 2023c).

Specific differences emerge across speeches. The Post-Budget Webinar (February 25, 2023) focuses on domestic skilling initiatives, using phrases like “transforming India’s youth” to align with budgetary priorities (Modi, 2023a). The G20 Education Ministers’ Meeting speech (June 22, 2023) adopts a global lens, with direct address (“excellencies”) and urgency (“we must resolve by 2030”) to position India as a collaborative leader (Modi, 2023b). The World Youth Skills Day speech (July 15, 2021) leverages cultural narratives, linking skills to dignity via Mahabharata references (Modi, 2021). The GPAI Summit speech (December 12, 2023) balances optimism (“inclusive AI”) with caution (“cybersecurity threats”), reflecting a forward-looking yet responsible vision (Modi, 2023c).

Overall, Modi’s language strategically fosters hope, urgency, and inclusivity, aligning with nationalistic goals of collective progress. However, the emphasis on future-oriented promises may downplay implementation challenges, a pattern further explored in the cognitive and social analyses. This textual analysis reveals how linguistic choices not only convey policy priorities but also reinforce centralized governance, shaping public expectations of state-led empowerment.

3.2 Social Analysis

In this section, social analysis is used to understand how the speeches highlight the role of people, the government and society. This is done by understanding how they talk about teamwork, responsibility and values. The analysis focuses on how the speaker encourages cooperation and makes people feel connected.

In the first speech the speaker shows that the government is helping and supporting young people. The government is seen as working together with citizens, especially the youth to build a better future. The use of words like ‘we’ and ‘our’ creates a feeling of togetherness. It also shows that the government cares about education and skill development and wants to make it easier for everyone to grow and succeed. The speaker talks about important programs and initiatives which shows that the government is serious about helping people. This creates trust between the government and the audience and makes them feel they are part of the journey.

In the second speech the speaker shows that the government and the people must work as a team to improve education and technology. The speech explains that education can help people reach new heights and solve global problems. The repeated use of ‘we’ and ‘our’ gives the audience the feeling that everyone is working together. It also talks about inclusion of women and different communities so that no one is left behind. The speech shows that the government is offering tools and resources but it is the people who will make the change happen. This way the audience feels encouraged and involved in making the country better. In the third speech the speaker focuses on the idea that skills are not only important for jobs but also for self-confidence and independence. The government is seen as helping people learn new skills and giving them opportunities. The speaker uses examples of traditional values and culture to connect with the audience and show that learning new skills is not against their beliefs but something they can be proud of. The speech makes people feel that by working together they can build a stronger and better society. It also shows that everyone has a role to play and the government is ready to support them.

In the fourth speech, the speaker talks about how artificial intelligence can help solve big problems but also how it must be used carefully. The government is shown as a leader that gives tools and guidance while encouraging people to act responsibly. The speech also explains how teamwork is needed between countries and communities so that artificial intelligence helps everyone. The use of ‘we’ and ‘our’ makes the audience feel included and important. The speaker also explains that the government is providing platforms and training but it is the people who need to use them properly. This creates a sense of shared responsibility and trust. The message Social analysis, following Van Dijk (2001), examines how Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s speeches (2021–2023) construct state-citizen dynamics, reinforcing power hierarchies and ideological narratives around youth empowerment. By analyzing language that promotes teamwork, trust, and inclusivity, this section reveals how Modi’s rhetoric positions the government as the primary facilitator of progress, aligning with nationalistic ideologies like Atmanirbhar Bharat (self-reliant India).

Across the speeches, collective pronouns (“we,” “our”) foster a sense of unity, as in “We must build a strong culture of internships” (Post-Budget Webinar, Modi, 2023a), positioning youth as partners in state-led development. This rhetoric constructs a collaborative image, yet frequent references to government initiatives (e.g., Skill India, NEP 2020) emphasize state authority, suggesting dependency on centralized programs. For example, the Post-Budget Webinar highlights budgetary priorities for skilling, framing the government as a proactive enabler (Modi, 2023a). Similarly, the G20 Education Ministers’ Meeting speech (June 22, 2023) uses “we” to include global audiences (“excellencies”), promoting India as a collaborative leader while reinforcing national pride (Modi, 2023b).

The World Youth Skills Day speech (July 15, 2021) connects skilling to cultural values, referencing Lord Vishwakarma to frame skills as a source of dignity and independence, encouraging youth participation in government programs (Modi, 2021). The GPAI Summit speech (December 12, 2023) emphasizes “responsible” AI use and global teamwork, using “Friends” to create accessibility while underscoring state guidance (Modi, 2023c). These strategies align with findings that collective language enhances trust and engagement (Chong & Druckman, 2007), as seen in India’s skilling programs, where community participation increases youth enrollment (Kumar, 2024).

However, the rhetoric’s focus on national unity and state-led empowerment may marginalize regional or dissenting voices. By presenting initiatives as universally beneficial, Modi’s discourse downplays challenges like uneven rural access, reinforcing a centralized governance model. Globally, similar youth empowerment rhetoric, such as the EU’s Youth Guarantee, emphasizes regional collaboration over state dominance (European Commission, 2023), highlighting India’s unique nationalistic approach. This analysis reveals how Modi’s language builds trust and collective identity but prioritizes state authority, shaping public expectations of government-led progress, a theme further explored in policy implementation gaps.

3.3 Cognitive Analysis

Cognitive analysis, per Van Dijk (1993), uncovers the beliefs, assumptions, and values embedded in discourse, revealing how Modi’s speeches (2021–2023) shape public perceptions of youth empowerment. This level examines ideologies framing problems (e.g., skill gaps) and solutions (e.g., state-led skilling), reflecting nationalistic values like self-reliance (Atmanirbhar Bharat) and collective progress (Othman et al., 2023). The speeches position youth as India’s “driving force,” assuming technology and practical education will unlock demographic dividends, while downplaying structural barriers like inequality.

In the Post-Budget Webinar (Modi, 2023a), youth empowerment anchors the “Amrit Kaal” vision a 25-year roadmap to India@100 assuming practical education (e.g., SWAYAM, National Digital University) fosters employability and economic growth. Values of inclusion emerge via technology bridging urban-rural divides, yet this overlooks persistent access gaps.

The G20 Education Ministers’ Meeting speech (Modi, 2023b) globalizes this frame, believing reskilling via platforms like DIKSHA enables youth leadership in international challenges. Assumptions of fairness through multilingualism and Global South collaboration reflect neoliberal ideology, prioritizing equitable innovation.

The World Youth Skills Day address (Modi, 2021) roots beliefs in cultural heritage, assuming skills confer dignity (e.g., via PMKVY, GOAL, Van Dhan Yojana for marginalized groups). Values of equity and self-reliance align with nationalist ideology, positing continuous upskilling as a path to national strength.

The GPAI Summit speech (Modi, 2023c) views AI as transformative, assuming ethical training mitigates risks (e.g., deepfakes) for inclusive growth. Beliefs in youth-led innovation reflect responsibility values, yet assume global frameworks prevent inequality.

Synthesizing these, the speeches embed a hopeful ideology: practical education, valued skills, and wise technology empower youth as nation-builders. Assumptions of state-enabled opportunities reinforce centralized governance, inspiring self-belief while guiding societal progress toward Amrit Kaal. However, this overlooks implementation realities, as explored below.

3.4 Policy Alignment and Implementation Gaps

Modi’s rhetoric aligns with the BJP 2024 Manifesto’s youth initiatives (Table 3), emphasizing NEP 2020, PMKVY 4.0, NAPS, and PM-VIKAS for holistic skilling. For instance, the Post-Budget Webinar positions NEP as a framework for multidisciplinary learning, while PMKVY drives upskilling via digital tools like SWAYAM.

Yet, cognitive optimism contrasts with uneven implementation. NEP 2020, aimed at 100% foundational literacy by 2025, lags with only ~20–30% state compliance; Goa implements for Classes III/VI/X from 2025–26, but nationwide rollout faces resource hurdles (Ministry of Education, 2025; Times of India, 2025a). PMKVY has trained ~1.6 crore youth by 2024, but certification is <50% and placements ~43% (PIB, 2025a; Careers360, 2025). SWAYAM boasts >3 crore enrollments, yet rural reach is ~20% due to connectivity issues (NITI Aayog, 2025).

The G20 speech highlights NIPUN Bharat for literacy by 2026-27, but progress is gradual (Department of School Education & Literacy, 2022). World Youth Skills Day invokes Skill India (since 2015) and Van Dhan Yojana for tribal entrepreneurship, with expansions ongoing but limited impact (PIB, 2017).

The GPAI speech promotes IndiaAI Mission (launched March 2024, ₹10,300 crore), with AIRAWAT operational and >34,000 GPUs by 2025, yet large-scale AI applications in agriculture/healthcare remain nascent (IMPRI, 2025; MeitY, 2025). The Digital Agriculture Mission, approved September 2024 (₹2,817 crore), integrates AI for farming but rollout extends to 2026, targeting 11 crore farmers by 2027 with uneven rural coverage (PIB, 2024; Indian Express, 2024).

This gap rhetorical ambition outpacing reality suggests cognitive frames amplify successes (e.g., pilot projects as achievements) while understating challenges like rural disparities. Policymakers must

prioritize transparency and industry alignment for equitable outcomes; youth should proactively engage while advocating accountability (Gautam, 2025).

Table 3: Policies Implementation for the youth population of India

| Policy | Domain |
|--|-----------------------|
| Expanding skill training and employment opportunities for youth | Education |
| Increasing employment opportunities in manufacturing via PLI & Make in India | Employment & Industry |
| Employment through investment in infrastructure | Employment & Industry |
| Establishing global centers for high value services | Employment & Industry |
| Transparent government recruitment and law against paper leaks | Youth & Governance |
| Establishing new institutions of higher learning (IITs,IIMs, AIIMS) | Education |
| Using technology for personalised learning(PM e-VIDHYA) | Education |
| Ensuring quality school education with 100% enrollment | Education |
| Adopting dynamic curriculum aligned with industry | Education |
| Mera Yuva Bharat-involving youth in nation-building | Youth & Governance |

4. Conclusion

The aim of this research was to examine Prime Minister Narendra Modi's speeches on youth empowerment and compare them with the policies and initiatives implemented during his tenure. Using Van Dijk's Critical Discourse Analysis model, the study looked at how language, values, and ideologies are presented in speeches, and whether they reflect the reality of policy implementation. The main finding is that while the speeches strongly highlight youth-centric themes such as skilling, education, innovation, and technology, there is often a gap between the political rhetoric and the actual progress of policies. Many programs mentioned in speeches, such as PMKVY, NEP 2020, and AI initiatives, do exist and have shown results, but their impact is uneven. Rural access, state-level rollout, and long-term sustainability remain challenges. Speeches tend to frame pilot projects or new schemes as large-scale successes, which creates a mismatch between promise and reality. Future studies could expand this research by comparing speeches from multiple political leaders across parties, instead of focusing only on one. It would also be useful to include perspectives from youth themselves, through surveys or interviews, to measure how policies affect them on the ground. Another possible way is to use data analysis on education and employment outcomes to see how far speeches and policies align with actual statistics. This would provide a more complete picture of how political communication shapes, and sometimes overstates, the progress of youth empowerment in India.

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