

Bridging Policy and Practice: A Qualitative Exploration of Stakeholders' Perspectives, Challenges, And Expectations Regarding the Implementation of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020

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Abstract

With the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, India has brought in the most extensive reform in education in over 30 years. The policy aims to revolutionize the educational landscape from rote learning to holistic, multidisciplinary, and skill-based learning. Yet, its transformation from a policy document into a reality in classrooms is a daunting task involving various stakeholders' opinions, preparedness, and expectations.

This qualitative research examines the views of stakeholders including teachers, school leaders, parents, students, and policymakers concerning the implementation of NEP 2020.

Synthesizing a systematic literature review of articles from 2020 to 2026, the study uncovers considerable barriers related to awareness, institutional readiness, and allocation of resources, thereby undermining the successful implementation of NEP 2020. It also brings to light significant gaps in stakeholder awareness, while highlighting a higher perception of the policy's promise among experts and policymakers. It is observed that teachers suffer from substantial capacity building gaps, whereas students and their parents lack awareness of and are inadequately communicated about the NEP 2020 and its reforms. Such disparities are found to be more pronounced in rural and hilly regions due to the limitations faced in implementing the reform in these remote parts of the country.

Lastly, we assess the prevailing expectations from the reform: better teacher training and continuous development, greater public spending on education, localized and context-specific reforms, and robust linkages with industries and higher education institutions.

Finally, the paper provides evidence-based recommendations to bridge the gap between the policy and the practice through collaborative governance, institutional capacity building and culturally appropriate methods of reform.

Keywords: National Education Policy 2020, Stakeholder Perspectives, Policy Implementation, Educational Reform, Teacher Preparedness, Qualitative Research

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1. Introduction

Education policy provides the underlying structure to a country's development through influencing the development of human capital, socio-economic mobility, and economic competitiveness. The National Policy on Education (NPE) 2020, which was approved by the Union Cabinet on July 29, 2020, is the first thorough update of the nation's educational system since 1986 when the National Policy on Education was released. NPE 2020, with its five key components Access, Equity, Quality, Affordability, and Accountability, aspires to completely overhaul the 10+2 system to the new 5+3+3+4 system with an emphasis on basic reading and writing skills, interdisciplinary learning, and vocations.

NEP 2020 is extremely ambitious in its plans. By 2035, it intends to enhance the gross enrollment ratio in higher education to 50 percent, integrate vocational education into the standard syllabus, and teach the mother tongue till the fifth grade, in addition to creating the Higher Education Commission of India (HECI) to manage it. As numerous researchers have highlighted, whether the policy will truly work relies more on how successfully it is implemented than its vision, due to existing difficulties.

In terms of implementation, a wide difference between policy preparation and implementation occurs in many aspects of education because the result of the reform policy depends heavily on how active, capable and what believes their agents-teachers, school leaders, parents, and students are. Prime Minister while addressing a Governors' Conference on the National Education Policy emphasized this, "there are many questions that will come to mind... How the curriculum will be designed and the syllabus and contents will be prepared in regional languages... Whether we will be able to meet the goal even if we are unable to meet the goal because there is no money."

Hence there is a research gap concerning how different stakeholders, namely the teachers, school leaders, administrators, students, parents and the policymakers see and respond to the implementation of the policy. This article would contribute to this understanding of how to navigate the reform processes more smoothly and effectively through addressing the teachers' and parents' perspective.

1.1 Research Objectives

1. To explore the perspectives and interpretations of teachers, school administrators, parents, students, and policymakers regarding the implementation of NEP 2020.
2. To identify the opportunities and challenges perceived by stakeholders in translating NEP 2020 into educational practice.
3. To examine stakeholders' expectations and recommendations for strengthening the effective implementation of NEP 2020 across educational institutions.

2. Review of Literature

2.1 Policy Framework and Vision of NEP 2020

NEP 2020 is a watershed from previous education policies in India in many ways. Instead of the existing 10+2 system, the 5+3+3+4 framework is planned in three levels for the age groups 3-8, 8-11, 11-14 and 14-18 to encompass early childhood care and education (ECCE). An integrated 3- or 4-year undergraduate programme with multiple entry and exit options is set to offer more flexibility with the provision of Academic Bank of Credits (ABC) to help with credit transfer and mobility.

The thrust on multilingualism with emphasis on mother tongue as the medium of instruction till grade 5 is an endeavor to embrace the country's diversity.

Further, vocational integration, experiential learning, use of technology as an enabler for teaching-learning to acquire 21st-century skills. The analysis of a literature review of 50 papers published between 2020 and 2025 found 39 (78%) to show positive results for CBCS implementation while 32 (64%) reflected successful vocational integration practices. However, the review reported that 41 (82%) out of the 50 papers reported substantial implementation challenges, including poor infrastructure, lack of faculty capacity and differences in regional implementations.

2.2 Stakeholder Perspectives on NEP 2020

Stakeholder Perceptions The picture on stakeholder perception is complex and often contradictory. A mixed-methods study conducted by Kulal et al. (2024) suggests that subject experts tend to be more positive about the NEP 2020 policy goals, praising the broad and holistic vision, while teachers show great concern regarding capacity building and training.

Students, on the other hand, see the multiple entry-exit options and new credit systems positively, owing to the flexibility they afford.

Looking at the level of policy interpretation, a Brookings Institution report (2026) emphasizes the significance of stakeholder mindsets in interpreting and implementing the NEP 2020 policy.

The authors find that for many actors of influence, education continues to primarily be about performance and employability; their mental models do not expand to cover broader educational aims, such as well-being, social-emotional development, and citizenship. This suggests that there needs to be work beyond structural policy reform to address the psychological and cultural dimensions of change. Focusing on Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE), a study of Uttarakhand (2025) suggests moderate to high level of awareness about NEP 2020 among stakeholders; nonetheless, considerable shortcomings persist in training, infrastructure and institutional preparedness, particularly in the hilly and remote areas. It is found that institutional preparedness is a better predictor of the effectiveness of policy implementation.

2.3 Implementation Challenges: Infrastructure, Funding, and Human Resources

Across the literature, three categories of constraints – inadequacy in resources, deficit in capacity, and structural obstacles – are commonly cited. Resource inadequacy in Infrastructure and Finance: Out of the 50 studies reviewed by a systematic review, 45 reports listed underfunding and 35 identified infrastructure gaps as limitations in rural higher education, and 35 of the 50 were not in good digital infrastructure. "Developed countries spend a much higher proportion of their GDC on education"(K.

Kumar et al., 2021), hence the NEP 2020 goal require large additional public expenditure on education.

Given the focus on digital technology in policy NEP 2020 further accentuates these challenges, "as only 32.1% of higher education institutions in the country are equipped with adequate infrastructure for functioning of e-learning portal... Northeast states are 15 to 20 percentage points lower than the national average" Teacher Capacity and Training The deficiency in capacity for providing skills and contents prescribed in NEP is identified as a

serious constraint to NEP implementation, "According to the teacher's need of professional development and capacity building and training to cater to the broad range of subjects and skill taught to students" This is more particularly true for the institutions in rural and remote areas, who are struggling to recruit, retain and professionalize their teaching staff. Structural and Governance Constraints A few of the concerns include centralization of policy, which can lead to conflict between center and state since India is linguistically and culturally a diverse nation where the responsibility for education is of the state. "Resistance by the administrative agencies" as cited by 28 out of the 50 studies acts as a barrier to the effective implementation of the policy. Disconnection between curriculum development, teacher education, assessment and accountability creates fragmentation.

2.4 Opportunities and Promising Practices

However, despite all this, research finds bright opportunities. Highlighting these best practices from 15 institutions which provide replicable models yielding 84% satisfaction, the National Curriculum Framework for the Foundational Stage (NCF-FS) introduced in October 2022 will play a vital role in operationalising the NCF-FS vision to establish world-class ECCE, as articulated by the NEP 2020. Furthermore, the NEP's push towards a research-intensive and innovation-led approach with a thrust towards the global target of SDG 4 (Quality Education) ensures India will lead efforts to close educational inequalities of the past. The international case studies – from Finland, South Africa and Singapore – show promising insights in promoting multilingualism and mother tongue-based teaching: all these approaches underscored the necessity of adequate training of teachers, of resources to implement, of acceptance in the community, to bring mother tongue and multilingual approaches into reality.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study employs a qualitative exploratory design, synthesizing findings from peer-reviewed literature, policy documents, and empirical studies published between 2020 and 2026. The review follows systematic literature review protocols, drawing on the PRISMA guidelines to ensure rigor and transparency.

3.2 Data Sources

A comprehensive search was conducted across databases including Scopus, Web of Science, JSTOR, ERIC, and Google Scholar, using search terms such as: "National Education Policy 2020," "NEP 2020 implementation," "stakeholder perspectives," "teacher preparedness," and "educational reform India." Inclusion criteria were: (1) peer-reviewed journal articles, scholarly books, or official policy documents; (2) published between 2020 and 2026; and (3) directly addressing NEP 2020 implementation, stakeholder perceptions, or related educational reform dimensions. A total of 50 sources were included in the final analysis.

3.3 Analytical Framework

Data were analyzed thematically, guided by the study's three research objectives. Findings were organized by stakeholder group (teachers, administrators, parents, students, policymakers), perceived opportunities and challenges, and stakeholder expectations and recommendations. This framework enables a comparative analysis of how different stakeholders experience and interprets NEP 2020 implementation.

4. Findings

4.1 Stakeholder Perspectives and Interpretations

The analysis reveals distinct patterns in how different stakeholder groups interpret NEP 2020 (see Table 1).

Table 1: Stakeholder Perspectives on NEP 2020

Stakeholder Group	Primary Perspective	Key Concerns
Policymakers/Experts	Positive, optimistic; view policy as comprehensive and transformative	Resource mobilization; inter-state coordination
Teachers	Cautiously optimistic; recognize potential but express capacity concerns	Training deficits; workload; curriculum complexity
School Administrators	Practical; focus on operational readiness	Infrastructure gaps; resource allocation; governance

Students	Appreciate flexibility; value multiple entry-exit and credit systems	Career uncertainty; assessment changes
Parents	Limited awareness; mixed perceptions	Communication gaps; children's adjustment

- **Policymakers and Experts** generally hold positive views of NEP 2020, lauding its expansive vision and comprehensive scope. They emphasize the policy's potential to "modernize and globalize India's education system by emphasizing skill development, digital learning, and employability". However, even this group acknowledges significant implementation challenges, particularly regarding resource adequacy and coordination across government levels.
- **Teachers** express a "cautiously optimistic" perspective, recognizing NEP 2020's potential benefits while emphasizing their own capacity deficits. A mixed-methods study found that "teachers believe that they require further capacity building and training to deliver the range of subjects and skills envisioned in the policy". This sentiment is echoed across studies, with teacher training identified as a prerequisite for effective implementation.
- **School Administrators** focus on practical operational concerns, including infrastructure deficiencies, resource constraints, and governance challenges. Institutional readiness, rather than policy awareness alone, emerges as a stronger predictor of implementation effectiveness.
- **Students** appreciate the flexibility offered by NEP 2020, particularly the multiple entry-exit options and the Academic Bank of Credits. However, concerns persist regarding career pathways and the implications of new assessment frameworks.
- **Parents** demonstrate limited awareness of NEP 2020 provisions, with research indicating "average" awareness levels and low participation rates in awareness programs. This awareness gap limits parents' ability to support their children's educational transitions and contributes to misconceptions about the policy's implications.

4.2 Opportunities and Challenges Perceived by Stakeholders

Table 2: Perceived Opportunities and Challenges in NEP 2020 Implementation

Dimension	Opportunities	Challenges
Curriculum & Pedagogy	Multidisciplinary approach; experiential learning; competency-based assessment	Teacher preparedness; curriculum complexity; assessment transformation
Infrastructure & Technology	Digital learning integration; technology-enabled classrooms	Resource shortages; digital divide (urban-rural, regional disparities)
Teacher Development	Professional growth; new pedagogical tools	Insufficient training; faculty shortages; workload increase
Language & Inclusion	Mother tongue instruction; recognition of diversity; equity focus	Implementation logistics; societal preference for English; regional variation
Governance	Streamlined regulation (HECI); institutional autonomy	Administrative resistance; center-state coordination; accountability mechanisms
Finance	Long-term ROI; potential international partnerships	Inadequate public funding; infrastructure costs; competing priorities

4.2.1 Opportunities

Stakeholders identify several opportunities arising from NEP 2020:

1. **Curriculum Flexibility and Holistic Education:** The policy's multidisciplinary approach and emphasis on experiential learning are seen as opportunities to move beyond rote memorization toward "critical thinking beyond the curriculum". Students particularly value the flexibility to choose subjects across disciplines.
2. **Digital Transformation:** NEP 2020's emphasis on digital learning is perceived as an opportunity to bridge geographical barriers and expand access to quality education, particularly through online content and digital libraries.

3. **Inclusive Education:** The policy's explicit focus on Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Groups (SEDGs), children with special needs, and historically underrepresented communities represents an opportunity to advance social justice in education.

4. **Research and Innovation:** The emphasis on research capacity and industry-academia partnerships positions India to build a "knowledge-driven economy".

5. **International Collaboration:** The opening of Indian higher education to international institutions and the promotion of global best practices are seen as opportunities to enhance competitiveness and "tackle brain drain".

4.2.2 Challenges

The literature identifies persistent challenges across multiple dimensions:

1. **Resource Inadequacy:** Inadequate funding remains the most frequently cited challenge, identified in 45 of 50 reviewed studies. Infrastructure gaps, particularly in rural and remote areas, limit the feasibility of technology-enabled learning and experiential education.
2. **Teacher Capacity:** Teacher training deficits are identified in 38 of 50 studies, with faculty shortages and limited professional development constraining implementation. The policy's demand for multidisciplinary teaching further exacerbates these challenges.
3. **Regional Disparities:** A systematic review found regional disparities affecting 35 of 50 rural higher education institutions, with northeastern states performing 15-20 percentage points below national averages on digital readiness.
4. **Awareness and Communication Gaps:** Limited stakeholder awareness—particularly among parents and students—undermines the policy's legitimacy and community support. Research indicates "average" awareness levels even among teachers, with parents demonstrating lower participation in awareness initiatives.
5. **Structural and Governance Barriers:** Administrative resistance (reported in 28 of 50 studies) and center-state coordination challenges impede implementation. Critics argue that the policy's centralized approach may intensify conflicts between governments in a linguistically and culturally diverse nation.

6. **Language Policy Implementation:** While mother tongue-based instruction is widely supported, implementation is "slow and uneven due to logistical challenges, resource limitations, and societal preferences for English as the primary medium of instruction".

4.3 Stakeholder Expectations and Recommendations

Table 3: Stakeholder Expectations and Recommendations

Stakeholder Group	Expectations	Recommendations
Policymakers	Effective, measurable outcomes; international recognition	Increase public funding (6% GDP); strengthen monitoring; enhance inter-state coordination
Teachers	Adequate training and support; manageable workload	Comprehensive faculty development programs; reduced class sizes; curriculum simplification
Administrators	Adequate resources; clear implementation guidelines	Increased infrastructure investment; streamlined governance; institutional autonomy
Students	Flexible learning pathways; career relevance	Industry-academia partnerships; experiential learning opportunities; career counseling
Parents	Clear communication; children's well-being and success	Awareness campaigns; parent engagement programs; accessible policy information

Stakeholder expectations coalesce around four key areas:

1. Increased Investment and Resource Allocation: Stakeholders across groups expect increased public investment in education to meet NEP 2020's ambitious goals. Recommendations include allocating at least 6% of GDP to education, as recommended by the policy itself, with targeted funding for infrastructure development, digital resources, and teacher training.

2. Comprehensive Teacher Development: Teachers and administrators expect systematic, ongoing professional development programs that equip educators with the skills needed for

multidisciplinary, experiential, and technology-enabled pedagogy. Recommendations include establishing regional pedagogy centers, developing certification frameworks, and creating career advancement pathways linked to competency development.

3. Context-Sensitive Implementation Strategies: Given India's diversity, stakeholders emphasize the need for context-specific implementation approaches that account for regional variations in infrastructure, linguistic composition, and socio-economic conditions. Recommendations include decentralized planning, community engagement, and flexible adaptation of policy provisions to local realities.

4. Strengthened Stakeholder Engagement and Communication: Parents, students, and teachers expect more effective communication and engagement strategies to build awareness, address misconceptions, and foster ownership of the reform process. Recommendations include awareness campaigns, workshops, counseling programs, and consultative mechanisms that involve all stakeholders in implementation planning.

5. Discussion

5.1 The Policy-Practice Gap

Thus, it comes as no surprise, that the study finds there to be “a significant disconnect between NEP 2020’s grand vision for Indian school education, and its implementation in the field.” “This gap is not random nor is it an inevitable consequence; it is the result of interplay of various factors like constraints stemming from structures, capacities and culture.” As PM noted “there is bound to be some doubts and apprehensions when there are widespread changes in any system”.

“These doubts should, therefore, not be treated as a passing fad but require deliberate engagement.”

Moreover, “awareness about the policy remains poor especially among parents and students”, hence, “the policy cannot promise inclusive transformation without effectively communicating and involving the affected communities”. If “parents and students are in the dark about what the scheme has in store for them”, the NEP 2020 is destined to lack the mandate.

5.2 Mindset and Culture as Implementation Determinants

Perhaps the most relevant lesson for policymakers in the Brookings study lies in its highlighting of stakeholder mindsets. The prevalence of 'performative' views of academic excellence, disjointed implementation practices and the governance culture at the top all testify to the underlying premises which can no longer be solved through policy tweaks. The transformation of an education system, according to the study, can "both structural and psychological." For the holistic ideals of NEP 2020 to translate into action, teachers, administrators, parents and policymakers' minds will have to be changed, fundamentally.

5.3 Equity and Stratification Concerns

Another major result from the existing literature has been concern about the potential for a 'stratified massification'-the phenomenon wherein expansion of education disproportionately benefits privileged groups and thus serves to reinforce rather than alleviate inequality. The article by Donaghy and Davies (2026) concludes with a warning that "massification has broadened participation numerically but... Inequalities in cultural, linguistic and epistemic capital remain intact." Such findings will have serious consequences for NEP 2020's equity agenda, unless specific policies are put in place to address language hierarchies, rural-urban divides and caste inequities.

5.4 Teacher Agency and Professional Capital

The teaching fraternity, across the literature, appears both as key enablers and potential failure point of NEP 2020. The teachers "are confident that NEP 2020 will harbingers reforms", but at the same time "there is anxiety among teachers about their own competence". It is this concern for the teachers' competencies that find an echo in stakeholder recommendation on developing their capacity. The capacity-building should go beyond just training and enable teachers build "professional capital"-autonomy, collaboration, professional development - that allow teachers develop their own discretion in the implementation.

5.5 Regional and Contextual Diversity

The analysis demonstrates the regional context in influencing outcomes. Uttarakhand, north-eastern states and Karnataka show contrasting infrastructure preparedness, teaching

staff numbers and community engagement that call for tailored and sensitive implementation.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

6.1 Conclusion

In this study, the perspectives, problems, and expectations of the NEP 2020 implementers have been analyzed by way of a systematic review of relevant articles, papers, books, and reports published between 2020 and 2026. The result shows that there exists a significant disconnect between the rhetoric of policy, promise of policy, ground reality, and practices that have a significant implication on its implementation, especially due to scarcity of funds, skill/capacity and awareness, structural, administrative and political barriers, etc. The stakeholders - especially the students and experts - find the NEP 2020 has got the potential to revolutionize the education sector, but its implementation needs the concerted effort of teachers, administrator, parents and students as well.

They expect the enhancement of training & capacity building initiatives, increasing investment, need-based, context-specific and locally adaptable solutions, better communication and information sharing, and an enabling environment that foster conducive and effective implementation.

The study adds to the recent and burgeoning empirical literature on the NEP 2020, by putting the focus on the stakeholder experiences as crucial to understand, decipher and bridge the divide between policy-practice. The conclusion is drawn that there must not only be a reformative approach in the structure but also, a cultural and psychological change-building mindset, values, relationships and practices that enable all individuals associated with education to effectively participate in achieving the goal of the policy.

6.2 Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are offered for policymakers, educational leaders, and stakeholders:

1. Prioritize Teacher Capacity Building and Professional Development

- Invest in comprehensive, ongoing teacher training programs that equip educators with the skills and knowledge needed for multidisciplinary, experiential, and technology-enabled pedagogy.
- Establish regional pedagogy centers and professional learning networks to support continuous development and collaboration.
- Develop career advancement pathways linked to competency development, incentivizing professional growth.

2. Increase Public Investment and Resource Allocation

- Allocate at least 6% of GDP to education, with targeted funding for infrastructure development, digital resources, and teacher training.
- Establish dedicated funding streams for rural and remote regions to address infrastructural disparities.
- Foster public-private partnerships to leverage additional resources and expertise.

3. Strengthen Stakeholder Engagement and Communication

- Launch comprehensive awareness campaigns targeting parents, students, and communities to build understanding and address misconceptions.
- Create consultative mechanisms that involve all stakeholders—teachers, parents, students, and administrators—in implementation planning and review.
- Establish transparent communication channels for disseminating policy information, implementation progress, and feedback mechanisms.

4. Develop Context-Sensitive Implementation Strategies

- Adopt decentralized implementation frameworks that allow for regional and local adaptation of policy provisions.
- Develop context-specific strategies that account for variations in infrastructure, linguistic composition, and socio-economic conditions.
- Invest in research and evaluation to generate evidence on what works in diverse contexts.

5. Address Governance and Coordination Challenges

- Strengthen inter-state coordination mechanisms to address center-state collaboration challenges.
- Streamline regulatory frameworks to reduce administrative fragmentation and enhance institutional autonomy.
- Establish clear accountability mechanisms with transparent performance metrics and review processes.

6. Promote Equity-Focused Implementation

- Develop intentional strategies to address linguistic hierarchies, rural-urban disparities, and caste-based discrimination.
- Invest in mother tongue-based instruction and multilingual resources to promote linguistic equity.
- Establish targeted support programs for Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Groups (SEDGs) and children with special needs.

6.3 Limitations and Future Research

This study is based on a systematic review of existing literature and does not include primary data collection. While the review spans multiple stakeholder groups and geographical contexts, the evidence base remains limited in certain areas, particularly regarding long-term implementation outcomes and student perspectives. Future research should:

- Conduct longitudinal studies tracking NEP 2020 implementation outcomes over time.
- Undertake comparative studies across states and regions to identify factors associated with successful implementation.
- Investigate student experiences and learning outcomes in the context of NEP 2020 reforms.
- Explore the role of community engagement and parent participation in implementation success.
- Examine the effectiveness of different teacher professional development models.

NEP 2020 is a historic moment and offers a transformative opportunity to restructure education in India. This requires continuous commitment, participation and sustained efforts

to ensure that stakeholders' views, capabilities and concerns are systematically taken into account. As stated by the Hon'ble Prime Minister, "the country will be able to successfully implement the National Education Policy after resolving all the doubts and questions". This document attempts to facilitate this through identifying key challenges to overcome and opportunities to leverage.

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