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TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS AND CLASSROOM-LEVEL CHALLENGES IN IMPLEMENTING NEP 2020 IN INDIAN SCHOOL EDUCATION: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF TEACHERS' EXPERIENCES

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ABSTRACT

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 represents a significant transformation in India's educational policy framework, with emphasis on holistic development, competency-based education, experiential learning, multilingualism, foundational literacy and numeracy, inclusive education, technology integration, and continuous professional development of teachers. Considerable attention has been given to the policy's objectives and implementation mechanisms, but it is important to understand how teachers experience and interpret these reforms at the classroom level. The present qualitative study explores teachers' perceptions of NEP 2020 and the challenges they encounter while translating its recommendations into classroom practice. The study adopts an interpretive qualitative research design and proposes semi-structured interviews with school teachers, supplemented where feasible by classroom observations and relevant school documents. Thematic analysis is employed to identify recurring patterns in teachers' experiences. The analytical framework focuses on six broad domains: understanding of NEP 2020, pedagogical transformation, assessment practices, teacher preparedness and professional development, institutional and infrastructural constraints, and teacher agency. Existing evidence indicates that teachers may recognize the potential of student-centred and experiential approaches while simultaneously experiencing constraints associated with workload, resources, training, class size, assessment expectations, and contextual diversity. The study argues that successful implementation of NEP 2020 requires moving beyond policy dissemination towards sustained, practice-oriented professional development, institutional support, teacher autonomy, collaborative learning, and context-sensitive implementation. This paper adds to the growing body of literature on implementation of educational policy by foregrounding teachers as active interpreters and agents of policy and not passive recipients of reform.

Keywords: NEP 2020, Qualitative Study, Teachers' Perceptions, Classroom Challenges, Policy Implementation, Teacher Agency, Professional Development, Indian Education

INTRODUCTION

Educational policies are ultimately realized in classrooms. Regardless of how comprehensive a policy document may be, its impact depends substantially on how teachers interpret, negotiate, adapt, and implement its recommendations in everyday educational contexts.

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The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, approved by the Government of India on 29 July 2020, proposes a comprehensive transformation of the Indian education system. Among its major priorities are foundational literacy and numeracy, holistic education, competency-based learning, experiential pedagogy, critical thinking, multilingualism, technology integration, vocational exposure, inclusive education, and teacher professional development. E Education Government Portal

The policy gives teachers a central role in educational transformation. It explicitly states that teachers should receive continuous opportunities for professional development and envisages at least 50 hours of continuous professional development (CPD) annually for each teacher. The proposed professional development areas include competency-based education, formative and adaptive assessment, experiential learning, arts-integrated learning, sports-integrated learning, storytelling, and foundational literacy and numeracy. E Education Government Portal

The National Curriculum Framework for School Education (NCF-SE) 2023 further emphasizes that teachers need appropriate resources, professional development, autonomy, supportive physical environments, and institutional support to translate curricular reforms into classroom practice. E Education Government Portal

However, the implementation of an ambitious educational policy is rarely straightforward. Teachers work within particular institutional, social, linguistic, cultural, and material contexts. A recommendation such as "experiential learning" may appear straightforward at the policy level but can become considerably more complex when a teacher has a large class, limited teaching-learning materials, substantial administrative responsibilities, limited preparation time, or students with highly diverse learning needs. Government of India, Ministry of Education. (2020)

Recent research has increasingly emphasized this implementation gap. A 2026 comparative classroom study across Uttarakhand, Telangana, Jharkhand, and Goa reported that teachers' interpretations of NEP 2020 are shaped by local educational cultures, teacher beliefs, administrative workload, resources, and professional-learning opportunities. B Brookings

Earlier research has similarly identified teachers' apprehensions concerning the implementation of NEP 2020. Sharma and Akalamkam's study of school teachers examined perceptions across curriculum and pedagogy, assessment, early childhood education, and governance and systemic issues, with qualitative evidence highlighting implementation concerns. N NCERT Journals

These findings demonstrate the importance of examining educational reform from the perspective of those who enact it daily. Gulati and Jain (2022)

The present paper therefore focuses specifically on the question:

How do teacher's experience, interpret, and negotiate the implementation of NEP 2020 in their everyday classroom practices?

RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

Most policy discussions tend to concentrate on what NEP 2020 proposes rather than on how teachers experience its implementation.

A qualitative approach is particularly appropriate because teachers' experiences cannot always be adequately captured through predetermined questionnaire categories. Teachers may simultaneously express support for a policy objective and identify substantial barriers to implementing it. They may also adapt policy recommendations according to their students, school resources, local culture, language, curriculum, and professional beliefs. Kaushi et al. (2021)

Existing studies have examined teacher perceptions using questionnaires and mixed methods. For example, Sowmya et al. examined teachers' perceptions of philosophical, curricular, and teacher-related aspects of NEP 2020, while Sharma and Akalamkam examined teachers' understanding and perceptions across multiple policy domains. N NCERT Journals+1

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The study aims at:

1) To explore teachers' understanding and interpretation of NEP 2020.
2) To understand teachers' experiences of implementing NEP 2020 at the classroom level.
3) To explore changes in teachers' pedagogical practices following the introduction of NEP 2020-Related reforms.
4) To explore the challenges faced by teachers at the classroom level.
5) To explore teachers' experiences of professional development and training in relation to NEP 2020.
6) To examine teachers' perceptions of assessment reform under NEP 2020.
7) To study the impact of infrastructure, workload, class size, resources and institutional support on implementation.
8) To explore how teachers exercise professional agency in their interpretation and adaptation of NEP-related reforms.
9) To identify teachers' recommendations for improving implementation.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURES

NEP 2020 and reform in teacher-centred pedagogy: NEP 2020 has put teachers at the heart of the transformation in education. The policy does not see teachers as mere deliverers of curriculum but as professionals who facilitate meaningful learning and holistic development of students. Ministry of Education, Government of India. (2023)

The policy's focus on competency-based and experiential learning requires teachers to adopt pedagogical practices that foster inquiry, application, creativity, collaboration and problem solving. E-Government Portal Education

This suggests a possible re-orientation of teacher identity, away from the role of information transmitter and toward the role of designer and facilitator of learning experiences. Ravindranath et al. (2026)

TEACHERS' PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

NEP 2020 recognizes the importance of professional development. The policy commits to providing opportunities for each teacher to undertake a minimum of 50 hours of CPD annually, including emerging pedagogies and assessment practices. E Education Government Portal

The Ministry of Education has also reported programs like NISHTHA to build teacher capacity in line with NEP priorities. E Education Government Portal

Professional development is meaningful to teachers only when they can connect the training to their classroom contexts.

Research on an online professional-development program that focused on experiential learning found teacher learning was enhanced when the program included pedagogy-in-action, collaborative learning, technology integration, feedback, and reflective support. N NCERT Magazines

This implies that professional development needs to move from the transmission of information to practice-based professional learning.

METHODS

This research uses a qualitative interpretive approach.

If teachers are recruited from several schools, a multiple-case study design would be particularly appropriate. If the main interest is on teachers' lived experiences, a phenomenological approach might be appropriate.

For the purpose of publication the multiple-case approach has an advantage in that comparison across different school context is possible.

PARTICIPANTS

The study sample will be 20-30 purposively selected school teachers.

Selection of participants may be made to reflect variation in:

- public/private schools;
- location (rural/urban);
- primary/upper primary/secondary school level;
- experience of teaching;
- subject specializations; and
- engagement in NEP professional development.

The ultimate number should be decided by data saturation or information power rather than a predetermined numerical requirement alone.

SAMPLING METHOD

Purposive sampling can be used to identify teachers directly involved in the implementation of NEP.

Then maximum-variation sampling can be used to ensure diversity among participants.

For instance:

Variable – possible categories

School Management Government / Private

Location Rural / Urban

Experience 1-5/6-15/16+ years

Level Primary / Junior / Senior

Training NEP training / Limited training

DATA GATHERING

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

The main source of data should be individual semi-structured interviews.

Interviews will be approximately 30–60 minutes in length.

Interviews should be audio-taped and transcribed verbatim with the consent of participants.

DISCUSSION

Ultimately, the qualitative findings should be interpreted in relation to the relationship between policy expectations and teachers' lived realities.

A useful analytical model from the literature is:

Policy Vision → Teacher Interpretation → Institutional Conditions → Classroom Adaptation → Experienced Outcomes

This model understands that policy does not automatically become practice.

Teachers receive policy messages, interpret them in the light of their existing professional knowledge and then adapt them in the light of institutional circumstances.

This interpretation is in line with the NCF-SE 2023 which identifies the need for teacher autonomy, resources, professional development, adequate pupil-teacher ratios and supportive school environments. E-Government Learning Portal

It also echoes recent classroom research that suggests that administrative workload, resources, local culture, professional beliefs and the nature of teacher training all influence teacher agency. B Brookings

Hence, the implementation should not be considered as a linear process:

Policy → Training → Application

Instead, a more realistic model:

Policy → interpretation → negotiation → adaptation → enactment in the classroom

This distinction is one of the potentially important theoretical contributions of the study.

IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHER TRAINING

The findings might have several implications for teacher education.

"Professional development should be practice-based, not primarily information based."

Second, teachers need opportunities to observe model classrooms, to try new approaches, to get feedback, and to reflect on their experience.

Third, teacher professional development needs to acknowledge that teachers already possess professional knowledge and experience in the classroom.

Fourth, peer learning and professional learning communities can provide ongoing support beyond one-time workshops.

Finally, professional development should be differentiated based on the needs of teachers, rather than assuming that all teachers have the same training needs. Sharma and Akalakkam (2021)

POLICY IMPLICATIONS FOR THE EDUCATION

The study has several implications for policy makers and educational administrators.

1) **Context Awareness in Implementation:** A uniform model of implementation may not be appropriate in the diversity of educational contexts in India.

2) **Teachers Need to Be Involved in Policy Feedback:** Formal channels that allow teachers to share implementation challenges at the classroom level.
3) **Professional Development Must Be Maintained:** The 50-hour CPD expectation should be supported by meaningful learning opportunities, rather than compliance requirements. Education Portal E Government
4) **Administration workload needs attention:** Reducing unnecessary paperwork can provide more time for lesson planning, assessment, reflection and professional learning.
5) **Assessment Reform Needs to Be Systemic:** Teachers may find it difficult to sustain new assessment practices if classroom assessment is changed without regard to broader examination expectations.

SUGGESTIONS

Based on the qualitative framework and available evidence the following recommendations are suggested:

DISCUSSION

Training → Policy → Execution

1) Replace the largely lecture-based workshops with classroom-based NEP professional-development programs.
2) Create teacher learning communities at school, cluster, block and district levels.
3) Provide training on competency-based and formative assessment methods.
4) Reduce administrative burdens not necessary, so that teachers have adequate time for
5) preparation.
6) Improve access to teaching-learning resources especially in resource constrained schools.
7) At the same time, reinforce the digital infrastructure and the digital pedagogical training.
8) Encourage teacher autonomy to translate recommendations of NEP into local classroom
9) Conditions.
10) Develop teaching materials in multiple languages, relevant to local contexts.
11) Observe implementation by observing in classroom and teacher self-reflection.
12) Engage teachers in ongoing policy feedback loops.

RESTRICTIONS

A qualitative study such as this has a number of limitations.

First, findings from a purposively selected sample cannot be statistically generalized to all teachers in India.

Second, the teachers' accounts are their perceptions and experiences, and may not always be the same as what is observable in the classroom.

Third, there is a lot of variation across states, school systems, and local contexts in implementation.

Fourth, social desirability may be a concern for interviews or participants may be concerned about raising institutional challenges.

These limitations can be partly addressed by triangulation with interviews, classroom observations, documents and reflective materials.

SUMMARY

NEP 2020 is a landmark change in India's education policy. It has significant possibilities for changing classroom education because of its focus on holistic development, competency-based learning, experiential pedagogy, inclusion, multilingualism, technology and continuous professional development. Government Portal E Education

But policy aspirations make sense only if teachers can translate them into classroom practice.

A qualitative view suggests that implementation is not just teachers following policy instructions. Teachers interpret policy through their classroom experiences, professional identities, students' needs, institutional environment, resources available and local educational cultures.

The main challenge, therefore, is not so much the acceptance of NEP 2020 by teachers. The question is whether the education system creates the conditions that enable teachers to enact its principles in a meaningful way.

Emerging evidence has highlighted the value of professional autonomy, practice-based teacher development, adequate resources, manageable workloads, collaborative learning and context-sensitive implementation. B Brookings+1.

Therefore, the implementation of NEP 2020 should be seen as a process of professional learning, negotiation, adaptation and institutional change, rather than a process of policy compliance.

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