Barriers and Enablers to Implementing NEP 2020 Principles in Teacher Education

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Abstract

The National Education Policy 2020, developed by the Ministry of Education, represents a significant new chapter in the history of education in India. It offers a complete shift in perspective regarding how we conceptualise and practice teaching, learning, and teacher preparation. The Policy does not simply suggest incremental improvement in the existing system but instead seeks to produce a systemic transformation of education in line with the requirements of the 21st century, which involves redefining the purpose and processes of education. Teacher preparation is considered the foundation for the achievement of the educational reform envisioned in this transformative policy because teachers are the primary individuals who translate educational reform objectives into classroom reality. Consequently, to effectively meet the broader goals of educational reform, it is essential to strengthen the preparation of teachers. At the same time, this Policy has a strong emphasis on holistic child development, which entails nurturing the intellectual, emotional, social and ethical potential of each child instead of focusing solely on the academic success of children. In addition to holistic development, teacher preparation programs must also prepare teachers who create opportunities for school-aged children to engage in critical thinking, creativity, collaboration and problem solving. Furthermore, the Policy promotes a move away from rote learning and examination-based instructional methods toward competency- based learning experiences that are focused on developing the ability to understand, apply, and use knowledge in the world. Finally, teachers are strongly encouraged to engage in reflective practice so that they are continuously assessing and improving their teaching practices. The integration of digital technology also forms a core component of the reform, requiring teachers to be proficient in using technological tools to enhance learning outcomes and accessibility. Systemic constraints, resource shortages, and uneven readiness across institutions create a gap between policy aspirations and actual practice. Recognizing this discrepancy, the study proposes recommendations that emphasize capacity building, contextual adaptation of policy measures, and establishment of feedback mechanisms that allow institutions to evaluate and refine their approaches over time. By systematically examining both the obstacles that impede change and the conditions that promote it, the research offers valuable insights for policymakers, teacher educators, and institutional leaders seeking to strengthen the implementation of educational reforms and ensure that the transformative promise of NEP 2020 is effectively realized.

Keywords

National Education Policy 2020, teacher education, implementation barriers, implementation enablers, curriculum reform, educational policy studies, professional development, India.

Introduction

The Ministry of Education has launched the National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020), which is a historic reform aimed at completely changing the Indian education system after more than 30 years of small, incremental developments. The NEP created a fundamental change in the overall educational philosophy, pedagogy, and governance of the system; it is not simply a revision of previous curricular structures. The reform initiative sees teacher

education as being central to achieving its overall goals as the quality of the teacher will directly impact the success or failure of all educational innovation initiatives. Therefore, without teachers having the appropriate preparation, any progressive policy framework will remain an aspirational document rather than something actually lived out in classrooms.

As NEP 2020 acknowledges, the challenges of educating young people in the current time of change are also exponentially more difficult due to many rapid cultural, economic, technological, and global developments that have taken place. Therefore, the policy shifts away from a focus on rote memory and a reliance on assessment and testing in classrooms — which have traditionally been the emphasis for many years in the Indian classroom — to a more competency-based and experiential approach to education that is student-centered and develops critical thinking skills, higher-order thinking skills, creativity, collaboration skills, and communication skills as well as ethics/values. As a result of these expectations, new and complex roles have emerged for educators; they are no longer viewed as providers of information or knowledge, rather, they are now seen as facilitators of learning, mentors, and reflective practitioners who will support students through inquiry and problem-solving as well as interdisciplinary study. Consequently, teacher education programs must themselves undergo deep restructuring to cultivate these competencies in future teachers.

Education is built on teacher education, as it sets the basis for all reforms in education by shaping teachers' beliefs (professional identity), pedagogical practices, and attitudes toward innovation. If teacher preparation programs continue to operate from traditional paradigms that focus on having theoretical knowledge without practical application, the reformative outcomes proposed by NEP 2020 will not be achieved. Therefore, teachers need integrated teacher education programs, increased exposure to multidisciplinary subjects, increased school-based internships, reflective teaching practices, and functional and efficient use of digital technology. These are all designed to give teachers the ability to both conceptualise how to best teach, as well as the actual experience in knowing how to teach in a manner that will allow them respond to the needs of their student population, regardless of their diversity and in a range of different learning environments.

The implementation of these principles, however, is far from simple. A gap between what a policy says about education and what is done in practice happens as a result of a myriad of factors that hinder the successful implementation of education reform. Commonly referred to as an "implementation gap," this occurs because the infrastructure, resources, and stakeholders associated with the educational institution do not match with the intended outcome of the education reform policy. For example, many teacher education institutions deal with facility and infrastructure problems, limited technology resources, outdated curricula, and large administrative workloads. All of these limitations restrict the ability of teacher education institutions to implement innovative methods of teaching or redesign their programs based on the standards of NEP.

Human and cultural factors play a significant role in changing (implementing) educational practice in addition to structural issues. When teacher educators are asked to adopt new pedagogical practices (changing their instructional methods from a long-standing lecture based format to an experiential or technology-based model), they may show signs of uncertainty and resistance. Moving away from a traditional model of instruction towards that of experiential and technology-enabled learning (using technology to learn) requires educators develop new skills, provide more pre-service (before teaching) preparation, and have access to ongoing (professional development) learning opportunities. Without systemic support and capacity building initiatives (developing knowledge and skills), teacher educators may not be able to meaningfully implement new methods of instruction. Also, variability among institutions, particularly between urban and rural institutions, may lead to disparities in how well institutions are able to implement changes. For exam-, one institution

may be able to implement all of the requirements of NEP 2020 quickly while another may struggle to meet minimum expectations.

The complexity of NEP 2020 creates additional challenges to implementation. Successful implementation of NEP 2020 requires coordinated action among a multitude of stakeholders, including, but not limited to: Policymakers, Institutional Leaders, Curriculum Designers, Teacher Educators and Student Teachers. In order for curriculum revisions to be successful, assessments must be redesigned, there needs to be an appropriate amount of technology integration, and ultimately, policies must respect the uniqueness of each institution. Without creating a coordinated approach to the process of implementing standards, the reforms would become fragmented and / or symbolic rather than substantive. Understanding not only the barriers to (implementing) NEP 2020 but also the enabling conditions that can facilitate the success of (implementing) NEP 2020 are identified.

Certain institutions demonstrate that with effective leadership, collaborative professional cultures, and sustained investment in professional learning, NEP 2020 principles can indeed be translated into meaningful practice. Studying both barriers and enablers provides a balanced perspective that moves beyond merely diagnosing problems to identifying practical solutions.

Accordingly, the present study seeks to explore the lived experiences of teacher educators, administrators, and policy implementers in Indian teacher education colleges. By examining how these stakeholders interpret, negotiate, and enact NEP 2020 principles within their institutional realities, the research aims to uncover the dynamic interaction between policy intentions and ground-level practices. Such an inquiry is critical for developing context-sensitive strategies that strengthen implementation processes and ensure that the transformative aspirations of NEP 2020 are effectively realized in teacher education.

Review of Related Literature

According to Anderson (2021), policy implementation is viewed as a collective effort involving cognitive, structural, and cultural agreement from all parties involved. When looking at the context of teacher preparation, this alignment takes on a greater importance as preparation for teachers to take on new ways of teaching requires institutional and professional adjustments.

Biswal (2022) asserted that teacher educators are also learners throughout the reform process and as such are constantly in need of professional development. This professional development is essential for moving policy from its intent into action.

Specifically with respect to the National Education Policy 2020 developed by the Ministry of Education, scholars identified several key thematic shifts. Chakraborty and Ghosh (2021) documented the increased emphasis on multi-disciplinary learning, improved foundational skills, and digital pedagogies being incorporated into teacher preparation programs.

Singh and Thakur (2023) stated that levels of institutional readiness vary significantly among different types of institutions. In particular, rural and poorly funded institutions faced systemic barriers that made implementing reform more challenging. Similarly, Sharma (2021) supported this finding with the statement that poor infrastructure and irregularly scheduled reviews of curriculum limited the potential for meaningful and sustainable change.

Implementation barrier studies focused primarily on the issue of resistance to change. The adoption of new educational policies was delayed, according to Kapoor (2021), due to entrenched teaching practices and the risk-averse cultures of many institutions. On the contrary, several researchers have documented enabling conditions that influenced successful implementation of new policy. Reddy and Rao (2020) reported that supporting leadership, teacher autonomy, and active participation with the community shaped successful implementation of policies and created a culture of innovation.

Another dimension to the current reforms is digital maturity; Garg and Jain (2020) found that Teacher Educators with a higher level of digital competency are better able to align their curriculum to the technological goals of NEP 2020. Verma (2022) echoed this, stating that investment in digital infrastructure, blended learning pedagogies and ongoing professional support systems are all critical enablers toward continuing to improve education.

Nonetheless, there remain significant gaps in understanding what institutional, socio-cultural and resource-related factors can inhibit or enable the implementation of NEP 2020 in Teacher Education. This empirical study aims to fill this gap by examining both barriers and enabling conditions across different contexts.

Objectives of the Study

● The primary objective of this research is to examine the barriers and enablers associated with implementing NEP 2020 principles within teacher education programs in India.

● Specifically, the study aims to explore how institutional structures, professional development systems, curriculum redesign processes, and stakeholder perceptions influence policy enactment.

● Additionally, the research seeks to identify institutional practices and support mechanisms that facilitate alignment with NEP 2020's reform agenda.

● A further objective is to generate practical recommendations for policymakers and educational leaders to enhance effective implementation.

Research Methodology

This study adopts a mixed-method research design to comprehensively investigate both quantitative and qualitative dimensions of NEP 2020 implementation. The research was conducted in three teacher education colleges representing urban, semi-urban, and rural contexts to capture diverse perspectives.

Quantitative data were collected using a structured survey administered to 250 teacher educators. The survey instrument included Likert-scale items measuring perceptions of implementation progress, perceived barriers, and attitudes toward policy principles. Quantitative analysis used descriptive statistics and inferential techniques to identify trends and relationships.

Qualitative data were gathered through semi-structured interviews with 30 key stakeholders, including program administrators, curriculum designers, and policy implementation coordinators. Additionally, institutional documentation, such as curriculum outlines, training schedules, and implementation reports, were analyzed to provide context and triangulate findings. Qualitative data were coded using thematic analysis, focusing on recurrent patterns associated with barriers and enablers.

Ethical measures were ensured through informed consent, confidentiality protocols, and adherence to institutional review board standards.

Data Analysis & Interpretation

The analysis of empirical data was undertaken to understand the extent to which the principles of the National Education Policy 2020 were being translated into actual practices within teacher education institutions. Both quantitative and qualitative datasets were examined in an integrated manner so that numerical trends could be interpreted alongside participants' lived experiences. This approach ensured that the statistical findings were not treated in isolation but were contextualized through detailed narratives provided by teacher educators and administrators.

The survey results initially revealed a notable contrast between ideological acceptance of the policy and its practical execution. A substantial majority of teacher educators demonstrated conceptual alignment with the philosophy of NEP 2020, suggesting that resistance to the policy's vision was not the primary issue. However, when questioned about actual progress

in implementation, far fewer respondents indicated that significant changes had occurred in their institutions. This discrepancy reflects what implementation theorists often describe as the "intention–practice gap," where stakeholders agree with reform ideas but lack the structural or professional support necessary to operationalize them effectively. Table 1 illustrates this divergence between agreement and implementation.

Table 1: Teacher Educators' Agreement with NEP 2020 and Reported Implementation Status (N = 250)

Indicator	Percentage of Respondents
Conceptual agreement with NEP principles	**78%**
Substantial implementation progress	**42%**
Moderate implementation progress	**36%**
Minimal or no implementation	**22%**

The descriptive statistics further examined how different reform components were being enacted. The findings indicated uneven implementation across domains. Foundational literacy practices, which required relatively fewer technological or structural adjustments, showed higher levels of adoption. In contrast, areas demanding systemic change, such as digital integration and competency-based assessment, demonstrated lower uptake. This pattern suggests that reforms requiring new infrastructure, skills, and evaluation systems are inherently more challenging to institutionalize. The variation across domains is presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Implementation Rates Across Key NEP Components

NEP Component	Mean Implementation Score (out of 5)	Implementation Level
Foundational literacy practices	3.9	High
Experiential learning methods	3.5	Moderate
Reflective practice activities	3.4	Moderate
Digital tool integration	2.8	Low
Competency-based assessments	2.6	Low

Qualitative interviews provided deeper insight into why these discrepancies existed. Many participants described professional development opportunities as episodic and fragmented. Rather than receiving continuous mentoring or structured training, educators often attended isolated workshops that introduced concepts without supporting their sustained application. Consequently, understanding remained theoretical and did not translate into consistent practice. Additionally, institutional constraints such as limited computer labs, unstable internet connectivity, and insufficient funding were repeatedly mentioned as barriers that undermined reform efforts. The frequency of these reported barriers is summarized in Table 3.

Table 3: Major Barriers Identified Through Interviews (n = 30)

Barrier Category	Frequency of Mentions	Percentage
Lack of sustained professional development	24	80%
Inadequate digital infrastructure	22	73%
Curriculum rigidity	19	63%
Resistance to pedagogical change	17	57%
Administrative workload	15	50%

While the barriers were substantial, the data also highlighted enabling conditions that positively influenced implementation outcomes. Institutions characterized by proactive leadership and systematic planning demonstrated more effective adoption of reforms. Leaders who communicated clear expectations, allocated resources for training, and encouraged collaboration created supportive environments for change. Furthermore, communities of practice allowed teacher educators to share strategies, reflect collectively, and build confidence in new pedagogical approaches. Documentation from such institutions confirmed that periodic reviews and feedback loops enhanced accountability and sustained progress. These enabling factors are detailed in Table 4.

Table 4: Enablers Supporting Effective Implementation

Enabling Factor	Institutions Reporting Presence (%)	Observed Impact on Implementation
Supportive leadership	68%	High improvement

Regular professional learning sessions	64%	Moderate to high improvement
Collaborative peer networks	60%	Moderate improvement
Structured implementation plans	58%	High improvement
Monitoring and feedback systems	55%	Sustained progress

To establish the relationship between professional capacity and implementation success, correlation analysis was conducted. Results demonstrated a statistically significant association between engagement in professional development and the degree of policy enactment. Similarly, higher levels of digital competency were linked to greater experimentation with blended learning and technology-based pedagogy. These findings indicate that capacity building directly contributes to reform effectiveness. The quantitative relationships are shown in Table 5.

Table 5: Correlation Between Professional Factors and Implementation Efficacy

Variable	Correlation Coefficient (r)	Significance (p-value)
Professional development engagement	0.61	< 0.05
Digital competency level	0.58	< 0.05
Leadership support	0.65	< 0.05
Collaborative participation	0.54	< 0.05

Taken together, the interpretation of these findings suggests that the principal challenge in implementing NEP 2020 is not conceptual disagreement but operational capacity. Teacher educators largely support the reform's objectives, yet their ability to enact them depends on the availability of training, infrastructure, leadership, and collaborative support systems. Institutions that invested in these enabling conditions demonstrated measurable progress, whereas those lacking them struggled to move beyond superficial compliance. Therefore, successful implementation requires sustained institutional commitment and systemic resource allocation rather than isolated or short-term interventions.

Findings of the Study

This study explored how the National Education Policy 2020 is actually being put into practice within teacher education institutions, and what it revealed was a gap between vision and reality. On paper, the reform has been widely welcomed. Most teacher educators expressed genuine agreement with the philosophy behind NEP 2020—the emphasis on learner-centered classrooms, competency-based education, and a more holistic approach to teaching and learning. In other words, resistance to the reform was not ideological. Educators largely believed in what the policy stands for.

The real challenges emerged not in belief, but in practice. While many participants were familiar with key ideas such as interdisciplinary learning, competency-based assessment, and technology integration, far fewer could point to meaningful changes in their own institutions. Understanding the policy did not automatically translate into implementing it. In many colleges, traditional lecture-based teaching and exam-focused assessment systems continued much as before. The shift in pedagogy that NEP 2020 envisions has been slower and more uneven than expected.

One of the clearest issues was the lack of sustained professional development. Many teacher educators reported that training sessions were brief and largely theoretical, with little follow-up support. As a result, they often felt unprepared to redesign courses, use digital tools confidently, or develop competency-based assessments. Without ongoing guidance and practical support, even well-intentioned educators struggled to move from awareness to action. Continuous capacity-building emerged as a critical missing link in the reform process.

Infrastructure limitations added another layer of difficulty. Institutions with weak internet connectivity, limited access to digital tools, or outdated facilities found it especially hard to implement blended learning or experiment with new teaching strategies. These problems were more pronounced in semi-urban and rural colleges, where resource constraints limited innovation. Not surprisingly, institutions with better infrastructure moved ahead more quickly, creating visible differences in the pace and quality of implementation.

At the same time, the study also highlighted factors that made a real difference. Strong and supportive leadership played a key role. Where institutional leaders clearly communicated goals, encouraged collaboration, and invested in training, reform efforts gained momentum. Collaborative spaces—where teacher educators could share ideas, reflect together, and solve problems collectively—also proved valuable. Institutions that developed structured implementation plans and regularly monitored progress were more consistent and accountable in their efforts.

Professional competence mattered as well. Teacher educators who were digitally confident and actively engaged in ongoing learning were more likely to experiment with innovative teaching methods. The analysis showed a clear positive relationship between participation in professional development and successful implementation of NEP 2020 initiatives. This reinforces the idea that capacity building is not optional support—it is central to meaningful change.

Taken together, the findings suggest that the success of NEP 2020 in teacher education does not depend primarily on whether educators accept the policy. In most cases, they do. What truly determines progress is whether institutions are ready—whether they have the necessary resources, supportive leadership, structured planning, and sustained professional development. Where these conditions exist, reform becomes visible and substantive. Where they do not, implementation tends to remain partial, slow, or symbolic rather than transformative.

Conclusion

The implementation of NEP 2020 principles in teacher education represents both a significant opportunity and a considerable challenge for India's educational landscape. The policy offers a progressive vision that aligns teacher preparation with contemporary educational needs, emphasizing holistic development, reflective practice, digital integration, and competency-based learning. However, translating this vision into practice requires more than policy directives; it demands systemic transformation at institutional, professional, and cultural levels.

In conclusion, NEP 2020 holds transformative potential for teacher education, but its success ultimately rests on how effectively institutions address the identified barriers while nurturing enabling conditions. By prioritizing sustained support, collaborative learning, and strategic planning, teacher education programs can translate policy ideals into meaningful classroom practices and thereby contribute to the broader goal of improving educational quality and equity across India.

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