Education policy implementation in Indian schools: How has the National Education Policy 2020 translated to on-ground changes?

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ABSTRACT

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The National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020) was the first policy released in the 21st century in India regarding education, which proposed widespread changes in all aspects of the Indian education system. However, past policies have seen inconsistent success in the implementation due to constraints such as geographical size, population, and variability of resources across regions. This study looked at the implementation of the policy in matters related to primary school education in six schools in the National Capital Region of Delhi, India, to understand the changes in the on-ground functioning of these schools as a result of the NEP 2020, and the challenges faced and the support received during the implementation process.

The data for this study was collected using ten one-on-one, semi-structured interviews with teachers, school leaders and a subject matter expert, all of whom worked in the education sector in Delhi. Translated versions of the interview transcriptions were analysed using a thematic analysis approach. The results revealed that changes had been implemented more successfully in the areas of curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment, supported by matters such as pedagogical training, than changes in the areas of academic structures and language of education, which were hampered by challenges such as infrastructure and staff shortages.

The findings provide a snapshot of education policy implementation in India at the nascent phase and identify strengths and areas of improvement in the current process. They also highlight the role of various stakeholders across the education system in ensuring successful implementation. These findings can contribute to the discourse and suggest best practices that can be used to strengthen policy implementation in similar contexts.

Keywords: Education Policy, India, Implementation

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

Abbreviation	Description
CBSE	Central Board of Secondary Education
CISCE	Council of Indian School Certificate Examination
DoE	Directorate of Education
ECCE	Early childhood care and education
EdTech	Education technology
FLN	Foundational literacy and numeracy
IB	International Baccalaureate
KG	Kindergarten
MCD	Municipal Corporation of Delhi
NCERT	National Council of Educational Research and Training
NCF	National curriculum framework
NCT of Delhi	National capital territory of Delhi, India
NEP 2020	National Education Policy, 2020
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NPE 1968	National Policy on Education, 1968
NPE 1986	National Policy on Education, 1986
NVS	Navodaya Vidyalaya Samiti
PoA 1992	Programme of Action, 1992
SCERT	State Council of Educational Research and Training
SME	Subject matter expert
TLMs	Teaching and learning materials

1 INTRODUCTION

Education policies in India have had different goals based on the ruling power of the time. Under various emperors in ancient and mediaeval times, education sought to impart religious or cultural knowledge aligned to the values of the given empires (Anjum, 2018; Ramachandran & Ramkumar, 2005). Under colonial rule, education was used as a tool to create a class of local subjects who would help the British colonists administer their empire (Macaulay, 1835). Post independence, governments attempted to design and implement policies that aided in nation building, but their success has been questionable (Chatterjee et al., 2018; Mahapatra & Anderson, 2022; Ramachandran & Ramkumar, 2005).

In the present day, the Indian government in 2020 released a new National Education Policy (NEP 2020) which aims to comprehensively overhaul the existing system. The policy proposed extensive changes in all areas of education in India, starting from early childhood education all the way to teacher training and adult education (Ministry of Education, 2020). Given the past track record of spotty implementation and complicated governing systems (Tukdeo, 2015), there remains a question of how successful the implementation of these widespread changes will be.

Education policy implementation in India has also faced challenges due to a large and diverse geographical area, varied cultures and immense societal inequities and barriers (Saluja, 2022). The NEP 2020 aims to tackle these implementation and societal challenges to foster a more equitable society based on a high quality education system (Ministry of Education, 2020). While there have been many studies which have examined policy implementation in the past in both Indian and international contexts (Bansal & Roy, 2021; Chaterjee et al., 2018; Farooqi & Forbes, 2019; Kazlauskienė & Gaučaitė, 2012; Li et al., 2022; Mahapatra & Anderson, 2022), few studies have focused on the implementation of the newest national education policy in India. This study adds to the discourse by investigating the enactment of the most recent national education policy in the country, to evaluate the success of its implementation and identify the challenges faced during the initial implementation phase of reforms. Specifically, I look at the implementation of the NEP 2020

guidelines with regards to primary education in schools in the National Capital Territory of Delhi, India.

Through this research, I studied the changes made to the day-to-day functioning of primary schools as a result of the implementation of the NEP 2020, the challenges faced during implementation, and the support received in the process. The study deepened my understanding of the process of public policy implementation in large and complex systems, and identified the common challenges faced and support needed to enable successful implementation. Further, I gained better insight into the role of school level stakeholders, specifically teachers and school leaders in the implementation process and the role played by governmental and non-governmental organisations in the process of education reform in the Indian context. These findings are useful to strategise and address areas of improvement in the current scenario, as well as to build tools and systems required for successful policy implementation in similar contexts in the future.

2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Policy implementation systems differ between countries depending on their governance systems, distributions of power, and leadership structures (Nilsén et al., 2013; Venkataramani et al., 2020). In India, large population sizes, economic disparities and diverse operational environments can lead to wide variances between the governance systems for education at the centre and in individual states, and between private and government school systems (Nikalje & Verma, 2023). In order to understand the context the study was conducted in and the theoretical concepts used in the study, I have defined some of the key concepts in the study in this section.

2.1 Conceptualising Education Policy

The first key concept in my study is that of education policy. Policy can be defined as "a set of ideas or a plan of what to do in particular situations that has been agreed to officially by a group of people, a business organisation, a government, or a political party" (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.), or "a set of ideas or plans that is used as a basis for making decisions, especially in politics, economics, or business." (Collins English Dictionary, n.d.). De Marchi et al. (2014, p. 19) describe public policy as "a public agreement, allocating public resources to a portfolio of actions aiming at achieving a number of objectives set by the public decision maker, considered as an organisation." Since education is more often than not a public enterprise, this definition is pertinent in conceptualising education policy. Education policy can therefore be defined as an agreement between the members of an organisation regarding the utilisation of resources towards predefined educational objectives. The organisation in question can be as small as an individual school, or as large as a national government. In most contexts, educational policy is defined at multiple levels, with larger levels (such as national or state levels) impacting the policy at the levels under it (such as district or school level) (Garritzmann et al., 2021). For example, a national government's education policy may define the boundaries within which each state in the country must establish its individual education policy.

While Lasswell's (1956) seven-stage model of policy making was one of the earliest to define the process (as the stages of intelligence, promotion, prescription, invocation, application, termination, and appraisal), it also received criticism, with many believing that the model was too rigid and prescriptive, along with questions about his ordering of the steps (Jann & Wegrich, 2006). Subsequent scholars have proposed similar frameworks based on Lasswell's work, such as the five stage process of the government policy cycle by Adeniran et al. (2023), and the four stages of the policy cycle identified by Jann and Wegrich (2006). These scholars typically identify agenda setting, policy formulation, policy execution or implementation, and evaluation as the distinct stages of the policy making process.

De Marchi et al. (2014) expand on this cycle to include the steps of public deliberation, legitimation, and accountability when talking about public policy. They define public deliberation as the process by which elected officials convey decisions made around policies to the public and acknowledge the public's feedback. This act also provides legitimation of the policy, as elected officials simultaneously reiterate their right by law to make the policy decision, and gain approval from the public regarding the policy. The third aspect they define related to public policy is accountability, which they interpret as the process by which officials show "openness and transparency" (De Marchi et al., 2014, p.24), that is, how well officials explain the process by which a particular decision is made along with its possible outcomes.

Based on these models of policy making as a process, the process of designing policies in a given context should ideally be influenced by international trends, local cultural value systems, technological advancements and scientific research. However, policies are increasingly being defined by political ideologies, lobbying and financial factors (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), n.d.; Wallin, 2021). These factors may lead to policies being made for the benefit of corporations and certain sections of the population more than others. It is therefore important to evaluate the contextual background a policy is designed in to best evaluate it.

In this study, I focus on understanding and evaluating the implementation phase of the policy making cycle, with regards to the National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020). The policy was formulated and released over the course of many years

and I expand on the process in relation to the formation of the NEP 2020 in India in the coming sections (Chapter 2.5). I also explain the contextual background of the policy with regards to India in Chapters 2.3 and 2.4.

2.2 Implementation and Evaluation of Policies

The second theoretical cornerstone of my thesis is the concept of successful implementation of policy. To be able to accurately analyse whether or not a policy has been successfully implemented, it is crucial to first define what policy implementation entails and to finalise a framework to evaluate the success of the implementation. Mthethwa (2012, p. 37) defines policy implementation as "the mechanisms, resources, and relationships that link policies to programme action. More specifically it means to carry out, accomplish, fulfil, produce or complete a given task". With this definition, we can begin to understand policy implementation as the process that translates the written word of the policy into concrete action.

Policy implementation can be impacted by various factors. DeGroff and Cargo (2009) have defined three key factors that impact policy implementation: 1) networked governance, 2) sociopolitical context and the democratic turn, and 3) new public management. They define 'networked governance' as the need for multiple agencies to coordinate their efforts in order to implement a public policy. 'Sociopolitical context and the democratic turn' is defined as the social and political power structures that impact decisions, such as whose needs are prioritised, what agencies are mobilised for implementation, whose word has most impact etc. 'New public management' is defined in their writings as the prioritisation of results and 'outcomes' in assessing programme effectiveness. All these factors are prominent in the Indian context as well and have a large impact on public and governmental perceptions of policies and programmes, but the factor of networked governance is especially prominent given the complex governance systems in place (refer chapter 2.3). However, policy implementation is also impacted by other external factors such as economic situations, availability of resources, and bureaucracy, and it is important to therefore evaluate the implementation of policies within the context they are enacted in (Carey et al., 2019; Jensen, 2020).

Considering these definitions, the success of policy implementation can be defined as how accurately the word of the policy translates to actionable changes on-ground. Dusenbury et al. (2003, p. 24) concur as they talk about policy implementation fidelity, which they describe as "degree to which teachers and other program providers implement programs as intended by the program developers". Further, Carroll et al. (2007) propose a framework to evaluate implementation fidelity by measuring adherence (how accurate the implementation is to the plan proposed in the policy). They state that implementation fidelity can be considered to be high if the programme adheres to the content, coverage, frequency, and duration set by the creators of the policy (Carroll et al., 2007).

Further, Muthanna and Sang (2023) developed a model of factors that affect education policy implementation and can lead to failed implementation. They ascribed these factors to policy makers (top-level bureaucrats who formulate policies), policy implementers (ground-level stakeholders who enact policies), or both. They described factors such as economic and political constraints, poor funding mechanisms, and faulty evaluation timelines impacting policy implementation at the policy maker level, while factors such as lack of information, negligence, and poor planning and institutional policies were described as impacting implementation at the policy implementer level. They also categorised the lack of funding, motivation, and infrastructure as factors that impact the larger system and present roadblocks to implementation at all levels.

Policy implementation can be said to occur through two distinct approaches - a top-down approach, or a bottom-up approach (Balamurugan, 2021). The top-down approach sees policy implementation as a phenomenon that is driven by top-level players, such as the national government, and executed by players on the lower level, such as local government bodies (Sabatier, 1986). Bottom-up approaches, on the other hand, examine policy implementation starting from ground-level players such as local politicians and administrators, without a strong central element (Bache et al., 2014). In my opinion, both top-level and ground-level players are necessary for successful implementation of policies. Clear directives and goals from the top-level players are crucial in order to guide the actions of players on-ground, while the

motivation and initiative taken by ground-level players impacts the scope of changes made on ground.

I designed this study to evaluate the success of the implementation of the NEP 2020 using parts of the definitions proposed by Carroll et al. (2007) and Dusenbury et al. (2003). The adherence to the written word of the NEP 2020 is studied, as suggested by Carroll et al. (2007) by examining the changes that have been made in schools in comparison with the recommendations published in the NEP 2020. Further, policy implementation fidelity was investigated, as suggested by Dusenbury et al. (2003) by surveying stakeholders' perspectives on the ease of implementation of policy, as well as their thoughts on the challenges they faced and support they received as a part of the implementation process. Finally, the role of 'networked governance' on policy implementation as proposed by DeGroff and Cargo (2009) in complex governance systems was studied by examining the role of the various regulatory and governing bodies of education on the implementation of the NEP 2020. These regulatory and governing bodies are elaborated on in Chapter 2.3.

2.3 Governance of Education in India

In the Indian context, it is impossible to talk about education policy implementation without talking about the complex web that governs the execution of such policies and programmes. The governance of education in India is, therefore, my third theoretical cornerstone. Governance can be defined as the process of managing a set of people according to predefined rules and policies. Deighan and Aitken (2021, p. 123) state that "Governance at its core is the sum of its parts – leadership, decision-making, goal setting, audit and review, scrutiny, values and principles, organisational culture, diversity, environment and direction." Therefore, it becomes clear that at a country level there are many factors which can impact the governance of education policy. In the Indian example, governance of education has largely been centralised at the state or local level, with ministers and bureaucrats, who may or may not have experience of working in the education system, largely defining expected learning outcomes and structures of functioning, with players working in

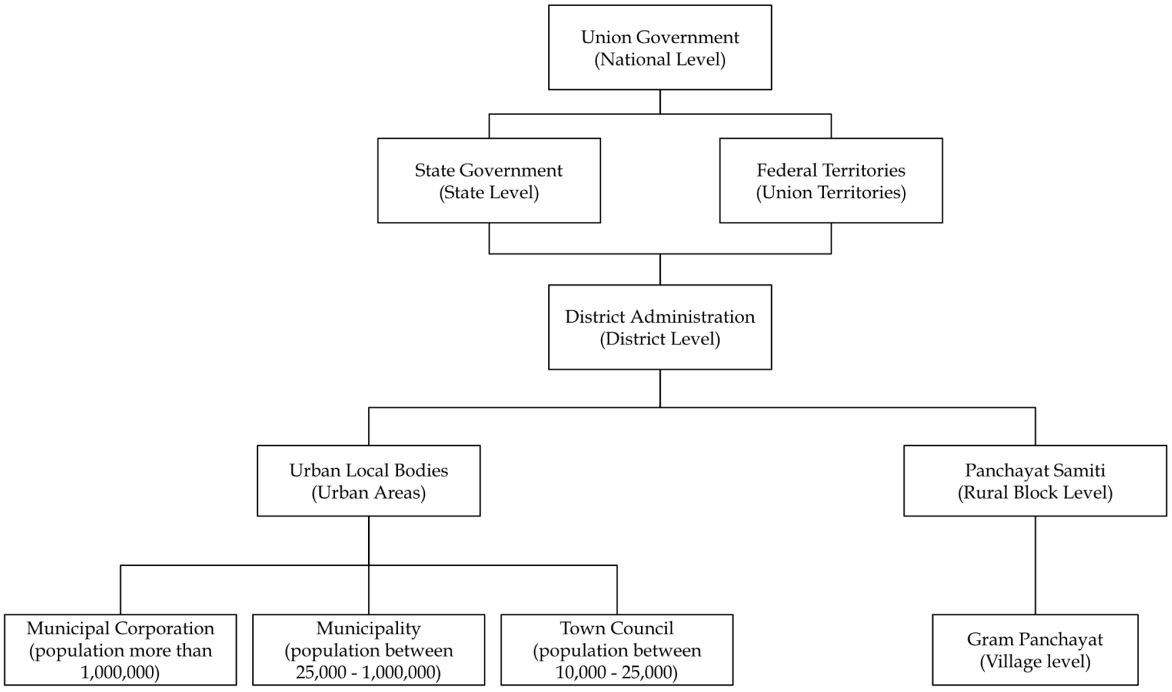
the sector at the ground level having little power while being held captive by reporting standards (Sisodia, 2019).

In this section, I will expand on key aspects of governance of education in India, including the education policy implementation mechanisms, the regulatory bodies overseeing education in India, the types of schools, and a brief overview of governance of education in the NCT of Delhi, which is the setting of this study.

2.3.1 Education Policy Implementation Mechanisms in India

Figure 1

Education Policy Implementation Mechanisms in India



In order to understand and evaluate the implementation of the NEP 2020, it is important to understand the mechanisms which govern public policy implementation in India. Governance and administration of public policies in independent India have been largely conceptualised through the lens of decentralisation since amendments to the constitution were made in 1992 to concretise a third tier of local governance (Sivanna et al., 2023). Apart from the central and state government level administrative systems, there exists a robust

two-level local governance system that oversees the implementation of public policy at the city or village level. These levels of governance are at the district level or settlement levels, known as the panchayati raj (meaning: traditional governing body made of five village elders) institutions (in rural areas) or urban local bodies (in urban areas). Figure 1 provides an overview of the governing bodies at each level.

The governance and implementation of policies can be in the purview of the central government (such as in matters of defence or international relations), the state government (such as in matters of public health or agriculture) or fall in the concurrent list, which means that both central and state governments have powers in those areas (such as in matters of education and criminal law) (Government of India, n.d.). Further, as per amendments made in 1992 to the constitution of India, the planning and implementation responsibilities of certain areas of civic responsibility (such as public health and welfare) have largely been handled by local governing bodies (Mohanty, 1999). The implementation of policy in the country can be either top-down or bottom-up based on the issue (O.P. Jindal Global University, n.d.). In most cases, regulatory boundaries or guidelines are established by the higher levels of government, and lower levels are empowered to contextualise these as per their needs.

Education in India falls in the concurrent list, which means that it falls under the purview of both national and state governments. In practice, this means that central governments devise national policies that act as guidelines for state education departments, which control the functioning of government schools in their individual states (Jain & Prasad, 2018). Governing bodies at different levels release guidelines and regulations for education systems at every level in the country, from early childhood care and education, to higher education. Some of these policies are released at a national level and are mandated to be implemented in all states and union territories (such as the Mid-day meal program and the Sarva Siksha Abhiyan), though the final form of the implementation plan may differ across states. The National Education Policy 2020 is one such policy released at the national level that is being implemented by states.

State governments have control over the education policies employed in their jurisdiction, including curriculum, teacher training guidelines, assessment systems,

and administrative policies. However, the classification of education as an item on the concurrent list means that these policies cannot be contrary to the policies defined at the national level (Government of India, n.d.). The curriculum, teacher training guidelines, assessment systems, etc., therefore change from state to state, though they generally follow the guidelines published at the national level. Due to the wide variance of resources, populations and political motivations across states there may be significant differences in the quality of education policy implementation mechanisms (Chanchani, 2022). Additionally, in line with the decentralisation lens enshrined in the constitutional amendments of 1992, local governing bodies like the panchayats and municipalities are increasingly in charge of administering the school education system in their jurisdiction which further increases disparities, especially between rural and urban areas (Bhatty, 2022).

2.3.2 Education System in India

The education system in India is a wide network of organisations offering education at the early childhood, primary, secondary, and higher education levels. While national and state governments define education policies in the country, the policies are enacted by various governmental and non-governmental agencies. Given the breadth of the network and the scope of this study, I will be focusing on and explaining the organisations and bodies involved in the education system till the school level.

Boards of education. An important factor governing the education system in India is the concept of various boards of education. These are governmental or non-governmental bodies that release guidelines regarding curriculum and school books, and are in charge of conducting standardised assessments (generally at the end of grade ten and grade twelve) as per their norms. Schools in India prescribe to these boards, which can operate at the national or state level. Certain international boards of education also operate in the country, such as the International Baccalaureate (IB) program and the Cambridge International Examinations board (Prajapati, n.d.).

The major governmental boards of education in the country are the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) and the various state boards of education,

which oversee curricula for all grades and standardised examination in senior secondary school at a central and state level, respectively (Central Board of Secondary Education, n.d.). All government schools, and a majority of private schools are affiliated to these boards. India also has a National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS), which regulates curriculum and examinations for students who are in non-traditional schooling (Ministry of Information & Broadcasting, 2023). Additionally, national and state Councils of Educational Research and Training provide guidance to schools and educational institutes across the country with regards to curriculum, textbooks, and teacher education. The National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) also provides guidance to the central ministry of education to devise national education policies, and State Councils of Educational Research and Training (SCERTs) support their states in implementing the said curriculum within the context of their state (Ministry of Information & Broadcasting, 2023; *NCERT*, n.d.-b).

Apart from governmental boards, there are also several private boards in the country. These boards serve similar functions to the government boards, primarily overseeing examinations and curriculum for the schools affiliated to them. Some of these boards are international (such as the IB program and the Cambridge International Examinations board) while some operate specifically in India (such as the Council of Indian School Certificate Examination (CISCE)). Specific private boards also cater to religious education needs, such as the Maharshi Sandipani Rashtriya Veda Sanskrit Shiksha Board which focuses on vedic education, and the Council of Boards of Madarsa Education which oversees Islamic madrasa education (*Council of Boards of Madarsa Education*, n.d.; Maharshi Sandipani Rashtriya Veda Sanskrit Shiksha Board, n.d.).

All types of boards that schools can be affiliated to oversee standardised examinations at the end of school level education, which grants students with a diploma, which then qualifies students to seek admission to higher education institutes. In context of this study, it is important to note that the views of the board a school is affiliated to impacts their curricular, pedagogical and policy practices. Three of the schools studied were government schools, affiliated to the state board of Delhi, while the other three were private schools. Two of the private schools were

affiliated to the CBSE, while one school was affiliated to the Cambridge International Examinations board.

Government versus private schools. Another important factor in understanding the school education system is the role of private and governmental organisations. School education in India is provided by private and government schools running in parallel. Government schools are run by both the central and state governments. Central government schools are spread across the country and have common curricula, teacher training guidelines, assessment systems, and administrative policies across geographical locations. These schools are generally affiliated with central boards of education, such as the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) or Navodaya Vidyalaya Samiti (NVS). These central government schools therefore are roughly the same across state borders and cater largely to families of public sector employees who may have a transferable job. Central government schools generally subscribe to the curriculum published by the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT).

State government schools are managed by their respective state boards of education. These schools prescribe to the curriculum designed by the State Council of Educational Research and Training (SCERT), which modifies national curriculum guidelines to be more contextual and suited to the needs of the specific state. For example, topics such as state or region-specific festivals may be emphasised in state curricula in comparison to national curricula. Further, in large urban areas primary schools may be managed by municipality level education departments, which helps further decentralise and contextualise the curriculum.

Private schools are schools which are managed largely by private bodies, with little or no government funding. Private schools with some level of government funding are referred to as private aided schools, while those with no government involvement are called private unaided schools (Kingdon, 2020). Private schools charge fees from students, which can start from as low as ₹300 per month and can go up to several thousand rupees per month (FSG, 2021). These schools must be affiliated with one of the national, international, or state boards of education, such as the Council of Indian School Certificate Examination (CISCE), the CBSE, or the International Baccalaureate (IB) program. However, these schools are not mandated

to follow the exact curriculum prescribed by these boards, and have the freedom to choose books and learning materials that they deem appropriate. They also have complete control over the pedagogies, teacher training methods, assessments and administrative policies employed in their school, as long as they equip students to take the national exams prescribed by their board. Parents in India have long held the view that private schools are 'better' than government schools and therefore prefer to send their children to these private schools (Gouda et al., 2013; Härmä, 2011).

In total, there are around 1.5 million schools in India, out of which approximately 69% are government schools and 31% are private schools (Education for All in India, n.d.). The ratio of private schools is higher in urban areas, with roughly two-thirds of schools in these areas being private, as compared to only one-fifth in rural areas (Little & Lewin, 2011). The schools included in this study include both private unaided schools and government primary schools managed by the municipality of Delhi. I expand on the school education system specific to the state of Delhi in the next section.

2.3.3 Education System in Delhi

The NCT of Delhi has approximately 5,700 schools, out of which roughly 1,250 are government schools, and about 4.5 million students in total (Government of NCT of Delhi, 2021). Education in the national capital territory of Delhi is supervised primarily by the Delhi Directorate of Education (DoE). The DoE grants recognition to private schools and runs government schools in the area. The schools managed by the DoE are predominantly secondary schools (grade six - grade twelve), but it also runs 449 'Sarvodaya Vidyalayas' which have classes from grade one to grade twelve. Additionally, the DoE is in charge of the Delhi SCERT and the District Institute of Education and Training (DIET), which control matters regarding the state's curriculum and teacher training (Delhi Directorate of Education, n.d.).

Primary schools in the Delhi area are largely managed by the education departments of the urban local bodies of the region. In Delhi, these are the Municipal Corporation of Delhi, the New Delhi Municipal Corporation, the Delhi Cantonment Board and the Department of Social Welfare (Delhi Directorate of Education, n.d.).

These local bodies run government primary schools in the area and direct the curricular and pedagogical practices in these schools. The schools included in this study were either recognised private schools or government primary schools run by the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD).

Interestingly, due to the organisation of the political landscape in the capital, the DoE and the MCD are not always ruled by the same political party. This can lead to differences in the functioning of schools based on which department controls them. In this case, until the elections held in 2022, these departments were controlled by two different political parties. The Aam Aadmi Party was in charge of the DoE, while the Bharatiya Janata Party was in charge of the MCD. This is important because the Aam Aadmi Party placed education very high on its election mandate and made many improvements to the schools they managed during their tenure, such as infrastructure renovations and curricular changes (Bansal & Roy, 2021).

Contrarily, the Bharatiya Janata Party's mandate was focused on basic infrastructural improvements such as housing and water supply, due to which the same importance was not given to improving school systems (Nayak, 2022). This was also seen in the results of the National Achievement Survey 2021, where students in secondary schools (governed by the Aam Aadmi Party) scored better than students in primary schools (largely governed by the Bharatiya Janata Party) (Hindustan Times, 2022).

When the Aam Aadmi Party was elected to the local bodies in Delhi in 2022, they also started to make improvements in the MCD primary schools (The Economic Times, 2023). Consequently, there have been major changes in the infrastructure and functioning of MCD schools in the past two years, as a result of the push by the Aam Aadmi Party.

2.4 Past National Education Policies in India

In order to best understand the context in which the National Education Policy 2020 is being implemented, it is important to understand the past policies which dictate the provision of education in India. Education policies in the country have been heavily influenced by international trends and political ideologies across decades. The first National Policy on Education, released in 1968 (NPE 1968) in the aftermath

of the independence struggle, was based on the recommendations of the Kothari Commision (1964-1966) (Ministry of Education, 2006).

It strongly suggested focusing national efforts on making education accessible to all to reduce socioeconomic disparities and build a strong national identity. It also emphasised the need for specialised teacher education and language education, suggesting a "three language formula" towards teaching of languages (Ministry of Education, 2006, p. 40). The NPE 1968 also formed the basis for the implementation of the 10+2+3 structure of education (10 years of basic education, followed by 2 years of 'junior college', and then 3 years of bachelor's education) (Ministry of Education, 2006).

The second major National Policy on Education, released in 1986 (NPE 1986), continued the focus on universal access to education, but also emphasised the importance of improving education quality, by increasing the focus on improving school infrastructure, good pedagogical practices, continuous assessment, and removal of corporal punishment (Aligarh Muslim University, 2020). The NPE 1986 (Ministry of Education, 2009) also suggested integrating the 2 years of 'junior college' into schools, thereby enabling students to continue in school till grade 12, followed by college for their bachelor's degree and further studies. Additionally, the policy called for setting up of "minimum levels of learning" for each stage of education to assure quality of education (Ministry of Education, 2009, p. 15). The policy also ideated the setting up of Navodaya Vidyalayas, schools for exceptionally talented students from rural and disadvantaged communities run by the central government. This policy was further revised in 1992 and the Programme of Action, 1992 (PoA 1992) was released, aiming at making education inclusive to scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, and women - communities who had traditionally been denied access to education.

Since the NPE 1986 was the last major policy released regarding education before the new National Education Policy 2020, it has had a major impact on the current landscape of education in the country. Due to the long implementation timelines in the country, most aspects of education are still based on the recommendations of the NPE 1986 and PoA 1992. For example, in my experience of

working with schools till 2022, most schools still follow the 10+2 structure, instead of the 5+3+3+4 structure proposed by the National Education Policy 2020.

2.5 National Education Policy, 2020

The National Education Policy, 2020 (NEP 2020) was the first revision of education policy in India in the 21st century, published 34 years after its predecessor. In the gap between the two policies, India and the world had undergone massive cultural, political, and technological changes. The needs of students had changed but learning goals and curricula had not kept up with the growing demands. The NEP 2020 aims to address these changes through the "revision and revamping of all aspects of the education structure, including its regulation and governance, to create a new system that is aligned with the aspirational goals of 21st century education, including SDG4, while building upon India's traditions and value systems" (Ministry of Education, 2020, p. 3).

The NEP 2020 was formulated by the government using a diligent process that mirrors the steps laid down by De Marchi et al. (2014). A 484-page draft of the new national education policy (Ministry of Education, 2019) was released in 2019 and educational institutions and public representatives were invited to provide feedback on the draft. The Ministry of Education then reviewed the feedback and suggestions before finalising the National Education Policy 2020 (Hebbar & Jebaraj, 2020), thus fulfilling the steps of public deliberation, legitimation. However, due to the size of the country and the large number of stakeholders involved in the system, there were no specific steps taken to ensure that feedback is received from all stakeholders, affecting the accountability part of the process.

In order to achieve the stated goal of revamping the Indian education system, the NEP 2020 has proposed changes at every level of the education system in India, from early childhood education to adult education and teacher training. The NEP also places an important focus on ensuring universal provision of education for students till age 14, in line with the Right to Education Act, 2009. Overall, the changes aim to make the system more holistic and robust, and to reduce the focus on pure academic performance. The NEP also states that it aims to encourage core 21st century skills such as critical thinking, creativity, and communication.

Along with the NEP, which was released in multiple languages to make it more accessible to stakeholders in different parts of the country, the Ministry of Education released an implementation plan with 297 tasks for education departments across the country to plan for the implementation of the NEP (Ministry of Education, 2021a). The tasks have been planned to be enacted across a ten-year period and are categorised according to their sphere of focus. Additionally, the NCERT has worked on national curricular frameworks for early childhood care and education in 2022 and for school education in 2023, and plans to release similar frameworks for teacher education and adult education (NCERT, n.d.-a). The implementation plan for the NEP 2020 categorises the tasks into 16 areas as follows (Ministry of Education, 2021b):

1. Early Childhood Care and Education
2. Foundational Literacy and Numeracy
3. Curtailing Dropout Rates and Ensuring Universal Access to Education
4. Curriculum and Pedagogy in Schools
5. Teachers
6. Equitable and Inclusive Education
7. Efficient Resourcing and Effective Governance
8. Regulation and Accreditation of School Education
9. Teacher Education
10. Vocational Education
11. Adult Education and Lifelong Learning
12. Promotion of Indian Languages, Arts, and Culture
13. Technology Use and Integration
14. Online and Digital Education
15. Financing
16. Implementation

The changes proposed in the NEP 2020 differ across areas, but they all aim to equip the education system to provide holistic education to all students in the country. For example, in the area of early childhood care and education (ECCE), the NEP recommends changes such as integrating ECCE centres with primary schools, adding a year of preparatory classes to the current structure, and strengthening the

training of ECCE workers, while the in the area of curriculum and pedagogy the NEP recommends changes such as increasing flexibility in course choices, promoting multilingualism, and integration of skill development into content areas.

In my thesis, I chose to focus on the changes recommended in the area of school education, specifically primary school education. This is a result of the limited scope of a master's level thesis, and my expertise as a result of previous work experiences. Within the realm of school education, I further narrowed my study to dive deeper into the changes made on the ground in curriculum and pedagogy, academic structures, language of education, and assessment structures. I describe the traditional status of education within these areas, and the changes recommended in the following subsections.

Apart from the four areas of change I focused on, I also wanted to understand what challenges, if any, teachers and school leaders had faced while implementing the guidelines proposed by the NEP 2020. Moreover, I wanted to investigate if they had received any training or extra support to help with the implementation of these changes.

2.5.1 Curriculum and Pedagogy

The first area of the on-ground changes I studied was the changes in curricular and pedagogical practices of schools and teachers. Teaching and learning in India has traditionally been highly formal, with a large emphasis placed on formal assessments and test scores, with the sole goal of making students 'employable' (Misra & Pathania, 2010). Additionally, most teaching has been transacted through teacher centred methods such as lectures (Tilak, 2021). However, learning outcomes have failed to be positive, especially in rural areas and underprivileged communities (ASER Centre, 2023; Kingdon, 2007). This has led to a situation where students, especially those most disadvantaged by geographical location or socioeconomic status, are unable to access high quality education.

The NEP 2020 acknowledged these challenges and suggested changes to be made in teaching and learning practices to promote holistic development (Ministry of Education, 2021a). It does so by prescribing that foundational literacy and numeracy skills be strengthened, use of digital and physical learning tools be

increased, and education be restructured to be more inclusive and holistic. The NEP 2020 also encourages the use of learner centred teaching methods to ensure that learning is contextualised and relevant to the student's environment. It suggests that teaching shifts from traditional rote based methods to experiential learning that can help students develop critical thinking and problem solving skills, with a focus on application of knowledge. On the whole, the NEP 2020 strongly emphasises the holistic development of students to ensure acquisition of core 21st century skills and competencies.

2.5.2 Academic Structures

The second area of the on-ground changes I studied was regarding the restructuring of academic and school structures. Traditionally, schools in India have been divided into primary (grades one to five), secondary (grades six to ten), and senior secondary (grades eleven and twelve) sections. Especially in the government sector, preschool education has been seen as a separate discipline, generally combined with family welfare in Anganwadi centres (government centres created to provide advice about healthcare and nutrition, and non-formal preschool education) (Women and Child Development Department, Govt. of Maharashtra, n.d.). In the private sector, preschool education is more formalised, with most well-off schools having kindergarten classes as well as other grades. Students would generally attend preschool for two years and join grade one at the age of five or five-and-a-half years (Galliara & Khanra, 2024).

The NEP 2020 proposes a change from the previous structure of school education to a structure where early childhood education is also included in the school education framework (Ministry of Education, 2020, p. 6). It recommends the following new divisions of schooling:

1. Foundational Stage (preschool to grade two): This stage is recommended to be divided into two parts. The first, for students aged three to six, consists of two years of preschool and one year of preparatory classes before grade one. The second part, for students aged six to eight, consists of grades one and two. The foundational stage is focused on building foundational literacy and numeracy skills, through play-based learning.

2. Preparatory Stage (grade three to grade five): Introducing elements of formal education such as textbooks along with the play-based learning methods of earlier grades.
3. Middle Stage (grade six to grade eight): Introducing and focusing on conceptual and experiential learning.
4. Secondary Stage (grade nine to grade twelve): Focusing on multidisciplinary studies to prepare students for higher education.

These changes, if implemented, would lead to an increase in the age of admission of students in grade one by a year (from the current standard of five years to six years) due to the introduction of the additional year of pre-school education. It would also mean that government primary schools would be restructured infrastructurally to include preschool classes. Given the focus on primary school education in this study, I wanted to observe if these changes in the primary school structure had been implemented, what plans were being made for their implementation and what was the anticipated impact of this structural change.

2.5.3 Language of Education

The third area of the on-ground changes I studied was the language of education in primary schools. Education in an English medium school has been seen as an aspirational goal for many families, with many parents even believing that education in English is better than education in regional languages (Jollu, 2023).

The NEP 2020 proposed a major change in the language of instruction, suggesting that instruction in primary schools should be in the regional language of the region, or in the mother tongue spoken by students (Srinivasan, 2020). This suggestion was met with a backlash from various stakeholders in society, with the government ultimately issuing clarifications that the NEP 2020 is advisory in nature and does not impose any specific language of instruction (India Today Web Desk, 2020). I investigated the current feelings towards this proposal in schools, particularly to see if any changes in language of instruction had been made on the basis of the NEP 2020 recommendations.

2.5.4 Assessment Structures

The final area of the on-ground changes I studied was regarding the assessment structures in schools. The NEP 2020 suggested a shift from a summative, rote-learning based assessment structure to "one that is more regular and formative, is more competency-based, promotes learning and development for our students, and tests higher-order skills, such as analysis, critical thinking, and conceptual clarity" (Ministry of Education, 2020, p. 17). It further suggested that assessments be used to promote learning, stating "it will help the teacher and student, and the entire schooling system, continuously revise teaching-learning processes to optimise learning and development for all students" (Ministry of Education, 2020, p. 17). The NEP 2020 also proposed that schools introduce a new format for student report cards which are more holistic and track progress on socioemotional development as well as academics. In this study, I investigated what changes, if any, schools have made to their assessment and reporting structures in light of the NEP 2020 recommendations.

3 RESEARCH TASK AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The process of policy implementation in India is a complex issue which is further complicated by factors such as large population sizes, convoluted governance systems and acute shortages of resources (Saluja, 2022). The deployment of the National Education Policy 2020 afforded a unique opportunity to examine the process of policy implementation in the early stages. Understanding the successes and failures in implementation at the early stage can help guide future efforts in policy implementation, to ensure the appropriate areas of development receive support.

The purpose of this study was to gain insight into this process and understand the steps involved in enacting policy decisions at a grassroots level in a complex, under-resourced system. Further, it identified the challenges faced by stakeholders and the factors that support them in the implementation process. My background of working with primary schools motivated me to examine the changes prescribed in the policy specifically in the sector of primary education in the policy. This study therefore focused on investigating the changes made on the ground in primary schools in the areas of curriculum and pedagogy, assessments, academic structure, and language of instruction. It does so through a case study examination of six schools in the National Capital Territory of Delhi, utilising data from ten one-on-one semi structured interviews. This qualitative study was rooted in the following research questions:

1. What on-ground changes have taken place in the four focus areas as a result of the implementation of the NEP 2020?
2. What challenges have the participants faced in implementing the NEP 2020?
3. What support have the participants received in implementing the NEP 2020?

4 RESEARCH IMPLEMENTATION

The current study is a case study of the measures taken to implement the National Education Policy 2020 in schools in the National Capital Territory (NCT) region of Delhi, India. The study was designed using a constructivist paradigmatic lens and uses semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders working in the education sector in Delhi as the primary source of data. The project was conducted between August 2023 and May 2024. In this section, I define certain aspects of the research design employed in this study, and the key concepts that guided the research implementation.

4.1 Research Methodology

The research for this study was conducted using qualitative research methods, specifically interviews, to form a case study. Given the newness of the NEP 2020, and the uncertainty which surrounds its implementation, I decided that qualitative research methods would be best suited to answer the research questions for this study while allowing for space to also study the complex structures surrounding education policy implementation in India. Given constraints of time and scope of the thesis, I chose the case study approach (Tracy, 2019) to collect the data.

Guest et al. (2012, pp. 4-5) define qualitative research as research that uses "non-numeric and less structured data than those generated through quantitatively oriented inquiry, because the data collection process itself is less structured, more flexible, and inductive". Essentially, qualitative research is research that leaves more room for flexible data collection and interpretation, while still providing enough structure to ensure a rigorous research process and valid data. Additionally, Cypress (2015, p. 356) describes qualitative research as being used to "...explore, uncover, describe, and understand what lies behind any phenomenon about which maybe little is known." Qualitative research therefore seemed like the best choice to deeply examine a situation which is both new and rapidly evolving.

Lindlof and Taylor (2002) further differentiate quantitative research from naturalistic and ethnographic research, stating that qualitative research does not always occur in the native habitat of the participants, and it does not always occur

over a long period of time. Thus, qualitative research provides the researcher freedom to examine a phenomenon in depth while allowing for participants to control the access provided to the researcher, helping retain their autonomy. This method therefore made most sense for my research questions as my topic of study was broad and I needed flexibility in the research process to be able to fully learn from my data and reduce preconceived notions about the topic.

Tracy (2019, p. 61) described case studies as "in-depth contextual analyses of one or a few instances of a naturalistic phenomenon". The case study approach was chosen for this study due to the complexity and large size of the chosen context (India), and the constraints I had with regards to the time available to complete the study. India is a large, diverse country with multiple systems governing education (refer Chapter 2.3). To collect data from every possible state and school type would need enormous amounts of data to be collected, which would not be possible within the scope of a master's degree program. Instead, I chose to focus on one geographical region (the National Capital Territory of Delhi), and diversify the participants in order to collect more robust data. Hence, the case chosen in this study can be defined as six schools in the NCT of Delhi in India, to study the implementation of the National Education Policy 2020.

Furthermore, Yin (2003) recommends the use of case studies to conduct research in complex environments where the researcher has little control over the situation, to answer questions of 'how' and 'why'. Since the current research was aimed at understanding the complex issue of policy implementation in a context that cannot be controlled by the researcher, the case study was deemed to be the best method to use for this study.

The cases in this study were chosen specifically to provide as diverse a range of situations as possible within the chosen context. Seawright and Gerring (2008, p. 295) emphasise the importance of selecting cases purposefully, stating "It is true that purposive methods cannot entirely overcome the inherent unreliability of generalizing from small-N samples, but they can nonetheless make an important contribution to the inferential process by enabling researchers to choose the most appropriate cases for a given research strategy".

Case studies, due to their small sample size, are inherently specific and their results are not easily generalisable. Having specific criteria for the selection of the samples in the case study is one way to increase the generalisability of such studies and make them more rigorous. With this in mind, the schools chosen to be a part of the study were selected to include both government and private schools, with diversity across the number of children, socio-economic background of students and availability of resources. In this way the rigour and validity of the research were ensured.

4.2 Researcher's Positionality

This research is based on studying a general phenomenon in a specific cultural and geographical context. In light of this, I feel it is important for me as a researcher to be clear about my positionality in conducting this research. I am a woman from an upper-class family in India. These identities place me firmly in the social structures in the world - in some cases giving me an advantage, and in others a disadvantage. I also have experience working in the education sector in India, both as a teacher and as an external consultant through an NGO. These experiences helped me to deeply understand the educational sector in the country and to appreciate the position that teachers and leaders are in within the system. My familiarity with the culture and language of the chosen context also helped me establish trust with the participants and build a relationship.

Furthermore, in the specific context chosen for this research, my position as an outsider allowed participants with expertise in the field to share their thoughts freely. I therefore choose to approach the research with a stance of naïveté and responsiveness (Tracy, 2019), which allowed me to let go of any presumptions I have about the topic of the interview and approach the conversation with openness and curiosity, while still being cognizant of my power within the interviewer-interviewee relationship and ensuring the interviewee was treated with respect at all times.

Further, as a researcher, I was constrained in my access to the participants, as I would only be able to conduct one interview with them. To take full advantage of the time I had with the participants, I took on the role of a focused witness (Tracy, 2019). The focused witness is one who has a firm structure of what, how and when

they will observe before they enter the scene they are observing. This type of observation is often time bound and focused on a specific question. It has the advantage of clarifying roles in interactions and reducing issues of negotiating access.

4.3 Research Context

The present study was conducted with teachers and academic leaders in six schools and a subject matter expert working on education policy implementation in the NCT of Delhi, India. The teachers and academic leaders were from three government run primary schools and three private primary schools. Initially, participants were approached through personal contacts that my research supervisor and I had. These personal contacts were asked to put me in touch with school leaders or teachers from government or private schools who had been working on implementing the NEP 2020 in their schools.

The primary criteria specified was that all schools needed to be primary schools, and should have worked on implementing the NEP 2020. For private schools, I additionally requested my contact to prioritise schools in higher socioeconomic brackets, to be able to better understand the contrast in implementation between resource-deprived and resource-rich schools. Convenience sampling was then used to determine the participating schools, wherein schools who fit the established criteria and whose leaders an interest in participating in the research were selected (Stratton, 2021). Participants who agreed to participate through this method were then asked to recommend other participants who fulfil the set criteria.

The National Capital Territory (NCT) of Delhi covers an area of around 1,484 square kilometres and houses more than 16.5 million people, out of which 37.1% are aged 19 and under (Rao et al., 2024). The NCT of Delhi is a Union Territory of India, and not a state. Consequently, the control of governance is shared between the central Government of India and the Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi (India Today Web Desk, 2019). The Lieutenant Governor is appointed by the president of the country and acts as a representative of the central government, which is in control of matters related to policing, land, and public order. The NCT of

Delhi also has a Chief Minister and cabinet who are elected by the people of Delhi and are in charge of matters such as education, public transport and utilities (The Wire Staff, 2023).

For the purpose of this study, it is important to note that the elected government of Delhi governs government primary schools in the region, and thus is in charge of policy decisions taken in these schools. Private schools have more freedom to choose the policies they implement in their school, as long as they align to the broad national guidelines issued. However, private schools are more directly accountable to the parents of their students, given the fact that parents pay tuition fees. This, along with the difference in resources available to these two types of schools, leads to a difference in policy implementation in different contexts.

4.4 Research Participants

This study was planned to be based on interviews with nine participants in the NCT of Delhi, India. Eight of the interviews were to be conducted with principals and teachers in four schools in Delhi. I planned to conduct the interviews with participants from two government schools and two private schools to get data from a wide range of socioeconomic backgrounds, financial statuses, and governance contexts.

Unfortunately, one principal from a government school and one principal from a private school had to drop out from the interviews due to personal reasons. I then interviewed school leaders from two additional schools (one private and one government) to get more balanced data. Additionally, one of the school leaders from a government school had recently retired and it was decided that I would interview the current school leaders from this school as well as the one who was recently retired. In total, nine interviews were conducted with participants from six schools, of which five were school leaders and four were teachers.

Additionally, a subject matter expert working in an NGO that specialises in the field of using educational technology (EdTech) for NEP 2020 implementation was interviewed. The interview focused on the participant's experience of working with various states in India to implement the NEP in their context. This interview was planned to understand the work being done for implementation of the NEP in

the broader scope of the country, to help contextualise the results from interviews with school stakeholders and triangulate the findings.

The participants were assigned pseudonyms to provide anonymity. Participants were assigned numbered pseudonyms based on their role and, if applicable, the type of school they work in. The letter 'P' referred to principals and 'T' referred to teachers, while abbreviations referred to the type of school, 'Govt' for government schools and 'Pvt' for private schools. For example, GovtT1 refers to the first teacher in the study, who works in a government school. The subject matter expert is simply referred to as 'SME' since only one subject matter expert was interviewed. The final participants and their pseudonyms are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Participant Details and Pseudonyms

Organisation	Participants		
	School Leader	Teacher	Other
School 1 (Government)	GovtP1, GovtP2	GovtT1	–
School 2 (Government)	–	GovtT2	–
School 3 (Government)	GovtP3	–	–
School 4 (Private)	PvtP4	PvtT3	–
School 5 (Private)	–	PvtT4	–
School 6 (Private)	PvtP5	–	–
EdTech NGO	–	–	SME

The participants were mostly female, with only one male participant. The principals had work experience ranging from 15 to 40 years, while the teachers had work experience ranging from 6 months to 17 years. The subject matter expert had been working in the sector for 7 years. More details were not collected about the participants to protect their anonymity. The participants were informed about the

study through the research notification and their consent was recorded with the same (see Appendix 1).

The schools studied were all large or medium sized schools, with student enrolment numbers between 700-2000. Government schools were smaller with an average of 750 students, while the private schools were larger, with strengths around 2000 students. The government schools also served families from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, while the private schools catered to higher income families. Several students in the government schools were first generation learners.

4.5 Data Collection

One-on-one, semi-structured interviews were conducted with expert informants (Tracy, 2019) as the data collection method for this study. The interviews were conducted in a combination of face-to-face and online mediums. Seven of the interviews were conducted face to face in Delhi in December 2023. The other three were conducted online in February and March 2024. The language of the interviews was a mix of English and Hindi, which is the regional language spoken most often in Delhi. Participants were contacted before the interviews and given an overview of my credentials, the purpose of the interview, and the topics to be covered in the interview. The interviews were generally between 30-60 minutes long and were recorded with permission from the participants, resulting in approximately 450 minutes of data.

Interviews were chosen as the primary method of data collection to enable deep conversations that could help me unearth any dissonance between official documents and on-ground realities (Tracy, 2019). Interviews were conducted one-on-one primarily so that participants would feel more relaxed and could express their views without fear of judgement or repercussions (Greenbaum, 1999). This was a concern especially for the participants from the government schools, as they were more directly controlled by government protocols and were hesitant to share data that contradicted the image portrayed by government officials.

Semi-structured interviews to allow for flexibility to steer the direction of the interview based on data that came up in the conversation with participants (Galletta, 2013). The interview process and questions were loosely based on the framework for

developing a semi-structured interview guide by Kallio et al., (2016). Based on the research questions and participants of the study, the semi-structured interview method of data collection was chosen, as per the first phase defined by Kallio and her colleagues. Once the method of data collection was finalised, I conducted a literature review to understand the concepts related to education policy and its implementation in the Indian context and developed topics for interview questions, in line with the second and third phases of the development process. These questions were then tested in a pilot interview with professionals working with school leaders in Delhi, before the guiding questions, additional data and order of questions were finalised, concluding the fourth and fifth phases of the framework for developing a semi-structured interview guide defined by Kallio et al., (2016). The final questions used in the interview are detailed in Appendix 2.

One week before the first interview in December 2023, I conducted a pilot interview with two professionals working in an NGO in Delhi that supports school leaders with skill development. The pilot interview was structured to test two hypotheses, aimed at understanding any researcher bias and technical pitfalls. The hypotheses tested were as follows:

(1) Are the interview questions leading to answers about the research questions?
(2) Are the interview questions easy to understand and answer?

Based on findings from the interviews, an additional tool was created to explain the specific guidelines issued in the NEP 2020 that were being investigated in this study. The order of certain questions was also revised to enable a smoother flow of conversation. Additionally, the pilot interview participants helped me understand the importance of assuring participants that the reporting of data will be completely anonymous and emphasising the limited scope of the study to put participants at ease. This insight helped me refine the framing of the conversation with research participants.

Tracy (2019) described informants as "veterans, experienced insiders, key connectors within the scene". Such participants were chosen as they would have the experience to understand and explain the changes brought about by the new National Education Policy 2020, as compared to previous policies. Further, their

experience and insight would help me understand the mechanisms of policy implementation in their context.

4.6 Data Analysis

The analysis of the data for this study was based on the transcripts of interviews conducted with principals, teachers, and a subject matter expert in the field of education policy implementation working in the NCT region of Delhi, India. The interviews asked specific questions about the implementation of guidelines established by the NEP 2020. The data was analysed using qualitative methods, specifically thematic analysis and inductive analysis, to build a theoretical understanding of the process of education policy implementation in the NCT region of Delhi, in the context of India.

Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 79) define thematic analysis as "a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data". Thematic analysis is, in its essence, a method for identifying 'codes' and 'themes' from data which allow researchers to draw conclusions and create theories based on the data. Clarke & Braun (2016) define codes as the "building blocks" of themes, calling them the "smallest units of analysis" which capture key features of the data.

Thematic analysis was decided to be the most appropriate method for analysing my data, since it allowed me to draw the most accurate and relevant conclusions from the data collected from participants through the interviews. The interview questions were designed to touch upon the guidelines stated in the NEP 2020 that I was most interested in studying, and hence I decided that thematic analysis would be the best way to extrapolate pertinent conclusions from the data. Further, thematic analysis allowed me the opportunity to understand the data in an organic and dynamic way.

There have been past studies that looked at the implementation of older education policies in India (Bansal & Roy, 2021; Chaterjee et al., 2018; Mahapatra & Anderson, 2022), but not many that looked at the implementation of the National Education Policy 2020, which is the latest policy to be released in India. The NEP 2020 outlines major changes to be made to the education landscape of India (Ministry of Education, 2020), the likes of which have not been seen before in the

Indian context. Given the lack of research into the topic, I concluded an inductive approach would be most appropriate as it would allow me the flexibility to ensure I am keeping the data collected from participants at the centre of my findings.

Stephens et al. (2018) describe inductive methods as those that involve judging the likelihood of a conclusion being true, given a specific set of data, based on prior knowledge. The inductive approach allowed me as a researcher to go into the research process with an open mind and as few preconceived ideas as possible (O'Reilly, 2009; Thomas, 2006). It also allowed me to examine the data coming in through the interviews without bias and draw conclusions, making it less likely that I would miss any key aspects of the data.

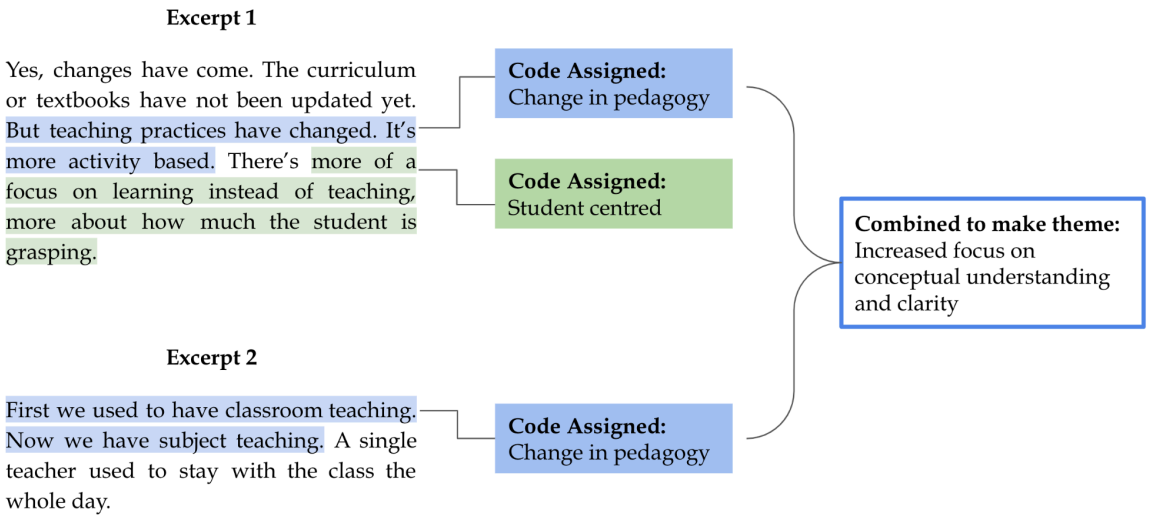
The analysis process loosely followed the eight-step process for thematic analysis outlined by Thompson (2022). The steps he describes are: (1) Transcription and Familiarisation; (2) Coding; (3) Codebook; (4) Development of Themes; (5) Theorising; (6) Comparison of Datasets; (7) Data Display; and (8) Writing Up. With consent from the participants, I recorded the conversation as I interviewed them. In one case, the participant did not consent to being recorded, and in that case, I used the field notes taken during the interview for analysis. These interviews, which were in a mix of English and Hindi, were then translated and transcribed manually. The transcription process also allowed me to become familiar with the data and note initial patterns emerging from the interviews. The transcriptions were then analysed and codes were assigned using the Atlas.ti software. This process resulted in the creation of 40 unique codes, which were then grouped according to the area of research they corresponded to.

The first set of codes were highly descriptive and were used to identify the specific changes that happened, or the support received and challenges faced in the implementation process (such as "move towards activity-based learning", "focus on FLN", "received training" or "increase in teachers' workload"). I then grouped these codes according to the particular areas of change being mentioned (such as "pedagogy", "language of instruction" or "academic structure"), the key challenges (such as "challenge - staffing" or "challenge - time"), or key areas of support (such as "support - training" or "support - materials"). The codes and code groups thus generated were then further analysed to identify particular themes within the

broader categories identified. Finally, I rechecked the codes against the decided themes to ensure no significant data was left out and concluded the analysis process by reporting my findings in the results section (Chapter 5). An example of the analysis process is provided in Figure 2 below, showing the process from assigning codes to the transcription to forming the theme.

Figure 2

Example of Thematic Analysis Process



4.7 Ethical Considerations

The study was conducted according to the ethical considerations laid down in Tracy (2019) and the protocols laid down by the University of Jyväskylä. The aspects of permission, confidentiality, participation, and transparency (Tracy, 2019) were first ensured through the research notification (see Appendix 1). The research notification was based on the university guidelines. It included a description of the study and explained their rights as research participants to ensure participants had clarity on what they were participating in. The research notification also outlined the ways in which they could contact me in case they want to withdraw from the study. It also

included a form where they could record their consent to participating in the research.

Additionally, before starting each interview I explained the topic, scope, and significance of the study. I also ensured participants that their names or their school names would not be mentioned in the study, and that their anonymity would be protected at every step. The data collected did not include any visuals of the participants, and specific permission was collected from participants to record voice memos. In the case of one teacher who did not consent to the recording, the interview was not recorded, and field notes taken during the interview were used for analysis instead.

These recordings were stored in secure locations and were deleted post the completion of the study. Further, the data was analysed in ways that continue to ensure anonymity for all participants. No identifying details were included in the analysis, and all participants were assigned pseudonyms to protect their anonymity.

5 RESULTS

In this section, I describe the results derived from the analysis of the interviews conducted with the research participants. The interviews were transcribed and then analysed using the thematic analysis approach. I divided the findings into categories to answer the research questions outlined in section 3. I start by describing the changes that the participants perceive as having happened on-ground within the four areas of focus I chose for this study (curriculum and pedagogy, academic structures, assessment structures, and language of education), and then detailing the challenges the participants faced and the support they received while implementing these changes.

The results of the data analysis are summarised and illustrated with direct quotations from the participants. The quotations used in this section have been translated (from the Hindi language) and edited (removal of filler words and repetition) as needed, to make them easier to read and comprehend. An overview of the findings is provided in Appendix 3.

5.1 On-ground changes as a result of the NEP 2020

In this section, I describe the changes that have taken place on the ground as a result of the implementation of the National Education Policy 2020, in 6 schools in Delhi, India to answer the first research question. These changes have been identified based on conversations with teachers and school leaders at these schools. I further placed these changes in the broader context of the changes taking place in other places in the country, which were identified based on a conversation with a subject matter expert working in the field of policy implementation in the country. The changes described are grouped according to the area they focus on and their impacts on different types of schools and stakeholders.

5.1.1 Curricular and Pedagogical Changes

In the three years that passed between the publication of the NEP 2020 and the collection of data for this study, multiple changes had taken place with regards to the curriculum and pedagogical practices in the studied schools in Delhi. This is in line

with the national ecosystem, which has also seen many changes as a result of the implementation of the new policy. According to the subject matter expert (SME) interviewed as a part of this study, the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) and multiple State Councils of Educational Research and Training (SCERTs) had started preparing textbooks for the government schools in their jurisdiction as per the curricular recommendations of the NEP 2020 and the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) documents. Additionally, the SME also stated that there had been an increase in focus on ensuring development of foundational literacy and numeracy (FLN) skills in students across different states. However, the SME also shared that these were changes taking place higher up in the education system at the board level, and it would most probably take at least two more years for these changes to be rolled out on the ground in all schools. A big reason they stated for this was logistical difficulties and the large number of stakeholders involved. They shared:

> So, because of the NEP, the NCF came - the National Curriculum Framework - which basically stated that these are the core outcomes that NEP talks about. This year the NCERT has already sat with the NCF and has made books for grades one, two and three based on the NEP - they made the new curriculum. For grades three to ten, I think they've worked on the books, but it most probably won't be applicable in the next academic year seeing the logistic part of the entire process. You have to print, make sure they reach schools and such. Then NCERT has also not given the SCERTs anything and because it's right now coming out with all the entire new books. So in states it will take at least one-two years. (SME)

There was a stark difference in the perception of the cause for these changes between private and government schools. Stakeholders from private schools clearly attributed the changes they made to the NEP 2020, but stakeholders from government schools were unsure of the reason behind the changes they implemented. They stated varying perceived reasons, such as a change in the political party governing Delhi, or a change in leadership in bodies governing education. This can be seen in the following quote about the changes taking place in pedagogy in their school from a government school principal:

> …we haven't been told that changes are happening due to the NEP. Sometimes when there is an administration change things change. Sometimes some one person wants to make change,

> and so changes happen. Now when you're telling me about the NPE, I'm thinking that maybe this is one way of implementation without saying it's the NEP. Changes have definitely happened.(...) When I look back, it seems like this may be a way to implement the NEP, but the name is something else as of now. Maybe once it succeeds it will be called a part of the NEP implementation. (GovtP3)

There were also some major differences in the types of changes that were implemented in government schools and private schools. For example, many of the curricular changes in government schools were focused on ensuring that students attain proficiency in foundational literacy and numeracy skills, while this was not a major concern for private school stakeholders. As one private school principal stated:

> …the point is that for private schools, I think stakes are a bit different. Compared to public schools in this country, private schools have generally been careful in terms of their academic standards. Which means that foundational learning has been of critical importance to a lot many schools already. (PvtP5)

As a result of these distinctions, I differentiated between the curricular and pedagogical changes in government schools and private schools in this section. Despite the differences, there were broad similarities in the direction of the changes happening in both government and private schools, as a result of the guidelines given in the NEP 2020. In both types of schools, the curriculum and pedagogical practices moved towards holistic and student focused methods. Stakeholders from both types of schools mentioned a shift towards hands-on, activity-based learning and an increase in focus on conceptual understanding over rote learning. This was also seen in the perceptions of changes in assessments, which I cover in the next sections.

In government schools, the changes in curriculum and pedagogy were externally motivated, in that they were mandated by the governing bodies in charge of these schools. The Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD), which was in charge of the governance of the government school included in this study, rolled out two programs that impacted teaching and learning at these schools. The first program was called Buniyad (translated: Foundation), which focused on holding special classes to improve the foundational literacy and numeracy skills among primary

school students. Under this program, students were divided on the basis of their skill levels in literacy and numeracy, and special support was given to students who were below their grade level on these skills to help them catch up. Teachers in government primary schools received materials including assessment tools and teaching materials to implement this program. These tools were standardised across the state and all schools received the same materials and tools. As one teacher stated,

> Since the last 2-3 years this has started. In this children are divided level wise. There is this assessment tool and we ask children to read this. [For example] If the child is able to read this, he/she is in level 2, otherwise in level 1. So like this we have divided the level of all children. Like this we have for hindi and maths as well. These are our FLN tools. After we divided the whole class, every teacher is given responsibility of one level. (...) We received material for the FLN classes as well, along with the tools. We got modules for this that we had to for that level. So we know by the end each kid in a level will be able to do till this module. And even if you go to another school in Delhi, if you see a child from level two then you will know that they are also Studying the same thing. (GovtT1)

Additionally, the MCD launched a website, called Edulife, to provide teachers with teacher guides, monthly plans, and lesson plans to standardise the level of teaching across schools in the state and improve student learning outcomes. According to the participants, monthly teaching plans or lesson plans were not mandated prior to the launch of this website. Teachers were free to teach the lessons in the order and using techniques they found best. According to the participants, this was usually done through a lecture style teaching method, with little focus on conceptual understanding and more focus on rote learning to pass exams. This has changed with the standardisation of the lesson plans, as illustrated through this quote by a government school leader:

> …teaching practices have changed. It's more activity based. There's more of a focus on learning instead of teaching, more about how much the student is grasping.(...) Earlier we used to have regular monotonous teaching, sometimes using teaching aids, not too many. But now lessons themselves are planned out this way, we get lesson plans and the teaching in those is planned such that we are able to use our regular items as teaching aids. Earlier we used to make lesson plans as per our wish, but now there's a portal - Edulife - where there are lesson plans and worksheets (both printable and blackboard). So teaching has become easier and learning has become easier because now things are divided into simple steps. (GovtT1)

However, some stakeholders shared that they were waiting for further support from the governing bodies, especially in terms of books. Stakeholders shared that the current books they had been provided were not mapped to the new curricular requirements.

Overall, the participants shared that teaching and learning practices in government schools had been standardised through the roll out of centralised plans and tools. The teachers and school leaders also reported that they were happy with these centralised tools as they reduced the burden placed on teachers while ensuring a high quality of teaching and learning. Additionally, they reported that student learning has improved, since the focus had been shifted from rote memorisation and exam focused assessments to conceptual understanding and holistic learning.

The participants from private schools also reported an increased focus on holistic student learning and skill development. However, they reported that these shifts were not mandated or regulated by government bodies and were instead made at the school's discretion. Private schools generally have more freedom in their curricular choices since those decisions are taken at the school level, instead of a state or district level like in government schools, as evidenced by statements such as "We chose to be affiliated to this board because of the flexibility that it offered for us" (PvtP5) and "We purchased this program that gives us the books, design curriculum, digital platform for teachers, for parents, for students, timely workshops, webinars, training sessions" (PvtP4) by two private school leaders. Thus, school leaders and teachers are able to make decisions based on their school's context and needs.

Further, the participants from private schools reported being proficient in pedagogical techniques such as inquiry-based learning and instructional methods such as phonics, which help in delivering high quality education to students without the need for centralisation and standardised lesson plans. However, similar to government schools, the participants from private schools also reported that they were now focusing more on ensuring clarity of concepts and development of skills in students, over exam-based approaches. As one private school leader stated:

> So for example, when I started teaching 23 years back, I also started teaching with the rote learning method, with learning the tables. You had to write, in KG (kindergarten) you had to learn the diacritical marks in Hindi also. Now we don't teach diacritical marks in Hindi in

> KG. In English we used to teach sentences and articles in KG. Now we have removed that from KG. We still teach the concept but we don't name it like articles and all. Earlier we had the concept of grammar, tables, multiplication, addition in KG, now we don't have that. Now we have sight words and such. Now our focus is more on linguistic clarity and speech. (PvtP4)

In conclusion, both the government and the private school participants had seen changes in their curricular and pedagogical practices which placed an increased emphasis on student learning and conceptual clarity over rote learning and exam result focused instruction. The participants from both types of schools also reported using more hands-on teaching and learning methods, along with more activity-based lessons. The participants from government schools reported that these changes had been catalysed by the organisations governing them through programs such as Buniyad, which increased the focus on FLN skills, and the Edulife portal, which provided teacher with monthly planners, lesson plans, and teaching and learning materials to standardise teaching practices across the region. The participants from private schools reported that they were ideating and deploying the changes themselves, using the recommendations published in the NEP as guidelines in their planning. They also utilised their unique strengths to tailor programs to teachers' strengths and students' needs.

5.1.2 Changes in Academic Structures

The participants, especially those from government schools, did not report seeing many changes made in the academic structure of their schools. The NEP 2020 suggested changing the existing academic structure of schools to include pre-primary aged students in the formal school system. A major effect of the implementation of this guideline on-ground would have been the combining of kindergarten and primary school buildings, and staff being employed such that they work with all students from kindergarten to grade two. The participants working with government schools all said that this had not been rolled out in their schools, and the subject matter expert (SME) interviewed also shared that this had not been seen in other states or schools. The participants reported that in the government sector, preschool aged students (3-5) currently went to the Anganwadi centre for

education, which was not always in the same building complex as the main primary school. The preschool part of these Anganwadis had not yet been combined with the main primary school, according to the stakeholders interviewed. For example, the SME shared the following, when talking about changes in academic structures in government schools:

> …the restructuring bit of it - that, right now I don't know if the schools will change. It's an infrastructure question at this point, right? I don't know how that will work right now. It's a big infrastructure change and I don't see it happening. Because schools have been made from one to five. Anganwadi schools are separate. How do you do it? (SME)

Private school stakeholders however shared that they did not see this part of the guideline changing their working environment very much, since their schools usually had preschools attached and students attended school in the same building from age three onwards. However, one private school stakeholder shared that the management system in their school had changed in the last two years as a result of this directive. Their school was now managing kindergarten to grade two as the foundational wing, in line with the recommendation made in the NEP 2020. The school shared the following about the academic structure in their school:

> PvtP3: Our school follows the structure prescribed in the NEP - we have a foundational wing that I am in charge of. We are following what the NEP says since we are CBSE affiliated.
>
> Researcher: Has it always been like that?
>
> PvtP3: Not before the NEP. This change has happened since the 2023 session. We started planning for this in the 2022 session.

The other major change instructed in the NEP 2020 was revising the minimum age of children in grade one to six years, increasing the age by a year from the previous norm of admitting students to grade one at the age of five. The government school participants specifically stated that they had not received any directives from the MCD to make changes to their admission policy with regards to age of children, and thus they were continuing with their older policy of admitting students aged over five years in grade 1. The participants from private schools were divided on this policy directive, with one stating that they had not seen a major change in their admission policy while another school said that this would impact the students who

were to be admitted to grade one in the coming academic year (2024-25). The school leader stated:

> The guidelines that we have received is that, you know, the child must be at least 5 years and 8 months old when they come to grade one. So our nursery admissions are now happening in such a way that they're aligned with this kind of age format. (PvtP5)

Overall, the participants shared that some change had been seen in this area, but there was still a lot of confusion with regards to how the guidelines in the NEP are to be implemented on the ground. They shared that they needed more direction from the government and governing bodies to be able to enforce these guidelines. Since there are major infrastructural and administrative changes needed to execute these changes, the participants shared that these changes may take a few more years to be implemented.

5.1.3 Changes in Assessments

Participants across both the government and private schools shared that there had been changes in the assessment structures in their schools. They shared that assessments were now more continuous, holistic, and focused on the overall development of the child, rather than pure academic skills. While the private school participants shared that they were still designing assessments internally at a school level, the government school participants reported that they have been receiving assessment tools from the education department of the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD).

The interview with the subject matter expert added further context to how assessments are designed in government schools. They clarified that there are no national regulations on how states have to handle assessments in schools controlled by them. Some of the bigger states with more manpower have specialised assessment cells at the state or district level through which they create assessment tools for all the schools under their jurisdiction. However, not all states have the capacity for such cells, and in those states, assessments are created by teachers at the school level.

In the context of Delhi government schools, the participants shared that they now received standardised assessments from the MCD department on the Edulife

website. They shared that the format of these assessments was different from the ones they had previously used, with more multiple-choice questions (MCQs) to test conceptual knowledge, whereas they previously had more questions from the textbook that could be answered through rote memorisation. As one government school leader shared:

> MCQ type assessments have increased, earlier it was a lot more theory. Now kids can't rote learn the answers from the end of the chapter and pass. Now until and unless kids understand the topics they won't be able to do the tests. So understanding of the lesson is more here than the previous type. (...) Earlier we used to make the papers based on what we have taught since there were no lesson plans or monthly planners. And we used to mostly use the questions at the end of the chapter. Now everything comes from the department on the Edulife portal. (GovtP2)

The government school participants also shared that the frequency of examinations had reduced, with students having formal assessments six times a year instead of eight times. They also shared that the syllabus to be covered in each exam had reduced, further reducing the burden on students. Lastly, government school stakeholders shared that the final grades for students in primary sections had been made more holistic, with everyday aspects like classroom participation, behaviour, hygiene, and work completion also being graded and included in the child's final grades. They reported that this had reduced the pressure on students to excel solely through academic performance and had made it easier for them to express themselves in other ways.

The participants from private schools shared that along with making assessments continuous and holistic, they had eliminated formally graded assessments for primary years. They shared that based on research into the topic, they had decided to instead use worksheets as tools to judge how successful their teaching had been and to find topics, if any, that they needed to reteach. One school leader also reported that these worksheets were not scheduled in advance to further reduce the stress on students:

> We did a lot of research on assessments. We have made rubrics up to the foundation level. Earlier we had scheduled assessments, the parents used to be told that there will be maths

> exam on this day, english on this day etc. Now we don't do that, we have informal assessments. We don't want to add stress for the child by telling them in advance. (PvtP4)

In conclusion, all the schools assessed in this study had made changes to their assessment structures and tools. In some schools, the changes were more considerable than in others. All the participants reported that assessments had become more holistic and continuous in the primary grades, along with a reduction in the importance being placed on formal assessments. In addition, the participants from the government schools reported that assessments, similar to lesson plans, had become centralised and were being provided by the department to all schools under its jurisdiction.

5.1.4 Changes in Language of Instruction

The language of instruction is the area that most participants agreed had seen the least changes. The participants across both government and private schools shared that their schools had not made any significant changes in the languages they instruct students in. Most schools reportedly already had bilingual teaching in classrooms, with the local language being used to explain topics frequently along with the official language the school functioned in, which in the schools studied was English. As a teacher from a private school shared:

> Because we have students who are not completely English proficient, and even if they were English proficient sometimes they are not able to understand the technical jargon so we have to use Hindi to properly explain the concepts. There are some basic concepts we have to explain in Hindi so they can understand better. I think if we speak only in English, they will zone out and it will become background noise. If we add Hindi which is their own language, they are able to connect to it more and be more comfortable so it grabs their attention. (...) This was always there. Even we as adults don't speak completely in English - we are not talking purely in English even now! (PvtT4)

Multiple participants also pointed out that parents prefer their children to be sent to English medium schools, since they perceive education in English to be more valuable. This belief was more prominent in parents sending their children to government schools, based on the interviews. According to the participants, these parents placed an aspirational value in English, as they believed that their children

would be better able to move up on the socioeconomic ladder if they excelled in the English language. As one government school principal pointed out:

> Mother tongue instruction has not started yet and I'm a little doubtful as to how it will be implemented when it is implemented. Because parents also have an inclination towards the English medium. Earlier when there was one English medium section, parents used to feel that the kids who are better are in that section and the studies there are better - which was not the case actually. The studies are the same in all classes. Now that we are an English medium school, we are the only English medium school in the surrounding areas, so we have more admissions comparatively. Parents think that because it's an English medium school, the studies are better here, so they want to take admission here. (GovtP2)

The SME also added that other states in the country had not yet started publishing any clear guidelines about the enactment of changes in the language of instruction. They shared that some states had started planning for books and materials to be bilingual, but most states were currently carrying on as earlier, with instruction being offered in local languages as well as English. To summarise, the language of instruction was the area of changes in the NEP 2020 that had seen fewest changes. The participants mentioned challenges such as a lack of direction from authorities as the reason for the lack of change seen.

5.2 Challenges Faced During Implementation of NEP 2020

The second research question for this study was concerned with identifying the challenges that stakeholders faced during the implementation of the guidelines published in the NEP 2020. Three categories of challenges were identified, which were i) a lack of resources, ii) an increase in stress and workload, and iii) issues securing stakeholder buy-in. Some challenges were specific to the government schools while some were stated by both the government and the private school participants. This section describes the various challenges stated by the participants in the implementation of the NEP 2020.

5.2.1 Lack of Resources

The first category of challenges that emerged from the interview data was about the shortage of resources. For the government school participants, the biggest challenge

stated was a lack of resources of all kinds, from human resources to material resources. All the government school participants interviewed stated that there was a shortage of teachers. They stated that it was difficult to give individualised support to children in classes because the student-teacher ratio was too high - in some cases, as high as 60 students in each class with one teacher. Both teachers and school leaders shared that due to the low number of teachers, it was difficult to enact the ideas they had. Teachers shared that they sometimes had to handle two classes (around 100-120 students) if another teacher was absent, as there were no substitute teachers available. They stated that these shortages lead to difficulties in providing quality education to children. Additionally, the government school participants expressed the belief that private schools did not face staff shortage challenges. As one government school leader stated:

> The guidelines talk about having 30-35 kids in one section, focusing on each child - we don't have enough staff to be able to do this. Some are transferred, some are on leave - and it's not possible to recruit so quickly. So there's always a staff shortage. So it becomes difficult to implement some of these guidelines. Private schools don't have this problem since they are able to recruit contract teachers and don't have absenteeism issues. Other (government) schools are also facing this issue. (GovtP3)

Another challenge reported by the government school participants was the lack of funds and proper infrastructure. The teachers shared that they had needed to put in their own money to get the monthly planners and assessments sent by the state department printed, and this had increased their financial burden. They stated that they were only reimbursed for the end of term papers they printed, even though the expectation was for them to have prints of all the assessments and worksheets they used in class. Additionally, they shared that they needed to spend money to buy basic supplies such as folders for students to store their work, which they combined to make each child's assessment portfolio. The government school participants also shared that the school's infrastructure had at times been a hurdle in implementing the guidelines shared in the NEP 2020, such as the recommendation to combine pre-school with grades one and two, since the current school buildings did not have spaces to add these classes. The participants from private schools did not mention these challenges.

The last challenge related to resources shared by both the government and private school participants was the lack of time to finish the new tasks they had to complete as a part of the NEP 2020 implementation. Teachers shared that they were assigned multiple duties outside of teaching, such as overseeing practice for the school annual day function, which were not accounted for in the school timetable and ate into their teaching time. They stated that due to these additional tasks, the time they could spend on core teaching tasks and in providing specialised support for students had further reduced. As one private school teacher stated,

> In the end, for teachers, it's not just teaching that they have to do. For any other task we are assigned - whether it is overseeing dance practice, or decorating a notice board, or anything else - we have to miss our classes. (...) And then we have to rush to finish our syllabus and cannot provide any kind of specialised support to students. (PvtT4)

To sum up, participants stated that a shortage of resources such as teachers, time, funds, and correct infrastructure were a challenge they faced in the implementation of guidelines presented in the NEP 2020.

5.2.2 Increase in Stress and Workload

The second category that emerged regarding the challenges faced was the increase in workload, especially for teachers. Three out of the four teachers interviewed stated that they felt their workload had increased as a result of the reforms listed in the NEP 2020. For example, the government school teachers stated that they now had to fill in multiple forms to ensure data had been collected as per the format mandated by the department. They also pointed out that most of the bureaucratic reporting required was on online platforms and shared that teachers who were older and unfamiliar with technology were struggling to complete the tasks. They stated that they had seen a marked increase in the amount of paperwork they had to fill and organise, and that there was now an expectation for them to be on call at all times of the day. One government school teacher stated:

> Earlier, once school ended at 1:00 p.m. my work used to get over. But now sometimes they even ask me for reports at 10:00 p.m. at night, like class data or daily data, and they say it has to go now. (GovtT1)

Teachers shared that this increase in paperwork had led to an increase in the amount of stress they felt regarding their work. Additionally, some school leaders stated that they also had to deal with an increasing amount of paperwork and had to make certain decisions that they did not fully agree with due to government regulations in accordance with the NEP 2020. For example, one private school leader stated that due to a recently published government order regarding the academic structure and age of students, half of the current cohort of kindergarten students would advance to grade one, while the other half would have to attend an extra year of preschool. They stated that this regulation increased their stress as they had to deal with additional questions from parents regarding why their child was being made to do an extra year of school, which parents felt would disadvantage their child in relation to their peers.

Lastly, the teachers expressed that due to the discrepancies between the published textbooks they were using currently and the pedagogical standards imposed by the NEP 2020, they had to put in more work to make suitable student material, which further increased their workload. Overall, stakeholders, especially teachers, shared that their workload and stress had increased as a result of the reforms enacted by the NEP 2020. They also expressed hope that this increase would be temporary and that having access to textbooks aligned to the new curriculum and format would alleviate this increase in workload.

5.2.3 Stakeholder Buy-in

The third larger category that emerged from the interviews regarding the challenges participants faced in implementing the NEP 2020 was regarding the difficulty in ensuring that all stakeholders were on board with the changes happening. For example, stakeholders shared that many parents, due to their unfamiliarity with the reforms proposed by the NEP 2020, were sceptical of the changes happening in schools and repeatedly raised concerns. For example, one school leader shared the following about parental views regarding the change in academic structures:

> There are big challenges in terms of, for example, how the whole age formula is being worked out right and how it is causing a stir against, you know, in the parent community because parents are not aware of this. Parents don't want to do this, they're considering it as an extra

> year. For example, the UP government talked about a cut off of 5.8 years, Right. Which is a bit problematic because now children who were already there in one class, half of them will end up being in the previous grade and half of them will progress to the other grade. (PvtP5)

Another private school leader shared that parents in their school were initially against the changes made to the curriculum, as the parents felt that their child was falling behind as compared to other children by not learning as much. As an example, the school leader shared that parents, especially first-time parents, would feel that their child was not learning enough if the child didn't know multiplication tables by the end of kindergarten since they would compare their child's learning to what they had learnt in school themselves, or what was happening in schools in their native villages where the NEP had not yet been enacted. The school leader shared that they had held multiple meetings and orientation sessions with parents to address their concerns.

The teachers also shared similar sentiments, stating that parental counselling was essential to seeing success with students, as students spent most of their time with their parents. The government school teachers also shared that due to a majority of students in their schools being first generation learners, parents had additional expectations of the academic rigour in the school since they equated rigorous education with better life outcomes. They also shared that the department (MCD) held larger scale parent-teacher meetings to reassure parents and addressed any concerns they might have.

Second, some school leaders shared that they had at times faced challenges convincing teachers to make changes in their teaching or curricular practices. They shared that the recommendations of the NEP 2020 were very different from the way that teachers had been conducting classes, and it was at times difficult to convince them to step out of their comfort zone and try the new methods suggested by the NEP 2020. They shared that specific training sessions and multiple conversations were required to bring all teachers on board with the reforms.

In conclusion, different participants shared that they faced challenges in securing buy-in from both parents and teachers, at different points during the implementation process. They shared that these problems were mostly resolved through conversations, training sessions, and parent-teacher meetings as needed.

5.3 Support Received During Implementation of NEP 2020

The third and final research question for this study was concerned with identifying the factors that supported the participants in implementing the NEP 2020 in the studied schools in Delhi. Two categories of support received were identified, i) professional development support, and ii) material support. In this section, I describe the findings related to support received by schools and stakeholders during implementation of NEP 2020.

5.3.1 Professional Development

The first category of support received by the participants was the help with professional skill development of teachers and school leaders. All the participants interviewed for the study mentioned receiving training related to their work area. Some of the participants also specifically mentioned receiving training on areas related to the implementation of the NEP 2020. The teachers from government schools reported receiving training on subject specific topics as well as pedagogical practices. They mentioned receiving these trainings from the MCD as well as from non-governmental organisations working in the area of education in Delhi. Participants reported that the training could be either single sessions or longer modules, depending on the topic covered. The government school leaders reported that they received training on topics such as providing effective feedback to teachers, handling administrative tasks and relationship building with parents, while teachers reported receiving training around themes such as making and using teaching and learning materials (TLMs), lesson planning and behaviour management techniques. As stated by one government school teacher:

> GovtT2: There has been a lot of teacher training. Because, since the last one year, the government party in the MCD is the same as the one in the DoE. So over the last year teachers and principals have been getting a lot of training, which is a very good initiative. I really appreciate that. Be it exposure trips, be it in subject training, lots of them. You take anyone - nursery teachers, for primary teachers, special teachers, principals, mentors - everyone has had very intensive training.
>
> Researcher: And what kind of training have these been? Like, what do you do in these sessions?

> GovtT2: In this, the exposure trips are basically focused on understanding the working of schools in other states of India. So we went to Pune, Bengaluru, Coimbatore, Palampur in Himachal Pradesh. So over there we learnt about how the schools there work, what best practices they have. We have also had workshops through NGOs, like we had a Maths workshop. Apart from that, we have also had sessions on the learning outcomes in the NEP, how to implement them in class, how to incorporate them in our teaching, how to make lesson plans in line with them. So teachers have been trained on those things as well. We start off with basic knowledge - what are learning outcomes, how do you teach using them etc. we have training sessions on these around the year.

Similarly, the private school participants stated that they received training from various governmental and non-governmental agencies. Specifically, the participants from one school stated that they had received training sessions on general pedagogy and implementation of the NEP from the curricular board they were affiliated with (CBSE), as well as subject specific training from the provider of the curriculum they were using in their school. They stated that there were general training sessions conducted by the board that were free for everyone to attend, and that they could also request for sessions on specific topics, which the school would pay for. They shared that the training sessions provided by their curriculum provider were a part of the curriculum package and were conducted at set intervals.

Apart from curricular and pedagogical training, the participants also shared that they received coaching support through in class observations and feedback sessions. The participants from one private school shared that they were observed and given feedback on their classroom teaching by the curriculum providers their school was affiliated with, while those from the other private school shared that they would be observed and receive feedback from their supervisors. The frequency of these observations and feedback sessions was not specified. The government school teachers also mentioned receiving feedback based on observations from mentor teachers - who are teachers who have been selected and trained in providing support to teachers in a cluster of schools as needed. The school leaders from government schools also mentioned that they had been trained on observing teachers and giving them feedback.

Finally, the participants from government schools mentioned receiving curricular materials and tools as a part of the support they had been given to

implement the NEP 2020. The government school participants specifically shared that they had been given lesson plans, monthly planners, assessment tools, and support in making TLMs for their classes from the MCD, which helped them conduct classes in the methods specified by the NEP 2020. They also shared that they had been given ideas for activities they could do in class to help engage students and assess their learning in non-traditional ways. These participants shared that they felt a decrease in their burden due to these resources, as they now had to spend less time thinking of unique lesson plans and could instead spend time enacting the high-quality plans they receive. They also shared that due to the uniformity in the lessons being conducted in schools across the state, there was less disparity in students' learning levels and an overall improvement in learning outcomes. The participants from private school did not report receiving any teaching materials.

In conclusion, the participants reported receiving support with regards to professional development and upskilling. They described getting this support through training sessions, classroom observations and coaching, and curricular and pedagogical materials.

5.3.2 Infrastructure and Learning Materials

The second category of support identified from the interviews was support with physical resources and funds for infrastructure. This was a category of support reported only by government school participants. They shared that they received support in the form of both funding and concrete materials, such as books. They also shared that the school buildings had been renovated and basic infrastructure, such as enough hygienic toilets, were provided.

The participants from one government school shared that they were also working with non-governmental organisations to address structural issues in their school. They shared that one NGO had taken over the responsibility of maintaining the water, sanitation, and hygiene resources in the school, while another was supporting them by providing books, toys, and other learning aids to equip their library. The participants from a different government school also mentioned receiving support from an NGO for basic supplies such as notebooks and stationery for students.

Lastly, the school leaders from government schools mentioned receiving some discretionary funds for specific purposes such as fixing structural issues in the school. They also mentioned that they received funding from the department to conduct extracurricular activities and events, such spelling bee competitions and maths wizard competitions in their schools. These funds, while not being large, had helped them in organising the events and procuring prizes to motivate students, they shared. To sum up, the government school participants reported receiving support from the department and from NGOs to address their basic needs, such as infrastructure and materials. Private schools did not mention receiving such support.

6 DISCUSSION

The aim of this research project was to understand the changes made by schools in their policies and functioning as a result of the NEP 2020. The study also aimed at understanding the challenges faced by stakeholders and the support received by them throughout the process of the implementation. In the course of the research, I identified multiple areas of on-ground change ascribed by participants to the implementation of the NEP 2020. In this section, I reflect on the findings of the study and compare them to the theoretical framework laid out in Chapter two.

6.1 Insights from participant interviews

During the interviews, the participants mentioned several changes in the studied areas that reflected the intentions laid down in the NEP 2020. An interesting phenomenon that emerged during the interviews, especially with the government school participants, was the fact that many of them were not aware of the actual written word of the NEP 2020. While some private school leaders had done extensive research into the policy, most participants interviewed shared that they had not read the policy document. In fact, during multiple interviews, participants when first asked stated that there had been no changes made due to the NEP. However, on further questioning and after sharing some of the proposed changes written in the policy, they shared that changes had been made in their schools. Given this, it becomes clear that the policy and its proposed changes need to be made more accessible to school stakeholders.

Additionally, a related finding that emerged from the data was the difference in approaches of policy implementation between government and private schools. Government schools saw a largely top-down model of policy implementation, with many of the changes being driven by governmental directives, while private schools employed a more bottom-up approach, motivated by their own interest in enacting the recommendations in the NEP 2020. These differences can be attributed to the difference in the governing structures of the schools, given that private schools have more freedom to make decisions regarding their school's curriculum and policy, while government schools are bound to act as directed by the government.

Another phenomenon that emerged was the difference between the abilities of schools to implement changes based on their socioeconomic status. The private schools included in the study, which all catered to students from a higher socioeconomic background, were able to enact changes based on the NEP 2020 more quickly and effectively. Participants from these schools also expressed a higher level of expertise and comfort with the student-centric teaching and learning methods recommended by the NEP 2020, and overall, a higher level of familiarity with the content of the NEP 2020. This could be related to the fact that private schools are able to be more selective with their staff, as they control the hiring process completely. Moreover, the expectations of parents, who pay fees and thus control the school's income, might play into the larger emphasis placed by private schools on quality of teaching and learning.

Finally, there was a difference between the viewpoints shared by school leaders and teachers. The teachers generally reported a larger increase in their workload as a result of the implementation of the NEP 2020 as compared to school leaders. Since a majority of the changes studied as a part of the research impact classroom teaching, it is to be expected that teachers were more directly impacted.

6.2 Evaluation of Policy Formulation and Implementation

Literature defines education policy as an agreement between the members of a system or an organisation about the utilisation of resources to meet predefined educational objectives (De Marchi et al., 2014; Garritzmann et al., 2021). Education policy can be evaluated at two levels in the context of this study - the larger level of the National Education Policy 2020, and the smaller levels of each schools' education decisions, hence, the 'organisation' in this situation could be the education system as a whole, or the teachers and school leaders interviewed in the context of this study. Given that the NEP 2020 was not discussed in detail with all schools and stakeholders prior to its implementation, there remains a question of whether there was an agreement between all members of the organisation as to how the system should be reformed.

There was a disconnect visible between the participants and the recommendations of the NEP 2020 at times. Going back to the cycle of policy making

defined by De Marchi et al. (2014), this could be related to the lack of "openness and transparency" displayed by the government in the process of formulation and implementation of the NEP 2020. None of the participants reported being involved in the policy making process and most shared that they were only involved in implementing the changes. There was also no mention of any systems in place for teachers or school leaders to share feedback with the policy makers. This was visible also in the smaller ecosystem of the schools interviewed, as teachers sometimes expressed that they were just following the school policy, with no real say in its formation, such as with regards to non-teaching responsibilities.

The impact of various socio-political factors on the implementation of the NEP 2020 was also visible in the study. The role of 'sociopolitical context and the democratic turn' and 'networked governance' as defined by DeGroff and Cargo (2009) were prominent. Many times, it emerged that participants changed a certain thing not because of an intrinsic motivation to follow the recommendation of the NEP, but due to extrinsic pressures by regulatory bodies or political mechanisms. Particularly in government schools, it was implied that certain policies (such as highly detailed paperwork and record keeping) were the result of a departmental push, and school stakeholders had no say in whether or not they were implemented. Additionally, because of the timeline of the election of the Aam Aadmi Party to the MCD and their philosophy on education, it was difficult for stakeholders to discern which changes made in the MCD schools were due to the NEP 2020, and which were a result of the Aam Aadmi Party's mandate. Additionally, the findings regarding the difference in implementation of the policy in government and private schools support the idea that external factors can influence policy implementation, as suggested by Carey et al. (2019) and Jensen (2020).

Further, the factors defined by Muthanna and Sang (2023) were also visible in the areas where no or little changes were seen. While this study does not look at the policy maker level of policy implementation explicitly, certain aspects such as poor funding mechanisms were visible in the data. At the policy implementer level, the impact of lack of information (unfamiliarity of participants with the NEP 2020 guidelines) was highly visible as a factor that hampered the implementation process.

System level factors such as a lack of funding and infrastructure were also visible, especially in the government school sector.

When evaluated through the frameworks proposed by Carroll et al. (2007) and Dusenbury et al. (2003), it can be said that there is moderate success with regards to fidelity and adherence to the written word of the policy. While some changes have been made that mirror both the written word and the spirit of the NEP 2020, there are still many aspects that have not seen changes. Due to the constraints of human resources, infrastructure, funding, and parental perceptions, it may take many more years for these changes to be seen on-ground.

6.3 Review of the Study

Tracy (2019) defined eight "big tent" criteria for excellent qualitative research which I tried to attend to in the course of doing this research. I believe I chose a worthy topic that is relevant and provides meaningful insights to stakeholders in the Indian education ecosystem. I ensured the research was rich in rigour and credible by including ample academic resources, triangulating my findings, and using thick description while reporting the results. By being transparent about my own positionality, biases, and experiences, I ensured sincerity throughout the research process. Additionally, I ensured that participants understood the ethical and practical considerations of the research by explaining the process in multiple ways and obtained explicit consent to make sure the study is ethical. While the significance of the findings to the larger ecosystem is yet to be judged, I gained a deep and valuable understanding of not only how the NEP 2020 has been implemented in schools, but also how to conduct good research. These are learnings that will guide me throughout my future research endeavours.

However, there were certain limitations to the study. While the study revealed the changes made in the functioning of the studied schools as a result of the NEP 2020, it is difficult to generalise the findings due to the small sample size and the limited context of the study. Due to the vast number of differences between states, cultures and contexts in India, the findings of schools in Delhi, which is a densely populated urban area, cannot be applied to a sparsely populated rural area, such as in the north-eastern states. Further, the critical position held by the state in the

political landscape of the country means that there is special focus placed on the public policy implementation and workings of public goods. This further increases the difficulty of generalising based on the findings in this context.

This study was also conducted with only six schools and ten participants, which adds to the difficulty of generalising the findings. While the participants were chosen through careful consideration, they were still representative of only a very small minority. Differences in staff numbers or funding, for example, could lead to differences in perceptions of the changes, challenges, and opportunities of implementation. For example, since there were no low-income private schools included in the study, there was no chance to evaluate if the changes, challenges, and support received by schools differed solely on the basis of socioeconomic status.

Additionally, the final participants were not aligned to the ideal sample defined in the beginning of the research process. Since a few school leaders had to drop out and new participants were interviewed in their place, there were certain schools where the viewpoints of both the leader and teacher were not obtained, and therefore it was not possible to accurately compare the perceptions of implementation between the two actors.

Finally, since this research and analysis was based on documents translated by me, there is a possibility of researcher bias in the interpretation and translation of the interviews. This, along with my previous experiences of working in the sector, may have then led to an increased bias during the analysis process, which may have affected the results.

6.4 Possibilities for Future Research

Given the short time frame between when the National Education Policy 2020 and other supporting documents were published, and this study was undertaken, there is a broad scope for more research into the implementation in the future. While this study gives a snapshot of the current state of the implementation process in the short term, more insight can be gained by repeating similar studies at larger intervals. Furthermore, similar research can be conducted in other states and contexts in the country, to deepen the understanding of the impact of political and socioeconomic factors on policy implementation. Additionally, research that examines the

implementation process through the full cycle - from ideation at the departmental level, to on-ground implementation - could lead to deeper insights.

6.5 Conclusion

To sum up, some of the changes prescribed in the NEP 2020 in the focus areas of this study, such as curriculum and pedagogy, and assessment structures, have been implemented on the ground, while others, such as academic structures and language of education, have not seen significant changes. It was also found that resources, workload of teachers and leaders, and motivation of external stakeholders presented challenges in the implementation process. Material resources and professional development support for in-school stakeholders aided the implementation process.

Moreover, it was found that the knowledge of the participants regarding the recommendations of the NEP varied, with some having detailed knowledge of the policy and others being less aware. The perception of the policy itself was largely positive, with the participants also mentioning that parents shared a similar positive view of most of the recommended changes. However, given that most stakeholders did not have an in-depth understanding of the changes prescribed by the policy, it is difficult to validate this response. Further, the role of politics and governmental agencies in the implementation of the policy were emphasised. Most changes were dictated by governing bodies, and schools had little autonomy in the implementation process, which the subject matter expert (SME) shared was similar to the situation across the country. This points towards a need to increase knowledge and autonomy of stakeholders at the ground level, particularly in order to achieve the goals of contextualisation and increasing relevance of education outlined in the NEP 2020.

In conclusion, I have three key takeaways from this research process. First, my belief in the importance of empowering teachers and school leaders has strengthened. It is clear that the success of any policy depends more on the belief and work of on-ground stakeholders than the written word or intention of the policy. The difference in the work done between the various teachers and school leaders indicates that their motivation is highly linked with the success of the reforms planned. It also became apparent that teachers and school leaders are the

stakeholders who best understand the support students in their schools need and thus should be given the required autonomy to contextualise policies to their specific situations.

Second, it became apparent to me through this research that political agendas and motivations can make or break educational reforms, specifically in the public sector and in the Indian context. The difference in the state of government schools between the rule of the Bharatiya Janata Party and the Aam Aadmi Party is proof that in the complex web of the governance of education in India, reforms are successful only with strong backing by the ruling party. Education must therefore become an important agenda item for Indian governments to ensure successful policy implementation.

Finally, I realised that the education governance system and non-governmental players must come together and function as a whole to identify and address roadblocks in policy implementation. Given the fact that almost all participants reported receiving some sort of support from an NGO, it is apparent that these organisations are already a strong part of the Indian education ecosystem. Given the gaps in knowledge building and upskilling of stakeholders, there is a broad scope of possible areas of collaboration between these agencies, which I believe should be explored further.

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APPENDICES

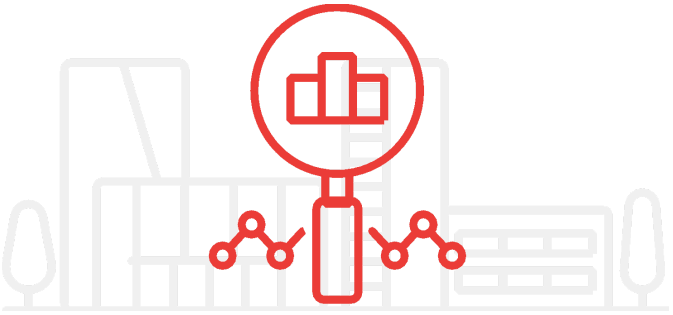
Appendix 1 Research Notification

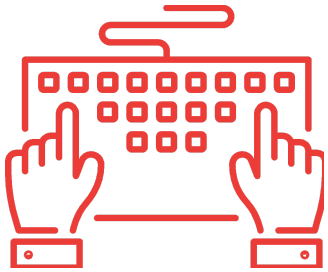
Information for participants in research

Dear Participant,

This study is about Policy implementation in Indian schools, specifically looking at the on-ground changes in schools as a result of the NEP2020. This study is conducted by Radhika Singaraju, studying at the University of Jyväskylä.

I would like to ask you to participate in my study because you are a valuable source of first hand information in this study as a result of your position in the Delhi school system. As a principal or teacher in this system, you will have valuable insights into the work being done to bring to life the vision of the NEP2020 on the ground in Delhi.



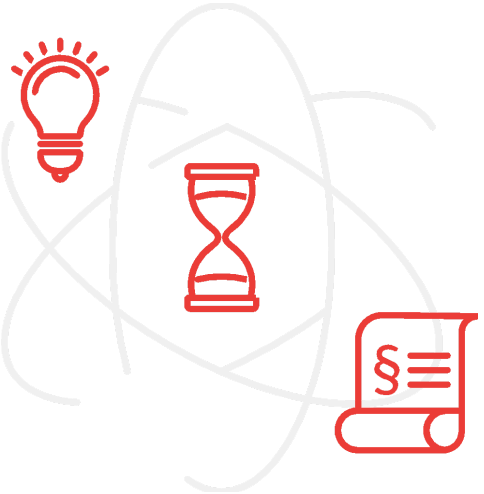


Voluntariness and the rights of research subjects

Participating in this study is completely voluntary. You can refuse to participate in interviews, withdraw your consent or cancel your participation in this study at any point. You do not have to tell me why you do not want to participate. If you have any questions about your rights, please contact the university's data protection officer tietosuoja@jyu.fi, tel. +358 40 805 3297

Information about the study

I will interview you in Delhi between 11th and 15th December, at a time and place suitable for you.
I would like to know about your experiences of implementing the guidelines in the NEP 2020, specifically regarding curricula, pedagogy, language of instruction, assessment structures and school structures. The interview will take approximately 1 hour. I will record our interview if you give me your permission to do so.

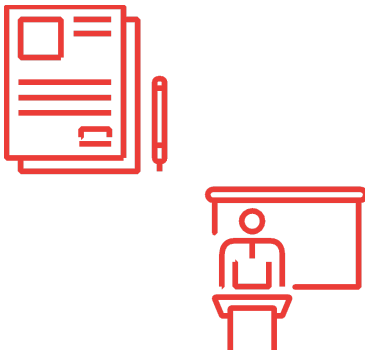


Protection of personal data

- I will not collect any personal data that can directly identify you during the study (you name, name of school, etc). I will collect data regarding your work experience and the context of the school.
- I will process all data obtained during the interview confidentially and anonymously. I am the only one who will listen to the recording. I will not disclose the content of our interview to anyone else. I have completed the university's data protection and information security training. In addition, I comply with the university's guidelines.

Data archiving

I will archive your responses anonymously for possible later research of my own, if you give me your permission to do so. No other researchers will read your responses nor use them as data in their studies.



Research results

The content of this study will be published as a master's level thesis at the University of Jyväskylä. This research topic will also be discussed in presentations and during lectures.

Rights of research subjects

You can ask me anything about this study before, during or after the interview. You have the right to access any data you have given me and have it rectified. In addition, you can tell me if you do not want your data to be processed. If necessary, you can also file a complaint regarding the processing of your personal data.

I will ask you to sign a consent form before our interview.

The form is on the last page of this file.

Consent form

I have been asked to take part in a study on policy implementation in Indian schools.

I have read and understood the information given above. I have received sufficient information about the study. Radhika Singaraju has also talked to me about the study and responded to all my questions about it.

I understand that participating in this study is voluntary. I have the right, at any time during the study, to cancel my participation in the study. I do not need to give any reasons for cancelling my participation. Cancelling my participation will not result in any negative consequences for me.

☐ Yes, I will participate in the study.

_____

Date

_____

Signature of the research subject

_____

Name in print

_____

Signature of the researcher

_____

Name in print

Appendix 2 Interview Questions

1. Number of years of work experience you have:
2. Number of students in your school:
3. Socio-economic background of students in your school:
4. Have any curricula or teaching practices changed as a result of the NEP 2020?
    a. If yes, how?
    b. If not, why?
5. Has the academic structure changed as a result of the NEP 2020?
    a. If yes, how?
    b. If not, why?
6. Have the assessment structures changed as a result of the NEP 2020?
    a. If yes, how?
    b. If not, why?
7. Has the language of education changed as a result of the NEP 2020?
    a. If yes, how?
    b. If not, why?
8. Have any other changes been implemented as a result of the NEP 2020?
    a. If yes, what changes?
    b. Why these changes?
9. How easy or difficult was it to implement the guidelines issued in the NEP 2020?
10. What challenges, if any, have you faced in implementing the guidelines issued in the NEP 2020?
11. Did you receive any support from the government or any NGOs in implementing the guidelines issued in the NEP 2020? What kind of support?

Appendix 3 Overview of Findings

The table shows the themes identified, the sub-themes included in each theme and the type of schools impacted by the change (private schools only, government schools only, or both).

Table 2

Overview of Findings

Category	Themes Identified	Schools Impacted
Curricular and pedagogical changes	Increased focus on conceptual understanding and clarity	Both
	Increase in activity based and hands-on learning	Both
	Focus on foundational skill development	Both
	Rigorous lesson planning	Both
	Centralisation and standardisation of planning and resources	Government
Academic structure changes	Combining preschool with grades one and two	Both
	Increase in age of admission in grade one	Private
Assessment changes	Continuous and holistic assessments	Both
	Reduction in number of exams	Government
	Reduced focus on formal examinations	Private
Changes in Language of Instruction	No significant changes	Both
Challenges faced	Lack of resources	Government
	Increase in stress and workload	Both
	Difficulties in gaining stakeholder buy-in	Both
Support Received	Professional development support	Both
	Infrastructure and learning materials	Government