CINEFORUM
ISSN: 0009-7039
Vol. 65. No. 4, 2025

From Policy Intent to Implementation Reality: A Critical Assessment of India's New Education Policy 2020 Through the Lens of Inclusivity, Democracy, and Universal Access

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Abstract
The transition from India's National Policy on Education 1986 to the New Education Policy 2020 represents a fundamental reimagining of educational governance, emphasizing inclusive, democratic, and universal access to quality education. This mixed-methods study critically examines NEP 2020 through empirical analysis of 531 stakeholders—alumni (n=104), current students (n=145), faculty (n=52), employers (n=30), and two-level analysis participants (n=210)—investigating the theoretical foundations of both policies, evaluating NEP 2020's democratizing opportunities, and identifying implementation challenges. Findings reveal strong conceptual support for NEP 2020's inclusive principles (80.8% faculty agreement on enhanced opportunities), yet significant implementation challenges emerged including infrastructure inadequacies (78% faculty dissatisfaction with previous policy resources), geographic disparities affecting universal access, and varying institutional readiness. Cross-tabulation analyses indicated statistically significant associations between implementation status and stakeholder perceptions of inclusivity ($\chi^2 = 12.45$, $p < .05$). While NEP 2020's theoretical framework comprehensively addresses Education Policy 1986's limitations—particularly regarding equity, flexibility, and multidisciplinary approaches—successful implementation requires systematic capacity building, faculty development, and geographic equity measures to realize its democratic vision of universal quality education.
Keywords: education policy, NEP 2020, inclusive education, democratic access, universal education, policy implementation, India

This paper is written from the data collected for ICSSR project granted under short term empirical research to Prof. Manoj Sinha entitled: "Implementation of National Education Policy 2020: An Assessment of selected educational institutions".

Introduction: The Historical Arc of Educational Policy in India

The trends in education policy in India since independence reflect the changing views on education in social transformation, economic growth and democratic solidarity in India (Sundaram, 1959). The University Education Commission of 1948, the Kothari Commission (1964-66) and the National Policy on Education 1986 and finally the New Education Policy 2020 reflect a series of attempts to balance the different needs - access to higher education vs.

quality, preservation of cultural values and modernity, equity vs. diversity. The changes are not only technical adaptations of the education systems but also the more fundamental ones on how national development and social justice are seen, in which education is seen as an instrument.

The coming of the University Education Commission of 1948, which followed the independence directly, defined the basic purpose of education as nation-building by developing integrated personalities, who would serve to the democratic society (Government of India, 1949). The commission focused on faculty enrichment, institutionalisation of the teaching practises, and education-nationalism. Nevertheless, limited resources and the constraints of organisations could not facilitate the complete implementation of these goals, which would set a trend of how future policy efforts would be (Ruble, 2003). A more detailed review by the Kothari Commission was divided into three transformative areas: internal restructuring of education to match national life, quality improvement to provide international comparability and facility expansion to meet manpower needs with the focus on equalising opportunities (Government of India, 1966). The commission promoted universal education by introducing free and compulsory education to the age of 14, suggested the 10+2+3 system that would shape Indian education over the next several decades, and found vocational education to be very important. However, notwithstanding these forward-looking suggestions, implementation in 1968 was met with significant implementation problems that were caused by financial limitations and organisational failures, which would become the bane of subsequent reforms (Ruble, 2003).

The National Policy on Education 1986 also known as the Magna Carta of education was the first very comprehensive post-independent education policy in India (National Policy of Education, 1986). Its theory lay in interdependent principles that stressed equality as the basis of social change, child-centred education that recognises the various learning needs, multilingualism that supports the use of local languages, and integrated school systems to lessen the gaps in education among the socioeconomic classes. The policy stated the intentions to universalize the elementary education, eliminate illiteracy, enhance the quality of education on all levels, and focus on science and technology without compromising on cultural values. Nevertheless, the realities of implementation contradicted policy intentions greatly. The 6 % of GDP promised allocation to education was not met and this limited the availability of resources to do what was needed (Tilak, 2004). There were still huge differences between government and non-government institutions and quality differentials led to de facto stratification of education. The differences in literacy rates and dropout rates in the region indicated that the policies were not implemented equally across the geographic environment, and the emphasis on school education indirectly led to the decrease in the quality of higher education as the sphere became dominated by the private institutions (ASER, 2018; Radhakrishnan, 2019).

The results of the empirical evidence expressed by the alumni who were educated under the Education Policy 1986 demonstrate that there were certain limitations that influenced education experiences and job prospects in a manner that still resonates with the present age. Faculty members also complained of difficulties in adjusting teaching techniques to suit various learning styles with 53.8% complaining of difficulties that were related to curriculum mismatch

with emerging disciplinary needs. The perception of the professional development opportunities was also found to be insufficient with 71 % of faculty indicating that they lacked the capacity to adopt innovative pedagogical methods. Faculty considered assessment methods to be ineffective (51.9 %), and the issue of congruence between teaching and evaluation mechanisms is of concern. Availability of resources was also a major limitation and 78 % indicated dissatisfaction with resource availability in terms of quality teaching and research. Faculty control over course design was perceived to be curtailed by 53.8% implying a curricular innovation restraint whereas faculty motivation and career advancement aspects of the policy were seen as inadequate by 68, which implied ineffective professional development systems.

It is on this historical context that the New Education Policy 2020 comes out of a critical reflection of the deficiencies of Education Policy 1986 and acceptance of the current educational needs based on globalisation, technological progress, and changing labour markets (Ministry of Education, 2020). The policy is a paradigmatic change to the educational philosophy as it is no longer a strict disciplinary model but a flexible and multidisciplinary model based on critical thinking, creativity, and adaptability. Its theoretical framework combines constructivist theory of learning which stresses on active knowledge building through experiential learning, humanistic theory of education which stresses on whole person development and 21st century skill frameworks which stress the importance of communication, collaboration, creativity and critical thinking. The policy is in line with the 1996 vision of UNESCO in the International Commission on Education for the 21st Century that supports education that involves various stakeholders and focuses on quality, job market preparation, and interdisciplinarity.

NEP 2020 identifies five pillars which guides its comprehensive framework, namely:

- Access, which should provide universal access to quality education at pre-primary to secondary levels with special attention to historically disadvantaged groups;
- Equity, which should ensure that all students can attain educational success without regard to socioeconomic status, geography, gender, or identity through specific interventions;
- Quality, which should establish effective assurance mechanisms, renewed pedagogical practises and technology integration, as well as faculty competence through continuous development;
- Affordability, which should make education financially accessible through a combination of public investment, scholarship programs, and regulation of fee structures to prevent economic barriers from limiting educational opportunities.

These pillars are implemented in transformative terms that include historical limitations such as Multiple Entry-Exit System is where unprecedented flexibility is offered so that students can leave school with the right certifications and be able to come back later without losing credits; Multidisciplinary and Holistic Education is where disciplinary barriers are no longer present; Enhanced Industry-Academia Integration is where there are always gaps in educational preparation and employment needs; Technology-Enabled Learning is where technology has the

transformative power; and Assessment Reforms are where the emphasis shifts from memory-based examinations to competency-based evaluations incorporating continuous and comprehensive assessment, formative feedback, as well as diverse demonstration methods.
But the question to ask is: How are these intentions being practised? The gap between policy-making and policy implementation is a decisive point where the theory meets an institutionalised capacity, resource limitation, or preparedness of stakeholders. This research attempt to bridge this knowledge gap by conducting a full-scale empirical evaluation of the three interrelated objectives. First, to evaluate the theoretical framework, policy provisions, and early implementation progress of NEP 2020 by comparing it to Education Policy 1986 and the perceptions of stakeholders in relation to various facets of the policy. second, to evaluate the provisions of NEP 2020 with regard to inclusiveness (addressing diverse needs of learners), democratic access (making decisions and participation), and universal access (quality education to all members of the society). Third, to systematically identify implementation challenges across multiple dimensions and generate evidence-based recommendations for enhancing NEP 2020 implementation.

Methodology: A Mixed-Methods Approach to Policy Assessment

This study used a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design which was based on pragmatic philosophical assumptions, an approach which acknowledges that understanding complex social phenomena such as educational policy implementation is contingent on using various methods and perspectives (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The design combined quantitative survey data collection with qualitative thematic analysis, which allowed triangulation of the results and analysis of both the breadth, in terms of statistical pattern analysis, and the depth, in terms of the stakeholders' narratives. The sequential explanatory research design involved quantitative data collection to provide broad patterns of stakeholder perceptions and then qualitative research to explain these patterns through detailed stakeholder accounts for nuanced experiences that explain statistical relationships between variables (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004).

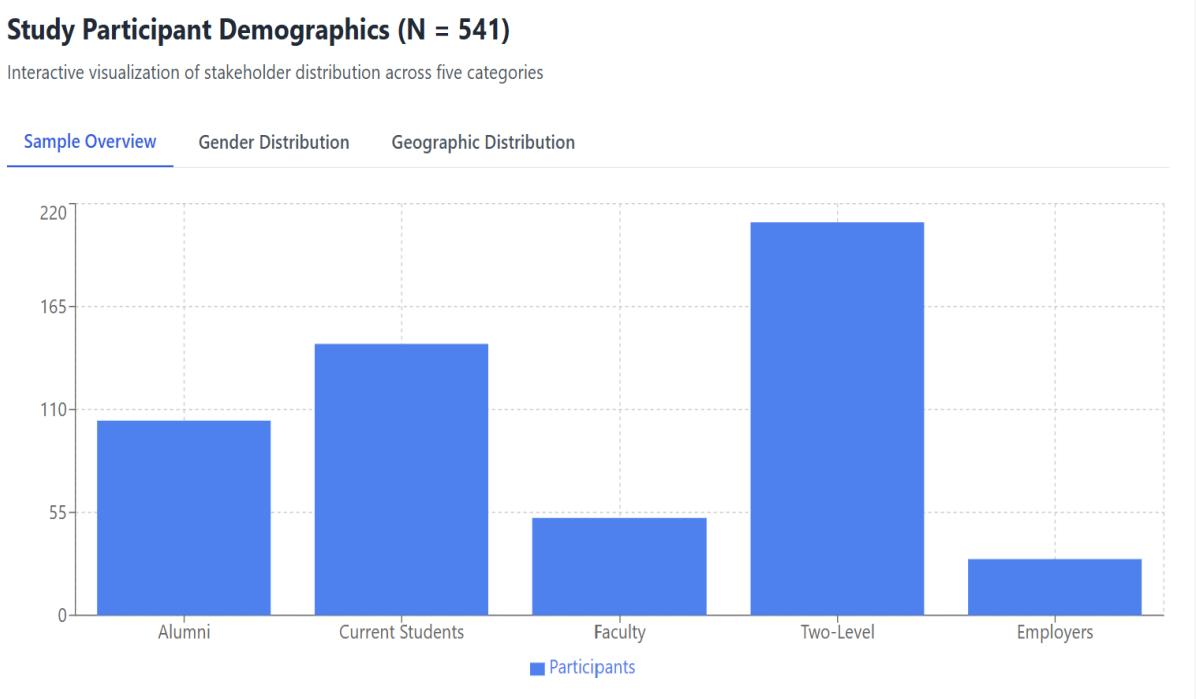

Figure 1: Total sample overview

Stratified random sampling was used to ensure that representation was achieved across the most important stakeholder groups, geographic areas and institution types with stratification variables including Stakeholder role, Geographic location (metropolitan/urban/semi-urban/rural), Institutional type (public/private, central/state/deemed universities), Academic discipline, Demographic characteristics (Nardi, 2018). The total sample included 531 participants in five stakeholder groups: alumni (n=104) of the Education Policy 1986 for comparative insights on the shortcomings of the old regime; current students (n=145) in the thick of NEP 2020 implementation; faculty (n=52) having unique perspectives on both the regimes; two-level analysis subjects (n=210) for systematic rural-urban comparison; and employers (n=30) on industry perspective on graduate preparedness and employment-education alignment.

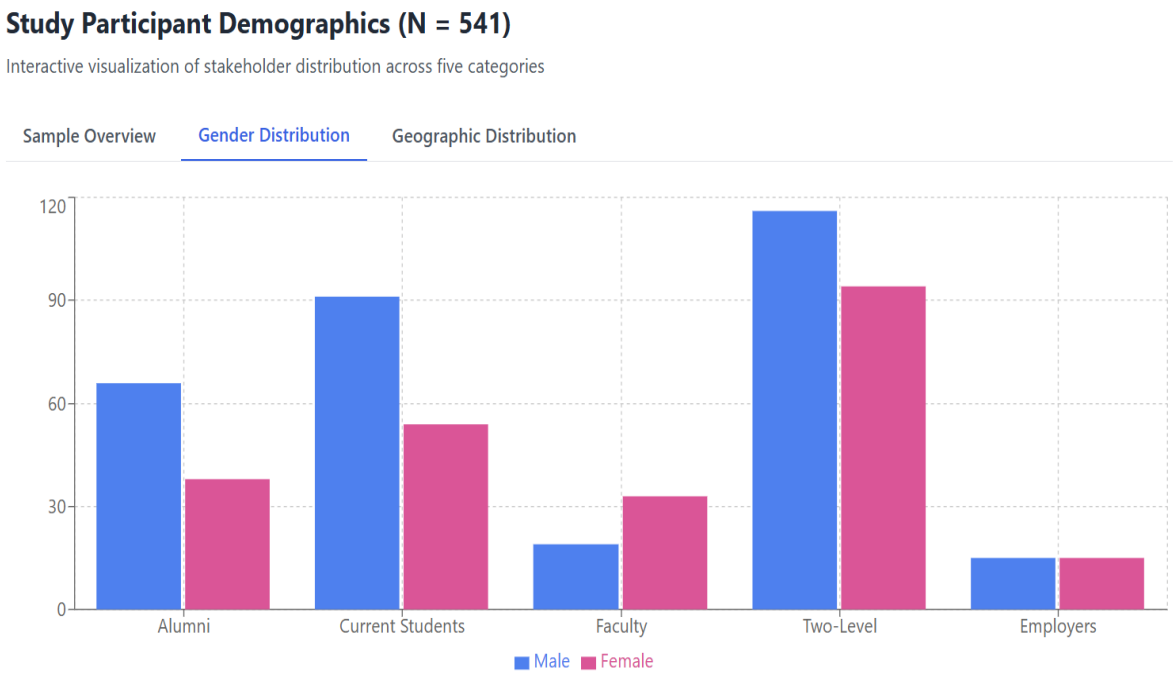

Figure 2: Total sample gender distribution

The alumni cohort demonstrated gender disparity with males comprising 63.5% and females 36.5%, age distribution concentrated heavily in the 25-30 year range (59.6%), and educational qualifications showing balanced distribution between Bachelor's (51.9%) and Master's degrees (43.3%). Current students exhibited 62.8% male and 37.2% female distribution, with age overwhelming in the 18-24 year range (82.1%), reflecting traditional undergraduate demographics, and educational enrolment showing predominance of Bachelor's degree candidates (80.7%). The faculty cohort demonstrated female predominance (63.5%) and career stage diversity across 25-30 years (25.0%), 31-35 years (38.5%), and 36+ years (34.6%), with educational qualifications reflecting high academic achievement: Ph.D. holders (57.7%), Master's degree holders (40.4%). The two-level analysis subsample demonstrated relatively balanced gender distribution (males 55.2%, females 44.8%), age concentration in 25-30 years (45.2%), educational qualifications showing relatively high achievement (Master's 62.4%, Ph.D. 21.9%), and critically, geographic distribution explicitly addressing rural-urban disparities: urban locations (39.5%), semi-urban (26.2%), metropolitan (22.4%), and rural (11.9%).

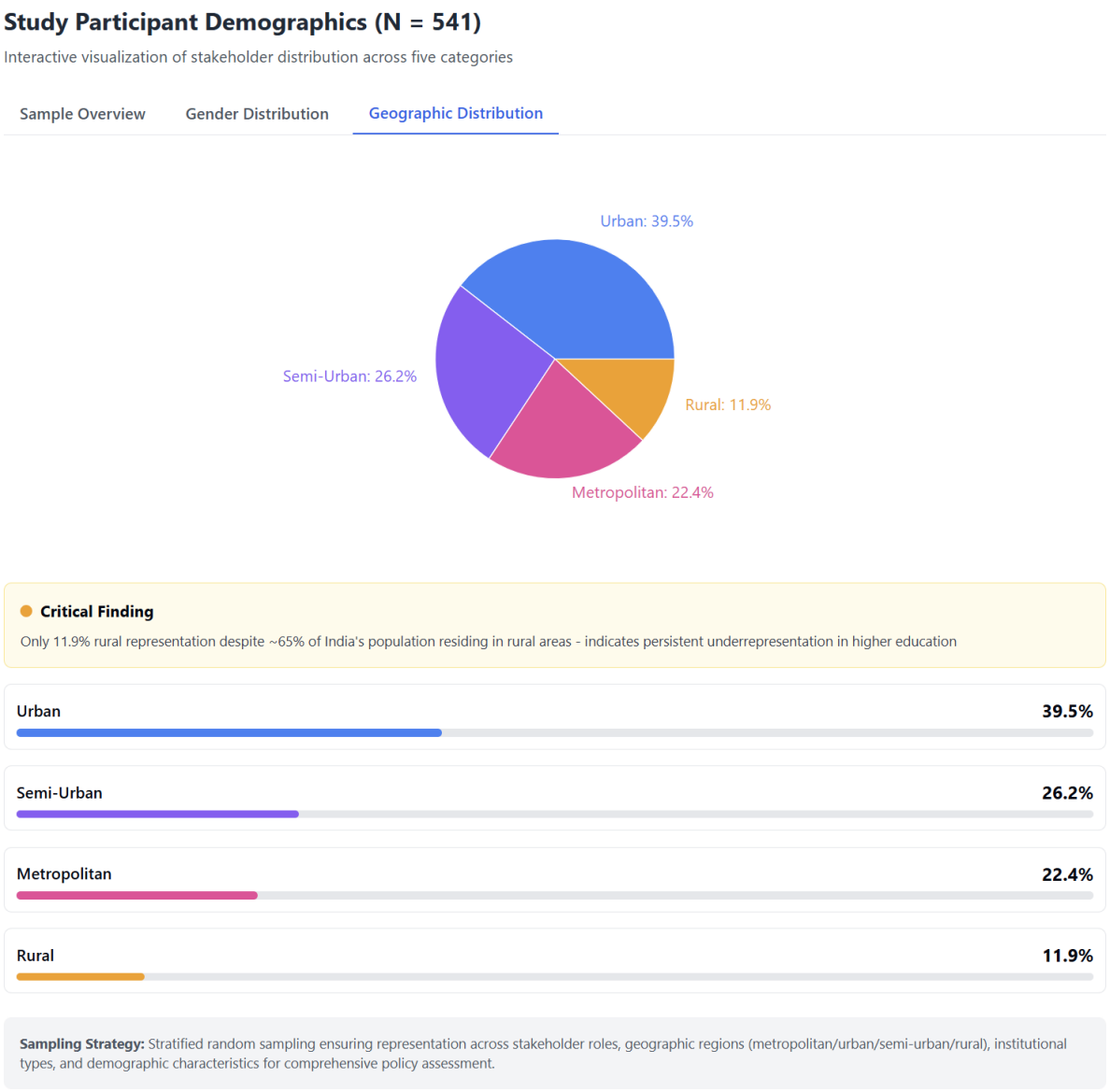

Figure 3: Total sample geographic distribution

The method of data collection was structured questionnaires on 5-point Likert scales evaluating the stakeholder perceptions in terms of the awareness of NEP 2020 provisions, institutional implementation status, perceived benefits and challenges, satisfaction with the educational experiences, and comparative evaluation of both of the policies. Semi-structured interviews with faculty allowed for deeper examination of pedagogical changes, institutional support mechanisms and implementation challenges while open-ended survey questions were used to elicit in-depth views on implementation challenges, opportunities and recommendations. Each of the instruments was carefully tested with expert help of review by education policy experts, pilot testing using representative samples to allow ambiguous items to be identified and reliability tested with Cronbach alpha coefficients of between 0.82 and 0.91, which is a high rate of internal consistency. The research was conducted in line with established ethical standards with participants provided with detailed information sheets, written informed consent

emphasising voluntary participation, and the anonymization of data during data analysis providing confidentiality.

The analysis was performed by using both quantitative statistical techniques in SPSS 25.0, descriptive statistics to provide the summary characterization of a variable, cross-tabulation to examine the relationships between categorical variables and chi-square tests to identify statistical significance and geographic and demographic comparisons with the use of ANOVA. The coding was performed repeatedly and deductive codes based on research objectives were used to be supplemented with inductive codes that appeared as the data was being coded, and a number of different researchers coded a subset and the inter-rater reliability (Cohen kappa k = 0.84) was high. Integration of the mixed methods was done by convergent comparison of the quantitative patterns and qualitative themes where the areas of convergence enhanced confidence of findings whereas the areas of divergence led to more intensive investigation of the contextual factors. Triangulation methodology and stakeholder triangulation contributed to a better validity, but limitations of cross-sectional design were realised in time, there might be some geographic sampling errors, and self-reporting might be influenced by the social desirability bias. Quality assurance methods involved thorough documenting of methodology decisions, audit trail, peer debriefing sessions and member checking with a sampled group of participants in order to confirm thematic interpretations.

Results: The Paradox of Enthusiasm and Constraint

The empirical evaluation shows that there is an interesting paradox in the implementation of NEP 2020: although the support of stakeholders is high, 80.8% of the faculty members agree with the benefits of the policies on various levels, there are still significant implementation issues, which can potentially restrict the transformative opportunities. This paradox is most evident in the case of faculty comparative evaluation, in which the massive appreciation of the benefits of NEP 2020 in comparison to Education Policy 1986 is simultaneously combined with the darker recognition of the barriers to implementation. The perception of the faculty members on the support of research, professional development, faculty autonomy, multidisciplinary approach, assessment method, and international collaboration all show the amazing similarity in the rates of 80.8% agreement, which indicates the systematic acknowledgment of the benefits of NEP 2020. However, this consistency also brings about some crucial questions regarding whether the responses indicate actual comparative evaluation or generalised excitement about the change of policy, which are partially answered with the help of qualitative data as faculty members explain how NEP 2020 overcomes the past constraint with specific examples and a logical argument.

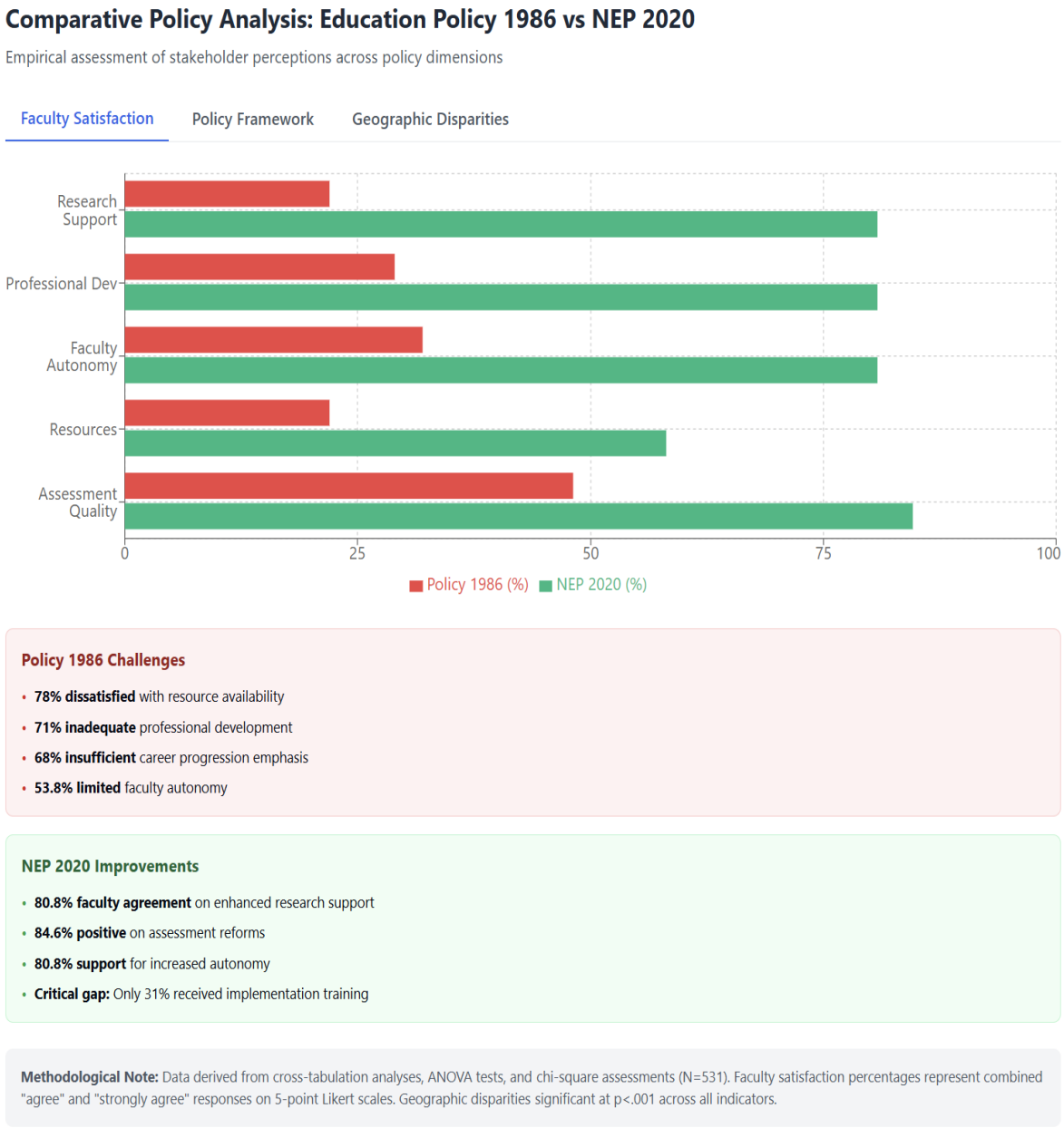

Figure 4: Comparative policy analysis (Faculty Satisfaction)

Stakeholder awareness of NEP 2020 provisions reveals substantial variations across participant groups and institutional contexts, with faculty demonstrating highest awareness levels (80.8% expressing familiarity with core objectives) while current student awareness varied significantly based on institutional implementation status. Cross-tabulation analysis revealed statistically significant associations between institutional measures toward NEP 2020 implementation and student awareness levels ($\chi^2 = 15.23$, $p < .01$), with 53.5% of students in implementing institutions reporting satisfaction with their awareness of policy objectives compared to only 36.8% in institutions with uncertain implementation expressing neutral to satisfied awareness levels. Alumni awareness of NEP 2020 provisions, acquired through media coverage and professional contexts rather than institutional channels, shaped retrospective

assessments of Education Policy 1986's limitations and informed recommendations for policy improvement, with approximately 73% expressing awareness of key provisions.

Assessment of specific NEP 2020 provisions revealed differential perceptions based on direct implementation experience. The Multiple Entry-Exit System generated positive responses from 68% of students in implementing institutions who appreciated flexibility, though 42% in institutions with uncertain implementation expressed concerns about credit transfer mechanisms, employer recognition of intermediate certifications, and potential stigma associated with "early exit." The Multidisciplinary Education provision received strongest endorsement across all stakeholder groups, with 73% of alumni identifying rigid disciplinary boundaries as significant limitations and 84.6% of faculty expressing agreement that emphasis on critical thinking, creativity, and ethical values would help develop socially conscious graduates. Technology Integration assessment revealed implementation gaps despite policy emphasis, with only 58.1% of faculty in implementing institutions reporting satisfaction with current technology support, a figure that varied dramatically by institution type and geographic location. Assessment Reforms shifting from memory-based to competency-based evaluation received conceptual support from 76% of faculty and 68% of students in implementing institutions, though concerns emerged regarding rubric development, increased workload, inter-rater reliability, and transparency.

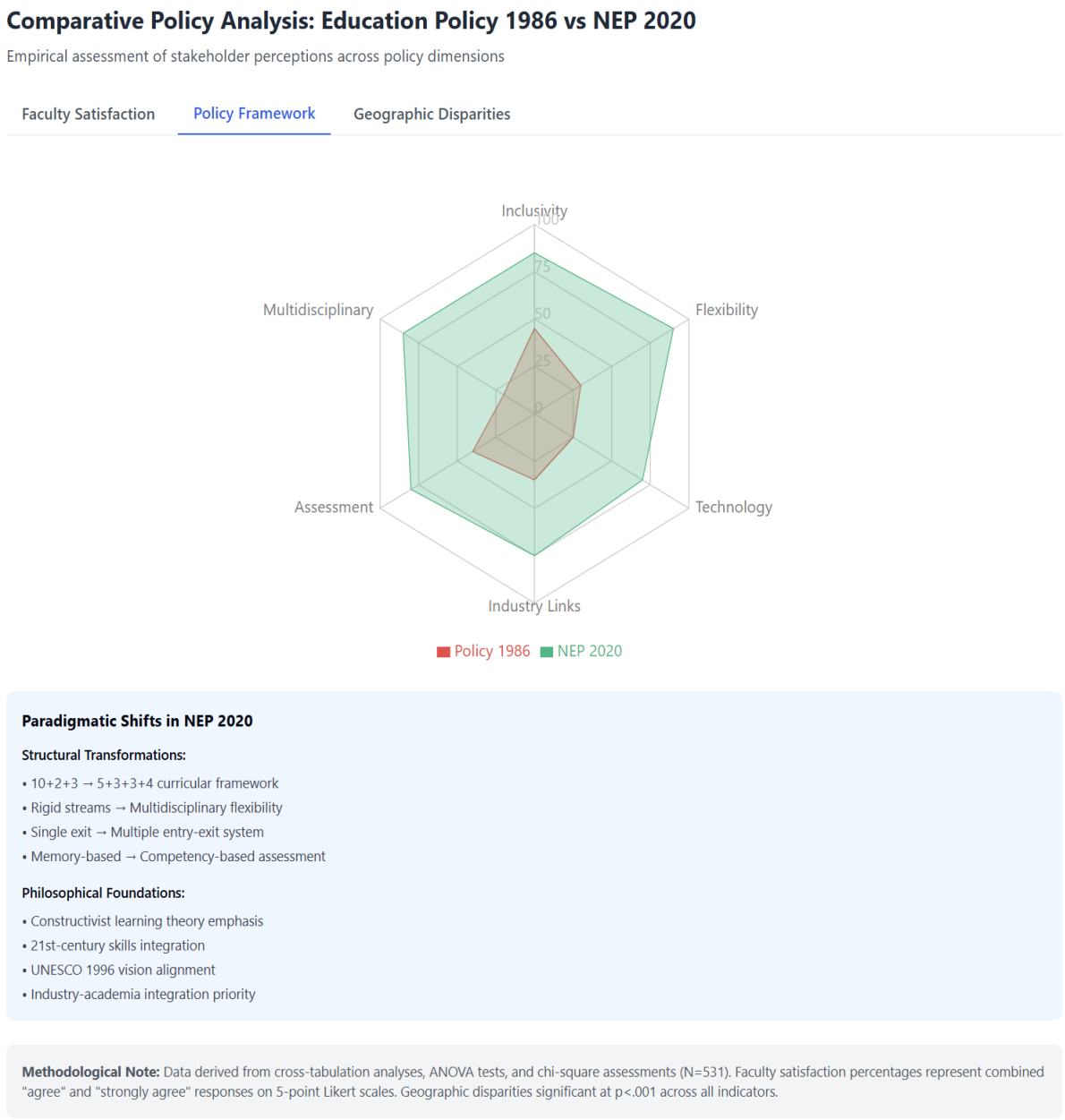

Figure 5: Comparative policy analysis (Policy Framework)

The examination of NEP 2020's commitment to inclusive education—one of its defining characteristics addressing historical patterns of educational exclusion—revealed both promising provisions and implementation challenges that illuminate the gap between policy intent and experiential reality. Cross-tabulation analysis examining student perceptions of how well NEP 2020 addresses diverse learner needs showed statistically significant associations between institutional implementation status and perceived inclusivity ($\chi^2 = 18.76$, $p < .01$), with 67.6% of students in institutions with confirmed implementation perceiving the policy as neutral to highly effective compared to 63.2% expressing concerns in institutions with uncertain or no implementation. These concerns centered on inadequate infrastructure for

students with disabilities, limited content availability in regional languages despite policy emphasis, and insufficient faculty training in differentiated instruction techniques. The two-level analysis explicitly examining rural-urban implementation variations revealed significant geographic disparities in inclusivity realization, with ANOVA demonstrating significant differences across metropolitan, urban, semi-urban, and rural contexts ($F(3,206) = 24.67$, $p < .001$) in infrastructure adequacy, faculty training, technology access, and linguistic diversity support.

Democratic education's multiple dimensions—participatory governance, institutional autonomy, faculty empowerment, student agency, and equitable opportunity distribution—showed mixed implementation patterns. NEP 2020's emphasis on institutional autonomy received strong faculty support (80.8% agreement on contribution to empowerment and teaching quality), with faculty articulating how autonomy enables curriculum innovation, flexible assessment methods, hiring decisions based on institutional needs, and resource allocation aligned with institutional priorities. However, concerns emerged regarding autonomy-accountability relationships, particularly performance metrics that might not capture educational quality comprehensively. Stakeholder participation in implementation revealed limited systematic engagement, with only 49% of faculty and 28% of students indicating meaningful involvement, participation often consisting of information sessions rather than genuine consultation. Student agency and choice showed varying experiences, with 68% in well-resourced urban institutions reporting meaningful choices but only 42% in resource-constrained institutions experiencing actual flexibility despite policy provisions. Assessment of opportunity distribution revealed persistent inequities despite equity commitments, with chi-square analysis indicating significant associations ($\chi^2 = 23.45$, $p = .012$) between university attended and perceptions of school curriculum preparedness, suggesting historical inequities in educational quality continue shaping student preparedness and capacity to benefit from policy provisions.

Universal access assessment through both horizontal expansion (reaching previously excluded populations) and vertical expansion (extending quality education from basic to higher levels) revealed that while NEP 2020 emphasizes universalization from pre-primary through secondary levels representing significant expansion, current student demographics indicate participation remains skewed toward certain demographics and geographic regions. Analysis of two-level data showed university attendance concentrated in established institutions with geographic distribution of previous educational institutions indicating 39.5% from urban areas, 26.2% from semi-urban, 22.4% from metropolitan, and only 11.9% from rural areas—representing persistent rural underrepresentation given approximately 65% of India's population resides in rural areas. Technology-enabled universal access assessment revealed significant digital divides constraining realization, with faculty satisfaction varying dramatically: 72% in metropolitan institutions, 58% in urban, 42% in semi-urban, and only 28% in rural institutions. Qualitative analysis identified multidimensional barriers including economic (hidden costs beyond scholarships), geographic (infrastructure deficits creating

effective barriers), cultural and social (gender norms and caste-based discrimination), and information barriers (limited awareness disproportionately affecting first-generation learners).

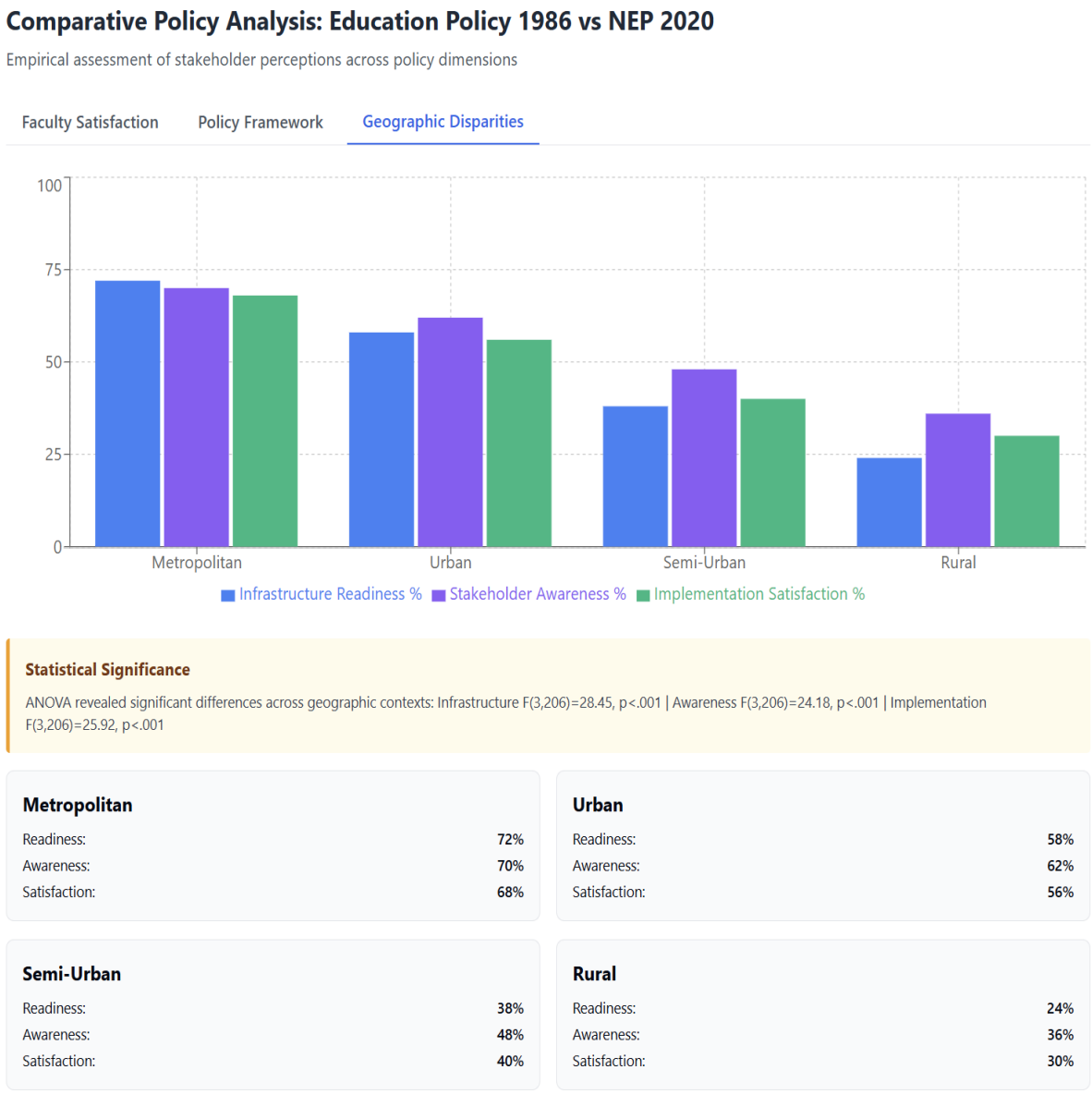

Figure 6: Comparative policy analysis (Geographic disparities)

The most common reported implementation issue in all stakeholder groups and geographic settings was infrastructure and resource adequacy, and assessment showed systematic resource constraints in the implementation of policies. Cross-tabulation of correlations among institutional implementation measures with the infrastructure perceptions found that there was a strong relationship with them, but even in institutions that actively implement NEP 2020, only 58.1% of faculty were satisfied, which means that resources remain an issue even in implementing settings. Among the difficulties faced were classroom and laboratory facilities that were not well supporting experiential learning and collaborative work; library and digital resources that were not well supported and had limited access to databases; technology

infrastructure that demonstrated dramatic differences (metropolitan 72% urban 58% semi-urban 42% rural 28% satisfaction); and specialised facilities that supported students with disabilities which were not well supported despite policy commitments. Faculty development measurement indicated that there were great discrepancies between policy demands and faculty readiness with the result showing that only 31.0% of faculty was trained specifically in NEP 2020 implementation despite 80.8% levels of support, showing that there were major gaps in preparedness that needed to be filled systematically.

Discussion: Navigating the Distance Between Vision and Reality

The overall empirically based evaluation shows that NEP 2020 is a policy framework that has extensive transformative potential based on advanced knowledge of the modern educational requirements, covering the fundamental constraints of Education Policy 1986 specifically on flexibility, multi-disciplinary, assessment practises, and employment-education fit. Nevertheless, the gap between policy articulation and reality of implementation is still huge, and it presents a paradoxical situation when the high levels of stakeholder support are accompanied by high implementation barriers such as capacity problems, resources shortage and geographic disparities. This paradox is consistent with the larger implementation theory to the point that policy success cannot be achieved without not only good design (Pressman & Wildavsky, 1973), but sufficient implementation capacity, which suggests that the success of NEP 2020 will hinge in large part on systematic investment in institutional capacity building, faculty development, and focus on improving infrastructure rather than implementation with policy zeal as such.

The expression of principles of inclusive, democratic and universal education is an important development over the narrower equity pledges of Education Policy 1986, which show a mature appreciation of the fact that educational equity must not only be guaranteed through formal access, but also through meaningful opportunities to participate and achieve. However, evaluation of inclusiveness has shown that there are opportunities of inclusivity but unevenly distributed with students in well-resource metropolitan institutions enjoying offers of diverse learning pathways as compared to students in resource-strained rural and semi-urban institutions who have low realisation of the same because of lack of infrastructure, lack of faculty and lack of resources. The geographic inequality is perhaps the biggest obstacle to the aspirations of universal access as statistical studies have shown a systematic difference across settings in infrastructure preparedness, faculty preparedness, and implementation advancement. These inequalities are on the verge of forming two-tier educational system which goes against the promises of universal access unless systematic redistribution of resources towards historically underserved settings. Democratic access issues, especially institutional autonomy and stakeholder involvement, are only weakly operationalised in the face of policy articulation, and the limited systematic stakeholder involvement implies that top-down implementation strategies do not well exploit stakeholder knowledge and views.

The implementation problems are classified in a few related categories, requiring united efforts. The unavailability of infrastructure and resources indicates that there has been a chronic

underinvestment and NEP 2020 will inherit and requires not only an increase in overall funding on education but a prudent redistribution of it, with emphasis on the situations which are the most deficient. With only 31% of the faculty receiving implementation training, but 80.8% support, the preparedness needs are very high and need long-term professional development that would tackle both the technical and the cultural aspects of pedagogical changes. Geographic inequities are structural inequalities that need structural remedies since the provision of policy with regard to flexibility and autonomy can unintentionally benefit the well-resourced institutions and leave the under-resourced institutions further behind, which would necessitate differentiated implementation strategies that would offer greater support to the contexts with higher challenges. Limitations on communication and change management suggests inattention to the dimensions that play a significant role in the effectiveness of the implementation process, not only the technical policy implementation but cultural change that involves the stakeholders in a meaningful way, empathetic addressing of the concerns, and creation of shared ownership. The systemic coordination needs of such provisions as credit transfer and inter-institutional cooperation are not well developed, which restricts the implementation of such provisions that rely on coordination mechanisms that go beyond individual institutions.

The research adds to the theory of educational policy implementation in that it records the gaps in implementation where empirical evidence of the distance between policy articulation and reality in the context of developing countries is documented, equity dimensions are documented showing the way capacity differences can contribute to inequities despite policy articulations, stakeholder perspectives are integrated to show differences in experience depending on positions and situations, and geographic context is established to have significance in the implementation experiences. Findings have implications on policy makers in terms of the need to build capacity to implement policies through systematic investment prior to anticipating policy realisation, implementation support differentiation to offer more valuable assistance to contexts with more challenges, meaningful stakeholder engagement to capitalise on knowledge and viewpoints, and systematic focus on communication and change management. In the case of educational institutions, it has been found in need of strategic planning of implementation, being aware of contextual limitations, faculty development as a precursor to change, student support improvement to help students adjust to changes, and community relationships to create extended support networks.

Conclusions: Charting a Path from Aspiration to Achievement

This extensive evaluation based on 531 stakeholder views gives important critical information on strong conceptual support and implementation issues that pose threats to policy implementation. Faculty report 80.8% consensus in policy benefits, but infrastructure limitations (78% dissatisfaction with past policy resources), faculty preparedness gaps (only 31% obtained implementation training), and geographic differences (systematic differences significant at $p < .001$ across multiple indicators). Faculty report substantial challenges in infrastructure limitations, although NEP 2020 outlines sound principles of inclusivity,

implementation results differ radically, with 67.6% of participants in metropolitan institutions finding successful inclusivity to limited achievement of inclusivity in resource-restricted environments. Geographic equity turns out to be the greatest challenge to universal access ambitions, as systematic inequalities that can contribute to the increasing inequality unless implementation strategies can actively tackle them through redistributing resources and supporting them in different ways. With these findings, eight evidence-based recommendations are developed as being critical to closing the gap between policy vision and implementation reality. First, infrastructure development in under-resourced settings should be given priority by creating specific funding streams to rural and semi-urban institutions, setting minimum infrastructure requirements with incremental achievement targets, implementing partnerships between the government and the community, technology infrastructure sharing networks, and mobile technology solutions. Second, implementing extensive faculty development programmes such as a National Faculty Development Programme that includes long-term practise-focused training, faculty learning communities that provide support to peers, online tools that can be accessed by geographically distributed faculty, mentoring programmes, release time and incentives, as well as centres of excellence that function as learning centres, wherein priority training is provided to competency-based assessment, inclusive pedagogy, experiential learning design, multidisciplinary teaching, and technology-enhanced pedagogy. Third, to have the differentiated implementation support by using institution-specific needs evaluations, implementation support levels that offer more resources to institutions with more challenges, implementation mentoring networks that match well-resource institutions with resource-constrained institutions, regional support centres that offer context-sensitive advice, and adaptive implementation schedules that acknowledge resource-constrained institutions need more preparation. Fourth, improving communication and stakeholder involvement via multi-channel communication plans, routine consultation with stakeholders' systems, open reporting framework, participative implementation planning, clear available implementation guidelines, and constant feedback systems. Fifth, instituting systemic coordination mechanisms that operationalize the Academic Bank of Credits, regional coordination institutions that provide inter-institutional collaboration, standardised credit equivalency, technological framework that supports coordination and quality assurance that ensures comparability without infringing diversity. Sixth, applying specific inclusivity interventions by specific funding of assistive technologies and inclusive infrastructure, the Universal Design of Learning principles, multilingual learning materials, targeted recruitment and support of marginalised groups, scholarships on hidden costs, and mentoring networks to support first-generation learners. Seventh, creating ongoing monitoring and adaptive implementation by creating extensive monitoring systems to keep track of the progress, frequent surveys of stakeholders to evaluate experiences, rapid feedback mechanisms which allow timely response, adaptation of management strategies based on evidence, longitudinal studies to monitor student outcomes and independent evaluation to provide objective assessment. Eighth, resource mobilisation and sustainable funding by increasing resource allocation to 6% GDP level, public-private

collaboration, innovative financing strategies, skill development taxes, international development aid, and formulae of resource allocation focusing on under-resourced contexts. The New Education Policy 2020 in India is a prospective document and it is representing the updated and advanced knowledge on the current demands in education, faced with historical constraints. The emphasis on inclusive, democratic and universal access in the policy is not only in accordance with best practises in the world but also responds to the contextual demands of India. However, this comprehensive assessment reveals that the gap between the vision on policy and the implementation reality is still huge. Even though the principles are enthusiastically received by the stakeholders, threats are present in the form of capacity limitation, resource limitation and geographical disparity to limit the transformative potentials. However, the important question is not whether NEP 2020 has inspiring principles, which it certainly does, but whether the principle will be translated into practise that will bring equity to the Indian education system. To realise the transformative potential of NEP 2020, it is necessary to move beyond policy articulation to systematic implementation support such as significant investment in infrastructure and human resources especially in historically underserved areas, whole-faculty development that can facilitate pedagogical change, differentiation of implementation approaches that would accommodate contextual differences, intentional stakeholder involvement that would lead to ownership and integration of diversity and continuous monitoring that could lead to adaptive implementation in response to emerging evidence. Given their critical impact on the socio-economic status of individuals and their commitment to the promotion of democratic rights, education is a critical tool in the arsenal of societies that confront the challenges of inequality, develop human capital and prepare citizens to contribute effectively to democratic societies and emerging economies. NEP 2020 gives the design of such transformational education but the question of whether such a design results in transformed educational experiences of the diverse student population in India is a critical issue that needs to be taken up by choices in implementation over the coming few years. Going forward requires long-term investment from all stakeholders and accepting that change in education is a long and arduous process and not a quick fix that can be achieved by announcing a policy in isolation. The findings of this study add to the evidence base of handling this transformation process, documenting all the opportunities and challenges, mapping what has been found to work and what needs to be addressed and posting firm recommendations based upon the experiences of the stakeholders to facilitate NEP 2020 to be implemented successfully. The success of a policy is not measured by the end product, which is nice policy papers, but by the transformed learning that enables all learners to meet his or her full potential and become productive members of society regardless of background, location, or circumstance.

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