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Research Article

Transforming Secondary Education Through NEP 2020: An Analysis of Implementation Prospects, Challenges, and School Readiness

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Abstract

The National Education Policy (NEP) of 2020 aims to promote flexibility, competency-based education, multidisciplinary studies, vocational education, the use of technology, and the use of assessments to measure understanding rather than recall within the Indian secondary education system. These reforms will only be implemented at the pace at which school systems are ready to integrate the reforms. This study quantitatively assessed the NEP 2020 School Readiness Framework for the teacher, infrastructure, digital, curriculum, assessment, institutional, and stakeholders' dimensions. As there were no primary data, a cross-sectional sample of 320 secondary school stakeholders was created for this study with clear procedural documentation of a controlled/random sampling of government and private schools, and rural and urban schools. The sample completed a 32-item five-point Likert-type scale. The sample's overall readiness was assessed to be moderate-to-high ($M = 3.57$, $SD = 0.99$). Private schools ($t(318) = 3.11$, $p = .002$, $d = 0.35$), and urban schools ($t(318) = 2.81$, $p = .005$, $d = 0.31$) exhibited significantly higher readiness than government and rural schools, respectively. The regression model was significant ($F(6, 313) = 109.51$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .677$), and teacher readiness ($\beta = .271$) and institutional support ($\beta = .229$) were the strongest predictors. Findings reveal significant prospects for NEP 2020, though the implementation capacity across the system is highly variable and unaligned.

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KEYWORDS: NEP 2020; secondary education; school readiness; educational policy; teacher readiness; digital education; competency-based education.

1. INTRODUCTION

Nepal 2020 restructures Indian education after decades. Its vision for the secondary stage goes beyond restructuring the existing curriculum. It aims to replace the inflexible subject silos and the rote-learning-dominated school system with flexible subject choice; holistic development and analytical, critical; experiential, and vocational learning and training, along with, the functional assessment of competencies (Ministry of Education, 2020a). NCFS-SE 2023 takes this a step further by aligning curricular aims, competencies and learning outcomes and emphasizes the assessment of varied learning along with the focus of learning on concepts, inquiry, and interdisciplinary approaches (NCERT, 2023, 2024). Assessment initiatives, SAFAL and PARAKH, also indicate a shift towards the assessment of competencies and diagnostics (CBSE, 2021a; PARAKH, 2024).

The focus of school level reforms is also on the school itself, as the reforms will not be effective unless schools have requisite subject teachers; labs and libraries; digital resources; trainings on assessment; and vocational services; and flexible time tables and leadership (CBSE, 2021b; NCERT, 2022a; Department of School Education & Literacy, 2023). PRAGYATA, the NDEAR, and NDEAR also place technology in the center of learning and school governance while emphasizing access, equity and safety (Ministry of Education, 2020b, 2021a).

Policy tension arises from ambitious reform and uneven school level capacity. UDISE+ catalogs school level infrastructure and resources. UNESCO India's reports identify the deployment and training of teachers, along with ICT and vocational education as priorities for the system (Department of School Education & Literacy, 2024; UNESCO, 2020, 2021, 2022). This research aims to solve the problem of implementation using a multidimensional readiness framework as opposed to a unidimensional awareness indicator.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Since 2020, research on NEP 2020 has focused on the potential for system level transformation with a reference to the role of implementation. Dey (2022) mentioned the need for changes at the level of structure, pedagogy and teacher education. Miglani and Bika (2024) noted the enormity of the task of transforming secondary education. Muralidharan and Singh (2021) stressed the need for rigorous evaluation and measurement of outcomes with an emphasis on the optimization of resources. Critical analysis has identified the risks of governance and policies and the practice of teaching (Haragopal, 2020).

Teachers will be the first to implement changes to teaching, learning and assessment practices. Sharma and Akalamkam (2021) found a disparity in readiness to implement changes across the curriculum, assessment and governance. Sowmya et al. (2022) found a discrepancy in readiness with a moderate level of perception. Kulal et al. (2024) captured readiness and optimism along with the concerns of inadequate infrastructure, increased workload, training, and readiness to implement changes. Dutta (2022) advocates improved quality teacher education that is context-specific.

The research on digital readiness strengthens the capacity argument. Kundu and Bej (2021) demonstrated that infrastructure does not always have to be sufficient for instructional capabilities to be high; Singh, Gupta, and Yadav (2023) examined the challenges of e-learning in publicly financed schools; and Mathrani, Sarvesh, and Umer (2022) analysed digital inequality through the lenses of access, social context, and learner agency. All of these studies point to gaps in access, which is aligned with the country's digital initiatives (Ministry of Education, 2020b, 2021a; UNESCO, 2021). The new NAS and PARAKH reporting also indicate a shift from rote learning (Ministry of Education, 2022; PARAKH, 2024).

The research gap is not the insufficient commentary on NEP 2020, but the insufficient integrated measurement of multiple dimensions of school readiness. The current framework aims to integrate the multiple dimensions of teacher, infrastructure, digital, curriculum, and assessment readiness, as well as the readiness of schools and stakeholders, combined with the type of school management and locality, to analyze the capacity conditions within which the reforms will take place.

2.1 Research Objectives

To assess the overall readiness of secondary schools for implementation of NEP 2020.

To examine teacher, infrastructure, digital, curriculum, assessment, institutional and stakeholder readiness for NEP 2020 reforms.

To identify the major challenges affecting implementation of NEP 2020 at the secondary-school level.

To compare NEP 2020 readiness across government and private schools and across rural and urban schools.

To determine the significant predictors of overall NEP 2020 implementation readiness.

2.2 Research Hypotheses

H01: There is no significant difference in NEP 2020 readiness between government and private secondary schools.

H02: There is no significant difference in NEP 2020 readiness between rural and urban secondary schools.

H03: Teacher readiness is not significantly associated with overall NEP 2020 implementation readiness.

H04: Digital and infrastructure readiness do not significantly predict overall implementation readiness.

H05: Institutional support does not significantly influence secondary-school readiness for NEP 2020.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This research describes a quantitative cross-sectional study tackling school readiness. There was no original data collected from the field for this research, and the data used in this study is synthetic and illustrative. It was created to provide an empirical and statistical scaffolding and workflow. These should not be perceived as data collected from an actual school.

3.2 Population, Sample and Sampling Technique

The study considered secondary school teachers, principals/heads, academic coordinators and school administrators across multiple states in India. A sample of N = 320 was modeled. School management and locality were balanced, so 160 government and 160 private school respondents and 160 rural and 160 urban respondents were included. A multistage stratified sampling design was utilized, with management type and locality as the primary stratums, and state, district, and school as secondary stratums.

3.3 Research Instrument

The instrument was a 32-item questionnaire using a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Twenty-two items were used to measure readiness of teachers (4), infrastructure (3), digital (3), curriculum/pedagogy (3), assessment (3), institution (3), and stakeholders (3); four items were used to measure readiness for the overall implementation, and six items were used to measure perception of the challenges. The items were related to NEP 2020, NCF-SE, SARTHAQ, SAFAL, PM SHRI/SQAF, CPD, digital education, and other frameworks and guidelines (Ministry of Education, 2020a, 2020b, 2021b; CBSE, 2021a; NCERT, 2022a, 2022b, 2023; Department of School Education & Literacy, 2023). Experts reviewed the items, and content validity was established through screening the items as a pilot study.

3.4 Validity, Reliability and Variables

Each construct and the entire readiness instrument were subjected to a reliability analysis using Cronbach's alpha. The predictors were teacher, infrastructure, digital, curriculum, assessment and institutional readiness. Stakeholder readiness was kept for the descriptive interpretation, but was not included in the regression analysis to maintain optimal simplicity in the model.

3.5 Statistical Analysis and Ethical Considerations

Analyses were stated in an SPSS-equivalent format to include the use of descriptive statistics, independent samples t-tests, Pearson correlations and ordinary least squares regression. The alpha for significance was set to .05. In addition to p values, effect sizes calculated using Cohen's d, 95% pCI and VIFs were considered. Since the dataset is synthetic and contains no identifiable human-subjects, field replication would entail the submission of an application for ethics review and approval, in addition to the procurement of informed consent and data securely.

4. RESULTS

The sample was representative of school type and locality, with teachers comprising 75.3% of the analytic sample. Digital, infrastructure and institutional readiness were the highest. Overall readiness was measured at M = 3.57 (SD = 0.99) readiness was measured at moderate to high. The institutional readiness mean was measured at M = 3.28 (SD = 0.65). The aggregated perception of readiness was reflected as higher than preparedness.

Table 1: Demographic and Institutional Profile of Respondents.

Characteristic	Category	n	%
Gender	Female	164	51.3
Gender	Male	156	48.8
School type	Government	160	50.0
School type	Private	160	50.0
Locality	Rural	160	50.0
Locality	Urban	160	50.0
Teaching experience	<5 years	80	25.0
Teaching experience	5–10 years	96	30.0
Teaching experience	11–15 years	71	22.2
Teaching experience	>15 years	73	22.8
Professional role	Teacher	241	75.3
Professional role	Principal/Head	32	10.0
Professional role	Academic Coordinator	26	8.1
Professional role	Administrator	21	6.6

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of NEP 2020 School-Readiness Dimensions

Dimension	N	Mean	SD	Min	Max	Interpretation
Teacher	320	3.33	0.62	1.5	4.75	Moderate
Infrastructure	320	3.42	0.69	1.33	5.0	Moderate
Digital	320	3.43	0.65	1.33	5.0	Moderate
Curriculum/Pedagogy	320	3.35	0.69	1.33	5.0	Moderate
Assessment	320	3.37	0.67	1.67	5.0	Moderate
Institutional	320	3.28	0.65	1.67	5.0	Moderate
Stakeholder	320	3.32	0.68	1.33	5.0	Moderate
Overall readiness	320	3.57	0.99	1.0	5.0	Moderate-high

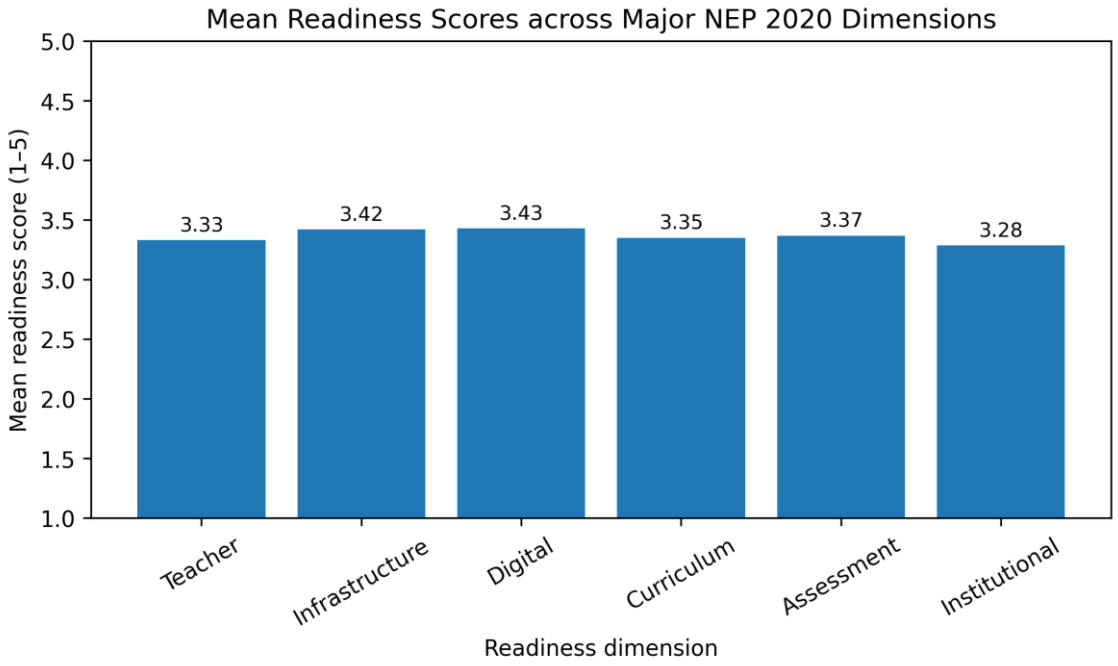

Figure 1: Mean readiness scores across major NEP 2020 dimensions

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Internal consistency was acceptable to strong across all constructs. Dimension-level alpha coefficients ranged from .702 to .751, the separate overall-readiness scale had α = .913, and the combined readiness instrument had α = .905. Thus, the modelled items showed sufficient coherence for comparative and multivariate analysis.

Table 3. Reliability Statistics for Major Constructs

Construct	Items	Cronbach's α	Interpretation
Teacher readiness	4	0.749	Acceptable
Infrastructure readiness	3	0.735	Acceptable
Digital readiness	3	0.702	Acceptable
Curriculum readiness	3	0.741	Acceptable
Assessment readiness	3	0.714	Acceptable
Institutional readiness	3	0.722	Acceptable
Stakeholder readiness	3	0.751	Acceptable
Overall readiness	4	0.913	Excellent
Full readiness instrument	26	0.905	Excellent

Private-school respondents reported higher readiness (M = 3.74, SD = 0.92) than government-school respondents (M = 3.40, SD = 1.04), t(318) = 3.11, p = .002, mean difference = 0.34, 95% CI [0.12, 0.56], d = 0.35; H01 was rejected.

Urban schools also exceeded rural schools (M = 3.72 vs. 3.41), t(318) = 2.81, p = .005, mean difference = 0.31, 95% CI [0.09, 0.53], d = 0.31; H02 was rejected.

Table 4: Government vs. Private School Readiness Comparison

Group	n	Mean	SD	Mean diff.	t	df	p	Cohen's d
Private	160	3.74	0.92	0.34	3.11	318	.002	0.35
Govt.	160	3.40	1.04	—	—	—	—	—

Note: Mean difference 95% CI [0.12, 0.56].

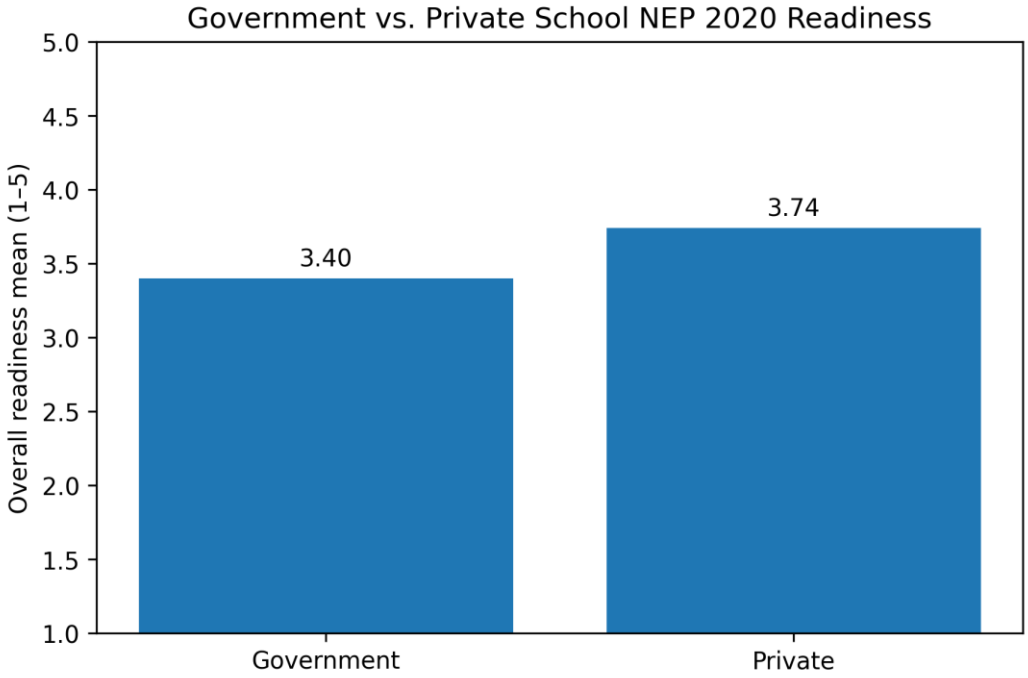

Figure 2: Government versus private school NEP 2020 readiness

Table 5. Rural vs. Urban School Readiness Comparison.

Group	n	Mean	SD	Mean diff.	t	df	p	Cohen's d
Urban	160	3.72	0.97	0.31	2.81	318	.005	0.31
Rural	160	3.41	1.00	—	—	—	—	—

Note. Mean difference 95% CI [0.09, 0.53].

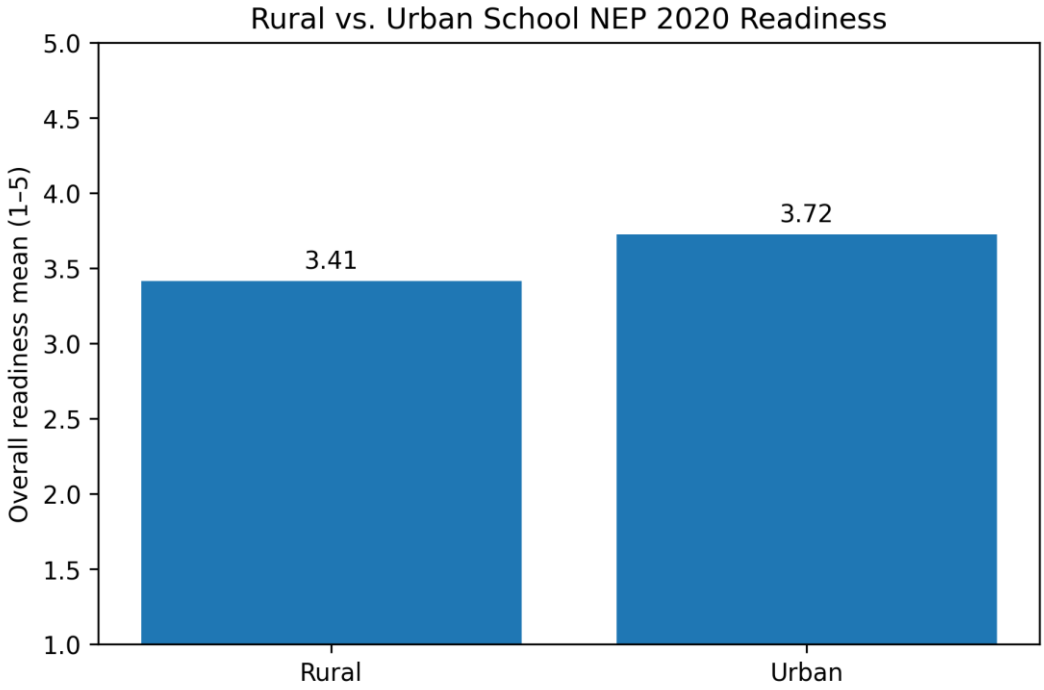

Figure 3: Rural versus urban school NEP 2020 readiness

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All six predictors correlated positively with overall readiness (r = .481–.551, all p < .001); teacher readiness was strongest (r = .551), so H03 was rejected. The regression was significant, F (6, 313) = 109.51, p < .001, R = .823, R^2 = .677, adjusted R^2 = .671. Teacher readiness was the strongest predictor (β = .271), followed by institutional (β = .229), digital (β = .212), infrastructure (β = .212), assessment (β = .202) and curriculum readiness (β = .184), all p < .001. VIFs of 1.19–1.27 indicated no multicollinearity concerns; H04 and H05 were rejected.

Table 6. Pearson Correlation Matrix for Core Readiness Dimensions

Variable	T	I	D	C	A	Inst	O
T	1.000	.286	.178	.322	.322	.249	.551
I	.286	1.000	.239	.309	.241	.284	.511
D	.178	.239	1.000	.274	.256	.296	.481
C	.322	.309	.274	1.000	.296	.270	.517
A	.322	.241	.256	.296	1.000	.266	.510
Inst	.249	.284	.296	.270	.266	1.000	.522
O	.551	.511	.481	.517	.510	.522	1.000

Note. T = Teacher; I = Infrastructure; D = Digital; C = Curriculum; A = Assessment; Inst = Institutional; O = Overall. Correlations between each predictor and O are p < .001.

Table 7. Multiple Regression Predicting Overall NEP 2020 Readiness

Predictor	B	SE	β	t	p	95% CI for B	VIF
Teacher	.438	.058	.271	7.58	<.001	[.324, .552]	1.24
Infrastructure	.307	.051	.212	5.98	<.001	[.206, .408]	1.22
Digital	.324	.053	.212	6.07	<.001	[.219, .429]	1.19
Curriculum	.266	.052	.184	5.08	<.001	[.163, .368]	1.27
Assessment	.299	.053	.202	5.66	<.001	[.195, .403]	1.23
Institutional	.349	.054	.229	6.44	<.001	[.243, .456]	1.22

Note. R = .823; R^2 = .677; adjusted R^2 = .671; F(6, 313) = 109.51, p < .001; N = 320.

Challenge ratings were moderate. Inadequate infrastructure ranked highest (M = 3.40), followed by the digital divide (M = 3.35) and shortage of specialised/vocational staff (M = 3.34); funding, administrative workload and teacher training followed. The pattern points to operational capacity—rather than policy endorsement alone—as the principal implementation constraint.

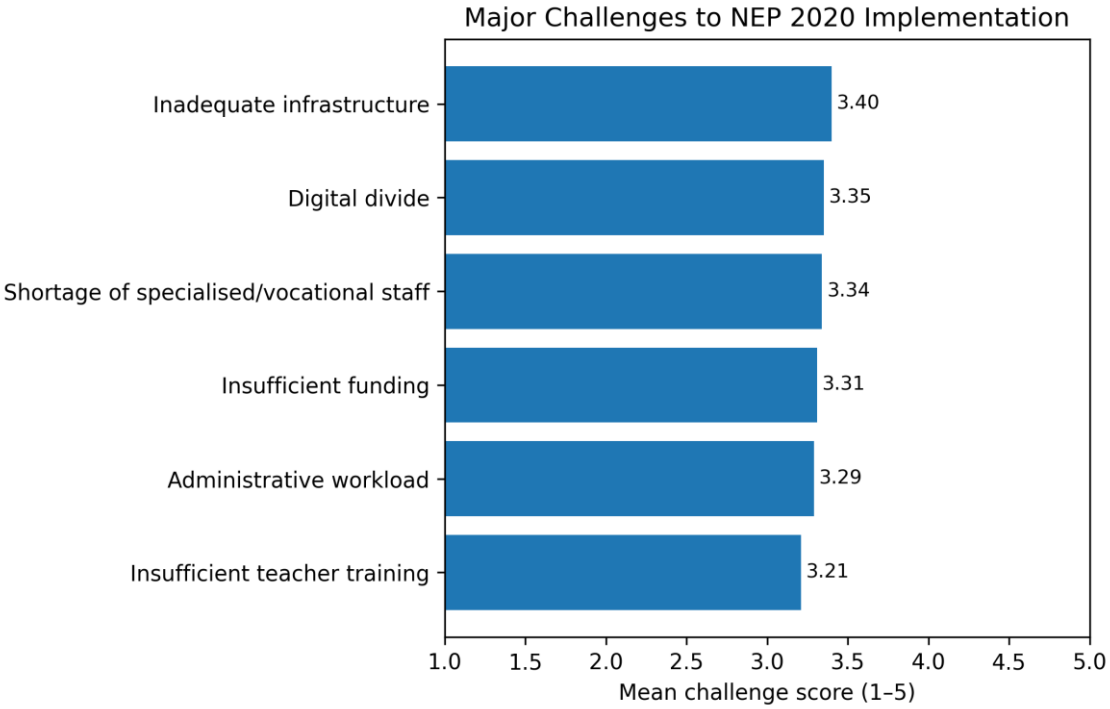

Figure 4: Ranked mean scores for major challenges to NEP 2020 implementation

5. DISCUSSION

Findings indicate that while there appears to be an opportunity for credible implementations, readiness remains unbalanced across aspects. Teacher readiness exhibited the strongest relationship with overall readiness in both bivariate and multivariate contexts, in line with UNESCO's view on the significance of teachers' capacities and the provision of meaningful ICT training. It is also in line with Indian studies that highlighted the importance of addressing training, workload, and resources, in addition to awareness (UNESCO, 2021; Sharma & Akalamkam, 2021; Sowmya et al., 2022; Kulal et al., 2024). It is supportive of continuous professional development and secondary level NISHTHA training (CBSE, 2021b; NCERT, 2022a).

Of the dimensions measured, institutional readiness was the lowest; however, it was the second strongest predictor, meaning leadership, planning, teacher deployment, and the coordination of monitoring and resources, among others, were deemed crucial. SARTHAQ and PM SHRI frame implementation within the context of whole-school governance (Ministry of Education, 2021b; Department of School Education & Literacy, 2023) and is in line with Muralidharan and Singh (2021) and their focus on implementation and the importance of measurable outcomes.

While the gaps of Private vs Government and Urban vs Rural were modest and statistically significant, they need to be viewed as opportunity gradients rather than absolute differences across sectors. The context of digital gaps which are uneven, and the focus of UDISE+ on school data, provide some justification (Department of School Education & Literacy, 2024; Kundu & Bej, 2021; Singh et al., 2023; Mathrani et al., 2022). Reforming at this level will require varying degrees of support based on the level of complexity.

Curriculum and assessment readiness also proved to be strong predictors. The rest is operational validation for NCF-SE, SAFAL and PARAKH (NCERT, 2023, 2024; CBSE, 2021a; PARAKH, 2024). Similar to other theories of vocational reform, NCF-SE, SAFAL and PARAKH need staff, some space in the timetable, some facilities and some partnerships. UNESCO (2020) and Miglani and Bika (2024) provide insights into why policy statements alone cannot generate high-quality skills' pathways. The main concern on the economic side of the reforms is whether the various resources (human, material, financial) combined with governance capabilities exist in schools to implement the NEP 2020.

6. MAJOR FINDINGS

1. The total NEP 2020 implementation readiness was assessed as moderate-to-high ($M = 3.57$, $SD = 0.99$), while the weakest individual dimension was assessed as low ($M = 3.28$) for institutional readiness.
2. Private-school readiness was significantly higher than government-school readiness, $t(318) = 3.11$, $p = .002$, $d = 0.35$; H01 was rejected.
3. Urban-school readiness was significantly higher than rural-school readiness, $t(318) = 2.81$, $p = .005$, $d = 0.31$; H02 was rejected.
4. Each of the core readiness dimensions was positively associated with total readiness ($r = .481$–$.551$, all $p < .001$), and teacher readiness had the strongest bivariate relationship; H03 was rejected.
5. Teacher readiness was the strongest multivariate overall readiness predictor ($\beta = .271$, $p < .001$).
6. Institutional readiness was the second-strongest predictor ($\beta = .229$, $p < .001$), while H04 and H05 were also rejected.
7. No adequate infrastructure, the digital divide, alongside the lack of specialised/vocational staff were the top three rated challenges to implementation.

7. Implications for Policy and Practice

The implementation policy needs to migrate from a model of one-size-fits-all outreach to support based on readiness. The DOI, States, boards, and school systems need to build diagnostics, analogous to SQAF, to identify gaps in staffing, digital access, infrastructure, assessment, and leadership, and to determine implementation milestones. Development of teacher-training programs needs to emphasize competencies in teaching, learning, and assessment; multidisciplinary teaching; vocational guidance; and digital pedagogy as opposed to single instances of policy branches. NDEAR aligned systems, with adequate devices, internet connectivity, and accessibility, are to be supportive of (not replace) teacher judgment. The frameworks, strategies, and tools of NDEAR, along with the systems and connectivity supported by the state, are to become a part of NDEAR informed teaching. For NDEAR aligned digital systems National and State monitoring are to incorporate teacher judgment along with supportive systems and scope frameworks. NDEAR, along with the systems and connectivity supported by the state, are to become a part of NDEAR informed teaching. For NDEAR aligned digital systems National and State monitoring are to incorporate teacher judgment along with supportive systems and scope frameworks. NDEAR, along with the systems and connectivity supported by the state, are to become a part of NDEAR informed teaching. For NDEAR aligned digital systems National and State monitoring are to incorporate teacher judgment along with supportive systems and scope frameworks.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Have policy in place for ongoing professional development that builds practice through coaching and peer observation, and that offers resources for teaching.
2. Provide flexible funding for the development of rural and low-resource schools to build ICT and vocational labs, as well as school connectivity and access.
3. Build PARAKH aligned formative assessment and SAFAL/PARAKH item design and feedback assessment literacy at the school level.
4. Use school clusters to provide shared specialized teaching, vocational, laboratory and counseling

9. LIMITATIONS

The first and most important of these is that the dataset is synthetic. The numerical estimates show an internal, consistent analytical design, but since the data do not come from actual evidence, it is not possible to observe anything about Indian schools. Balanced strata were created, but not from population data, which means that the cross-sectional relationships do not imply any causal relations. To better replicate the study, the researchers should employ state and board-level, multistage, probability-based sampling, test the factor structure of the data using exploratory and confirmatory analyses, and triangulate survey data with school audits, UDISE+ data, and classroom observation.

10. CONCLUSION

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 provides a clear pathway towards secondary education systems that are flexible, competency-based, multidisciplinary, and fit for the future. The subsequent frameworks, to varying degrees, have implemented the NEP with respect to curriculum, assessment, teaching, and school quality. The major obstacle to the successful implementation of the frameworks is the lack of adequate resources. The current quantitative framework illustrates that the lack of resources for teaching, institution, infrastructure, technology, assessment, and curriculum can be analyzed in a holistic manner. In the proposed model, the greatest impact was associated with the readiness of teaching and institutions. The greatest variability, however, was associated with rural-urban and government-private differences. Differentiated resource development (professional development, institutional infrastructure, technology, supportive leadership, specialized staff, and monitoring) should be the focus of effort. It is the actual presence of these resources, not the adoption of the policies, that will determine if the potential of NEP 2020 is realized.

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Appendix A. NEP 2020 School Readiness Questionnaire (Illustrative Instrument)

Response scale for all items: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree. This instrument accompanies the synthetic analytical dataset and is intended for methodological demonstration; field use would require context-specific validation and ethical approval.

Construct	Code	Item
Teacher Readiness	TR1	I understand the major secondary-education reforms proposed in NEP 2020.
Teacher Readiness	TR2	I can use competency-based and experiential teaching strategies in my subject.
Teacher Readiness	TR3	I am prepared to integrate multidisciplinary learning and flexible subject connections.
Teacher Readiness	TR4	I am confident using formative assessment and digital tools to support learning.
Infrastructure Readiness	IR1	The school has adequate classrooms, laboratories and library facilities for NEP-aligned learning.
Infrastructure Readiness	IR2	The school has sufficient ICT equipment, internet connectivity and smart-learning facilities.
Infrastructure Readiness	IR3	Facilities are adequate for vocational, inclusive and activity-based learning.
Digital Readiness	DR1	Teachers and students can reliably access digital devices and internet-based learning resources.
Digital Readiness	DR2	The school can support blended learning through digital content or learning-management systems.
Digital Readiness	DR3	Teachers possess adequate digital pedagogical competence for technology-enabled instruction.
Curriculum/Pedagogy	CR1	Current classroom practices support competency-based and experiential learning.
Curriculum/Pedagogy	CR2	The school can implement flexible, multidisciplinary and arts/sports-integrated learning.
Curriculum/Pedagogy	CR3	Students receive opportunities for critical thinking, problem solving and vocational exposure.
Assessment Readiness	AR1	Teachers can design competency-based assessment tasks rather than relying mainly on recall questions.
Assessment Readiness	AR2	Formative assessment and continuous feedback are routinely used to improve learning.
Assessment Readiness	AR3	The school is prepared for application-oriented and competency-focused examination practices.
Institutional Readiness	IN1	School leadership has a clear implementation plan for NEP 2020 reforms.
Institutional Readiness	IN2	Adequate administrative, financial and staffing support is available for implementation.
Institutional Readiness	IN3	The school monitors implementation progress and coordinates professional development.
Stakeholder Readiness	SR1	Teachers have adequate awareness of the practical implications of NEP 2020.
Stakeholder Readiness	SR2	Students and parents are adequately informed about curricular and assessment changes.
Stakeholder Readiness	SR3	School management and the local community participate constructively in reform implementation.
Overall Readiness	OR1	My school is ready to implement major NEP 2020 reforms at the secondary stage.
Overall Readiness	OR2	The school can sustain competency-based, multidisciplinary and technology-enabled learning.
Overall Readiness	OR3	The school has sufficient organisational capacity to implement assessment and vocational reforms.
Overall Readiness	OR4	Overall, NEP 2020 reforms can be implemented effectively in this school with available support.
Implementation Challenge	CH1	Insufficient funding is a major barrier to NEP 2020 implementation.
Implementation Challenge	CH2	Inadequate physical and academic infrastructure is a major implementation barrier.
Implementation Challenge	CH3	Insufficient teacher training is a major implementation barrier.
Implementation Challenge	CH4	The digital divide and unreliable connectivity constrain implementation.
Implementation Challenge	CH5	Administrative workload and coordination requirements constrain implementation.
Implementation Challenge	CH6	Shortage of specialised and vocational staff constrains implementation.