



Study on the Effectiveness of National Education Policy (NEP 2020) Implementation in Rural and Urban Schools in Osmanabad

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Article History

Received: 12.11.2023

Accepted: 25.12.2023

Published: 30.12.2023

Abstract: **Background:** The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 represents a radical reform in the Indian educational sector with a learner-centric approach to facilitate pedagogical change in favour of equity and flexibility. Policy frameworks are ambitious, but operationalization — especially in semi-urban and rural settings — is patchy and under-assessed. The two-fold nature of rural and urban to the demographic structure of Osmanabad district provided an interesting setting to evaluate this differential rollout. **Objectives:** The present study was conducted to assess the functionality of NEP 2020 introduced in rural and urban schools of Osmanabad. The specific aims are to compare infrastructural readiness, pedagogical adoption, and stakeholder involvement in the two settings. It also aims to consider key drivers and constraints that influence policy translation in schools. **Methods:** A convergent (concurrent) mixed methods design was used. Teachers, administrators, students, and parents (a total of 80) were involved in data collection based on structured questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and NEP-oriented checklists. Quantitative analysis was done to check the data of six rural and six urban schools in terms of means and percentages, and qualitative information was analysed by thematic coding. **Results:** It indicates a rural-urban divide in the adoption of NEP 2020. Urban schools tended to be more digital, experiential, and stakeholder-oriented. By contrast, rural schools had fallen behind because of poor infrastructure, unqualified teachers, and parental disengagement. But in the villages, the embrace of early grades multilingual education was more natural. **Conclusion:** The paper stresses that though NEP 2020 presents a transformative vision, local specific strategies are required for its implementation, particularly in resource-poor areas. Closing these divides requires focused investment, local capacity, accountable governance, and continued community engagement. The results support a transition from compliance-based deployment to adaptive, equity-enabling deployment.

Keywords: NEP 2020, rural education, urban schools, policy implementation, teacher training, digital divide, stakeholder engagement.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and Rationale

The NEP 2020 is a landmark policy reform in the educational infrastructure of India, which aims to

move the education system from being based on the rote method to a holistic, flexible, and learner-centred model (Ministry of Education, 2020). By prioritizing foundational literacy, multilingualism, vocational integration, and digital pedagogy, NEP

Citation: Pournima Kalyan Dhawale (2023). Study on the Effectiveness of National Education Policy (NEP 2020) Implementation in Rural and Urban Schools in Osmanabad. *Glob Acad J Humanit Soc Sci*; Vol-5, Iss-6 pp- 315-321.

2020 seeks to democratize access to quality education, transcending social and economic stratification and geographical distances. But the impact of such a game-changing policy will reflect only in its facile execution, which may be a challenge, particularly in places like Osmanabad, where you have urbanising clusters as well as extremely rural communities.

Osmanabad, situated in Marathwada, Maharashtra, provides a strong case for NEP 2020 review considering the population mix, infrastructural differences, and educational lag. Although, some of the urban schools in the district have started using technology and competence-based learning, but very few rural schools manage to use technology and cope proficiency-based learning in the classroom due to lack of infrastructure, shortage of teachers and community involvement in the rural setting (Anitha, 2020; Sharma & Singh, 2021).

1.2 Problem Statement

Rigorous evidence on the ground-level execution of NEP 2020 is scarce, more so in semi-urban/rural districts like Osmanabad, given the lofty aims of the same. Many of the studies primarily concentrate on national, or state-level, trends, with little attention paid to the micro-level process that shapes policy diffusion. This paper fills the research gap by undertaking a field assessment of NEP 2020 rollout in rural and urban schools of Osmanabad in terms of infrastructural preparedness, pedagogical restructuring, and stakeholder participation.

1.3 Objectives

- To measure the readiness of Osmanabad's school infrastructure and pedagogy for NEP 2020.
- To contrast patterns of implementation in rural and urban schools.
- To assess how community and administrative participation affect policy implementation.
- Provide recommendations for action for an equitable and context-specific implementation.

1.4 Significance of the Study

In this respect, the study adds to the sparse literature on education policy implementation by providing such an on-the-ground, district-level view. It also is in keeping with the larger objectives of SDG 4 (Quality Education) and contributes to the evidence-based design of policies by identifying regional challenges and chances. The results should be of use to district education officers, policy makers and to civil society players involved in promoting inclusive and quality education.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1 Conceptual Foundations of NEP 2020

National Education Policy (NEP) 2020: The NEP 2020 is proposed to be a harbinger of a transformative vision for Indian education, showcasing a holistic, nurturing, equity, and learner-centric pedagogy (Ministry of Education, 2020). It brings in a 5+3+3+4 curricular structure, support for multilingualism, and will have a strong vocational education component early on. According to researchers, the NEP 2020 desires to break the glass walls of conventional education and encourage interdisciplinary and critical education (Vijay, 2023; Sharma & Singh, 2021).

2.2 Implementation Challenges in Rural and Urban Contexts

There are disparities in practice between rural and urban schools, highlighted in multiple studies. Urban schools have more resources to enable them to make the transition to digital tools and whole new ways of learning, such as by competency, but rural schools often have a lack of infrastructure, a short supply of teachers, and poorly educated citizens (Anitha, 2020; Sundar & Iyer, 2023). Aithal and Aithal (2020) emphasise the importance of NEP's context-sensitive implementability, particularly in resource-poor districts such as Osmanabad.

2.3 Pedagogical Shifts and Teacher Preparedness

NEP 2020 focuses on experiential, inquiry-based, and competency-driven learning. But the move from rote to constructivist methodologies is a huge shift that requires an awful lot of teacher training. Analysis conducted by Patel and Gupta (2022) and Das and Roy (2021) indicates that such developmental opportunities are unavailable to many teachers, especially those in rural places, who are isolated and distanced from such learning arenas. This rift acts as a space to prevent or stymie the pedagogical translation of the policy.

2.4 Digital Divide and Technological Integration

The policy has put digital infrastructure to its breaking point and exposed a clear digital divide. Urban schools are providing smart classroom online learning tools, but in rural India, they are grappling with basic connectivity. Courtesy of Chandan Chaturvedi (Schedulers, 2022). This digital divide does not just impact access, but exacerbates educational disparities, especially in low digital literacy districts (Verma, 2021).

2.5 Stakeholder Engagement and Governance

The successful implementation of NEP 2020 needs multiple stakeholders to be involved – parents, local governance, and civil society. But research shows that there is limited knowledge and involvement in rural areas (Mallik, 2023). Empowering the School Management Committees

(SMCs) and decentralizing decision-making are considered to be some of the key enablers (Manurkar, 2023).

2.6 Gaps in Literature

Yet there is little district-level on-the-ground research from schools on the implementation of NEP 2020 despite a burgeoning literature. Most analyses are either theoretical or state-level examinations. To fill this gap, this paper examines an analysis at the micro' of Osmanabad bringing together quantitative and qualitative knowledge.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

Methodology This research follows a convergent sequential mixed- methods design and employs both qualitative and quantitative methods in order to develop a richer and nuanced understanding

of implementation of NEP 2020 in Osmanabad. The justification for such a design is that it can triangulate results, ensure validity, and capture the complex relationships in both rural and urban educational sites.

3.2 Study Area

The study was conducted in the Osmanabad district of Maharashtra, with an arrangement of urban centres (e.g., Osmanabad City) and rural blocks (e.g., Bhoom, Kalamb, and Tuljapur). The district was chosen because of its socio-economic heterogeneity, digital divides, and as a microcosm of rural-urban dynamics in education in India.

3.3 Study Population and Sampling

The overall study population included 80 identified participants, purposively and stratified sampled for equal representation across stakeholders and geographies.

Stakeholder Group	Rural (n)	Urban (n)	Total (n)
Teachers	10	10	20
School Administrators	5	5	10
Students	15	15	30
Parents	10	10	20
Total	40	40	80

This stratification also permitted a comparative reading, which ensured contextual depth.

3.4 Data Collection Tools

The utilized instruments are as follows, to guarantee methodological quality and an empirical focus:

- **Structured Questionnaires:** Given to teachers and students to measure awareness, infrastructure, and pedagogical changes.
- **Semi-Structured Interviews:** Interviewing administrators and parents to understand their perceptions of, challenges with, and engagement in the NEP reform.
- **Classroom observations** are used to record teaching practices and physical environment in real time.
- **Implementation Checklists:** Correspondence with NEP 2020 principles (for instance, multilingualism, vocational preparedness, digital literacy).

Piloting. The instruments were piloted in two schools (a rural and an urban school) to check for clarity and contextual appropriateness.

3.5 Data Analysis

- **Quantitative Data** were analysed using SPSS for frequencies, percentages, and cross-tabulation to determine trends, differences.

- **Qualitative:** Analysed using NVivo, based on the six-phase framework of Braun and Clarke (2006). The codes were created inductively and revised through reflective peer debriefing.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

The research was conducted ethically and:

- **Consent:** Consent from all participants, with assent from students less than 18.
- **Privacy:** Ensure through anonymous data and secure storage.
- **Participation** was voluntary: participants were aware that they could leave the study at any time.

4. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Overview of Data Interpretation

Effectiveness of implementation of NEP 2020 was assessed by analyzing data collected from 80 participants attending 12 schools (6 rural and 6 urban) in Osmanabad. The results are reported according to four main thematic areas: infrastructure and digital literacy, pedagogical innovation, multilingual and vocational integration and stakeholder collaboration.

4.2 Infrastructure and Digital Readiness

Table 1: Infrastructure and Digital Readiness

Indicator	Urban Schools (%)	Rural Schools (%)
Smart classrooms available	83	25
Reliable internet connectivity	75	30
Access to NEP-aligned digital tools	67	18

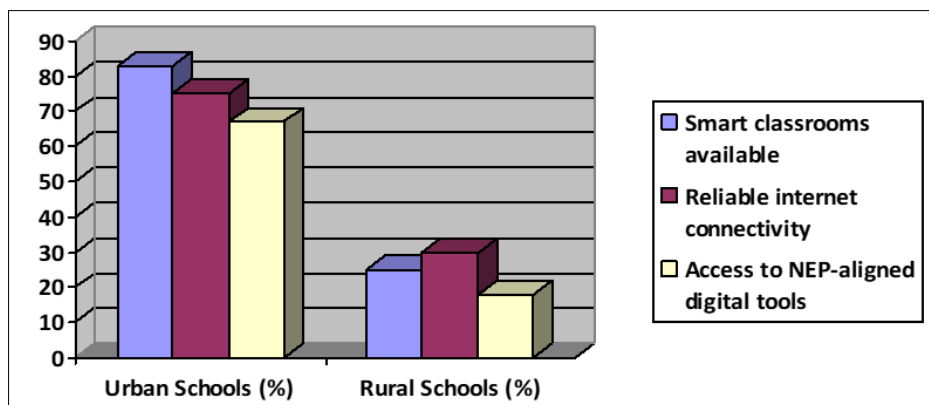


Figure 1: Infrastructure and Digital Readiness

Urban schools in Osmanabad are about to pave the way for digital integration, and rural schools need to cross the infrastructural bottleneck. The

digital gap is an important obstacle to a fair NEP utilization.

4.3 Pedagogical Transformation

Table 2: Pedagogical Transformation

Practice Adopted	Urban (%)	Rural (%)
Competency-based learning	60	25
Use of formative assessments	70	35
Project-based or experiential learning	55	20

Although urban teachers are increasingly teaching aligned pedagogies, rural teachers report fewer NEP training opportunities and resources. This

shift in pedagogy at NEP has yet to take root at the rural ground level.

4.4 Multilingual and Vocational Integration

Table 3: Multilingual and Vocational Integration

Implementation Area	Urban (%)	Rural (%)
Introduction of vocational modules	50	10
Use of mother tongue in early grades	40	65
Availability of multilingual textbooks	60	25

The flexibility of NEP and its multilingual goals are better aligned within rural schools since many of them already do so. Vocational education is

underdeveloped in both settings, but it is the urban schools that pilot more programs.

4.5 Stakeholder Awareness and Engagement

Table 4: Stakeholder Awareness and Engagement

Stakeholder Group	Awareness of NEP (%)	Participation in School Governance (%)
Urban Parents	75	60
Rural Parents	30	20
Teachers (Urban)	85	70
Teachers (Rural)	55	40

Urban actors are more aware and more engaged in NEP-related reform. Supportive rural communities have found it difficult to have their voices heard through formal mechanisms for engagement and information exchange.

4.6 Thematic Insights from Qualitative Data

- Teachers' What they want: Rural!!!!Teachers demanded localised training in Marathi and autonomy in delivery of curriculum.
- Students' Perspectives: Urban students enjoyed learning-through-activities, though it was not consistently implemented. Students living in the countryside stressed the importance of upgraded infrastructure and greater exposure to extracurricular activities.
- School Leaders' Perspectives: School administrators from both rural and urban areas identified funding limitations and bureaucratic red tape as key obstacles

5. DISCUSSION

5.1 Interpreting the Rural-Urban Implementation Gap

The results of the study indicate a significant difference in the implementation level of NEP 2020 in rural and urban schools of Osmanabad. The extent of convergence between urban schools and NEP objectives was higher in digital infrastructure and pedagogical reforms. Rural schools, on the other hand, had basic infrastructure deficits, little teacher familiarity, and limited stakeholder knowledge of the program. These findings reflect the national pattern, in which the urban schools function as the early adopters of the reformation, and the rural ones trail behind due to system constraints (Kumar & Bansal, 2021).

This cleavage is not merely technological and is a reflection of deeper structural inequities that exist in financing, governance, and access to capacity-building resources. Its promise of equity and inclusion would be just another aspiration until these structural gaps are afforded focused responses.

5.2 Pedagogical Shifts and Teacher Agency

If urban teachers mentioned moderate amounts of experiential and competency-based learning, rural educators responded by saying they felt boxed into a mandated curriculum and not adequately prepared for implementing it. This brings out an important paradox of implementation: that policy calls for innovation, but the actors on the ground do not have the authority and space to innovate (Rao & Menon, 2020). Teacher agency has to be central to NEP for it to succeed, particularly in rural areas where top-down instructions often don't get translated into the classroom.

In addition, there are no localized, language-specific training modules, which also excludes rural teachers. As Singh and Thomas (2022) contend, pedagogical reform must be co-mediated, not simply mediated, with teachers.

5.3 Digital Divide and Structural Exclusion

Digital divide still poses as a serious challenge in the implementation of NEPS. Every urban school in Osmanabad has started introducing smart classes and digital content, but the rural schools have struggled with weak connectivity and inadequate number of devices. This bottleneck not only reduces the accessibility of the NEP-aligned resources but also deepens the existing educational disparities (Chakraborty & Jain, 2021).

The dominance of digital learning in the policy should be maturely counterposed with reality-technology cannot be a substitute for the infrastructure that is basic infrastructure. As Mishra & Kulkarni (2023) point out, digital equity is not just about the devices but about sustained access, digital literacy, and contextual relevance.

5.4 Stakeholder Engagement and Policy Ownership

Urban parents and school officials were more informed about NEP reforms and had more involvement in school governance was found in the survey. Rural communities, however, showed low awareness and engagement. This is a larger problem of policy ownership, when reform is not communicated in language that is easily understood and culturally resonant, it remains abstract and disconnected from local understandings (Deshmukh & Iqbal, 2022).

Empowering SMCs, using Panchayati Raj institutions, and building school-community ties are crucial to democratise NEP implementation.

5.5 Implications for Policy and Practice

The Osmanabad example further highlights the importance of context-specific, pro-poor implementation strategies. There is a risk in a one-size-fits-all strategy that will exacerbate existing divides. Rather, NEP 2020 needs to be implemented by:

- Decentralised planning that gives power to the local people.
- Resource allocation according to differentiated need.
- Ongoing feedback loops between decision makers and the field.

6. CONCLUSION

The field-based assessment of implementation of NEP 2020 in Osmanabad throws a nuanced picture of advancement and existing disparities between the rural and urban education scenario. Urban schools are beginning to be more responsive to the policy's progressive intentions, demonstrated through digital infrastructure, pedagogical innovation and stakeholder engagement, whereas rural schools continue to be bound by systematic limitations. The urban-rural gap is reflected in not just infrastructure, but also in institutional capacity, policy understanding, and classroom instruction.

The study highlights that NEP 2020, being well-conceived, needs context-specific operationalisation. Rural teachers are devoted, but have no direct opportunities for continuous development, and many of them are bound by a narrow curriculum with very little pedagogical freedom. Rural areas are also isolated from the reformation process, due to their low level of NEP awareness and weak government contribution. Implementation will be uneven without deliberate effort to involve these voices.

Crucially, the results indicate that equity must be translated from aspiration to action. How well NEP 2020 will succeed in districts such as Osmanabad, guided by locally appropriate strategies that meld infrastructure and live transactions management support, culturally sensitive teacher training, digital equity, and inclusive governance. Decentralizing decision-making and establishing feedback loops from the bottom-up can put the power to own the policy in the hands of schools and communities, not simply be a policy.

This is precisely where the transformative potential of NEP 2020 lies, in not how uniformly but how subtly and locally it is adapted. This study provides not just a diagnosis but a clarion call ... and the call is to richer and deeper relationships that act as an educational ecosystem in which reform takes root — is not just introduced but enrolled in, humanized, and maintained.

7. Conflicts Of Interest

The author has no conflicts of interest related to this study. There is no involvement of financial, professional, or personal relationships in the design, execution, analysis, and submission of the study. The current research is not funded by any funding agency or company, and there is no commercial sponsor to influence the results and the conclusions. Ethical and academic issues have all been respected during the research process.

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