

IMPLEMENTATION OF NEW EDUCATION POLICY: PERCEPTION AND PROFESSIONAL ADAPTATION OF SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHERS IN KHULNA

Hasan Shaikh^{1*} and Md. Iqbal Hossen²

¹Khulna University, Bangladesh

²Northern University of Business and Technology Khulna, Bangladesh
hasanshaikhhrampal@gmail.com¹ and mdiqbalhossen2288@gmail.com²

*correspondence: hasanshaikhhrampal@gmail.com

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Abstract

In an era where educational reforms serve as both a beacon of hope and a source of contention, the New Education Policy (NEP) of Bangladesh emerges as a critical site for exploring the dynamic interplay between policy ideals and classroom realities. Grounded in the Theory of Planned Behavior, it seeks to examine teachers' interpretations and responses to policy reforms, their challenges and opportunities, and the impact of the NEP on education quality. The study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining a survey of 48 teachers from seven distinct schools, with nine providing in-depth interviews. The findings reveal significant discrepancies in teachers' understanding of the policy's objectives, with a notable portion expressing dissatisfaction with its clarity and alignment with student needs. While some educators acknowledge a shift towards student-centered learning, others highlight the obstacles posed by insufficient resources, professional development, and curriculum adjustments. However, to address the limitations of this study, future studies can expand the scope to include different regions and explore the long-term effects of NEP on student outcomes. Furthermore, educators and policymakers must collaborate to ensure that ongoing professional development and resource allocation are prioritized to facilitate successful educational reform.

Keywords: new education policy, professional adaptation, secondary school, teacher perception

Introduction

In Bangladesh, secondary education is an integral component of the foundational educational framework. It is tasked with the pivotal role of imparting essential knowledge, competencies, and dispositions that enable individuals to assimilate into societal structures and to actively participate in the advancement of both communal and personal growth. The onus of facilitating this transformative educational experience falls upon the institutions of secondary schooling (Rahman et al., 2010). However, a growing body of research investigates the potential



moderating effect of teacher experience and qualifications on students' academic achievement. Empirical research indicates that the proficiency and caliber of pedagogical training enhance educators' efficacy, which consequently exerts a direct influence on the academic achievements of their pupils (DeMonte, 2015). Tucker and Stronge (2005) state that extensive inquiry substantiates the assertion that proficient educators not only foster a positive educational environment and enthusiasm for learning among students but also demonstrably elevate academic performance outcomes.

Rahman (2022) wrote that the new education policy in Bangladesh for secondary schools includes several significant changes aimed at transforming the education system. Here are some key points: (i). A new curriculum has been introduced to make the learning experience more enjoyable and based on experience-based learning. (ii). Exams have been eliminated up to the third grade to reduce stress on students. (iii). Public exams will be held before the Secondary School Certificate (SSC) tests. (iv). Distinctions in the streams of science, arts, and business studies will be introduced in classes IX and X. (v). Classwork assessment will continue throughout the academic year, with a collective assessment at the end of the year. (vi). Some subjects will have a full learning-based assessment.

The implementation of this new curriculum began with a pilot program in 2022 and is set to be fully implemented by 2025 for primary and secondary students. The changes are designed to move away from rote learning and exams, focusing instead on class activities to deepen students' understanding of subjects.

Nevertheless, this NEP-2021 creates concerns among the parents and guardians which have been highlighted across many mainstream national media. In this context, exploring teachers' perceptions remains a burning issue. Therefore, this study attempts to address this gap.

Research rationale

Bangladesh's shift in educational paradigms towards the implementation of the New Education Policy (NEP) in secondary schools is a significant one aimed at improving education quality and making it relevant to global standards. The policy includes changes in curriculum, the introduction of new pedagogical approaches, and technological integration within classrooms. But this success is largely determined by what teachers feel and how they can adapt professionally because they are the main drivers of these implementations. Yet, several obstacles arise in understanding teachers' perceptions of such changes and their professional adjustments to align with new policy guidelines.

The primary gap in the literature, firstly, is that no work has been done on attitudes and perceptions of secondary school teachers in Khulna city till now towards the NEP. Should teachers perceive policy changes as positive, they are more likely to interact with and properly execute the reforms. In this case, when they view changes as impractical or irrelevant, resistance may occur, hindering the overall success of the policy. Comprehension of these perceptions is a prerequisite for recognition of potential obstacles and enablers within the process of carrying out these policies.

Similarly, changes in teaching practices, professional development, and resource use are part of professional adaptation. The NEP makes it clear that

student-centered learning should be preferred, and competency-based education should be implemented, for which the teachers also have to improve the way they plan, teach, and assess. Nonetheless, the readiness and willingness of teachers to embrace these new demands are not known. There is a need to explore the professional development opportunities available to teachers and their effectiveness in facilitating these adaptations.

Moreover, the policy highlights the infusion of technology in education, and for that teachers should be well abreast with technology and use them while transacting. In this context, it becomes extremely important to investigate teacher readiness towards integration of technology under NEP and to deal with these issues for successful implementation.

Furthermore, the challenges of the NEP may be different, mainly due to the context of secondary education in Bangladesh. Issues such as large class sizes, inadequate physical facilities, lack of resources, use of outdated textbooks and curricula, and socio-economic inequities can impede teachers' ability to respond to new educational reforms. Therefore, it is important to understand how these contextual factors operate in conjunction with teachers' perceptions and adaptations within their professional realm to design appropriate intervention programs that assist teachers in dealing with these barriers.

Lastly, the larger educational ecosystem, including school leadership, community engagement, and policy enablers or drivers, also shapes the experiences and adaptations of teachers. Good leadership and supportive policies can help create a context within which positive transformations in practices can take place (Harris 2008). This is where the rubber hits the road – to understand how each of these interfaces and find a confluence with teacher professional adaptations is imperative if we are to truly appreciate how complex the implementation dynamics of the NEP are. This study also has implications for policy amendment processes, not only in Bangladesh but also in other countries experiencing similar contexts.

Research question

The study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the perceptions of secondary school teachers regarding the New Education Policy?
2. What challenges do secondary school teachers encounter in adapting to the new policy, and what opportunities do they perceive it offers?
3. How has the New Education Policy impacted the quality of education in secondary schools, according to the perspectives of teachers?

Literature Review

The impact of new education policies has always been a topic of concern in educational studies, especially to understand teacher perceptions and their professional adaptability towards it. To find an exclusive point of departure for the current study, in this chapter, some of the related literature has been reviewed and analyzed which directly goes with the footing of this project.

Perceptions of policy by teachers are important because change resulting from mandated reforms occurs primarily with their practice (Cohen & Hill, 2000; Fullan, 2001). Pajares (1992) argued that teachers' beliefs and perceptions about

new policies mediate the translation of intended changes into actual classroom practices. Also, Spillane et al. (2002) and Datnow (2012) maintained that teachers' perspectives and interpretations of policy are influenced by their prior knowledge and experiences, opportunities for professional learning, and the coherence between district directives and instructional guidelines.

Professional adaptation refers to changes in teachers' practices and ways of thinking that occur to new policies (Day et al., 2007). Adaptation is influenced by professional development opportunities, support structures, and the wider school organizational culture (Desimone, 2009; Guskey, 2002). For this reason, professional learning communities (PLCs) have been argued to be pivotal in promoting teacher adaptation (DuFour, 2004; Vescio et al., 2008).

The National Education Policy of India– 2020 (Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2020) intends to transform the Indian education system with an emphasis on holistic development, flexibility in choosing subjects, and competency-based learning. Therefore, comprehensive reforms like Darling-Hammond et al., (2017) suggest, demands for significant changes in teaching which is a challenging aspect for teachers. Ingersoll and Collins (2018) argued that teacher adaptability is an indispensable trait as it becomes necessary during drastic policy changes.

Moreover, several challenges are associated with teacher adaptation to new policies. Resistance to change is a recurring barrier to adaptation which often stems from fears and the comfort of a familiar routine (Hargreaves & Goodson, 2006). In addition, a lack of professional development and support can interfere with successful adaptation (Avalos, 2011) which is also emphasized by Borko (2004) and Timperley et al. (2007) in their work which revealed that ongoing and content-embedded professional learning is necessary for successful adoption.

Furthermore, professional development is one of the key factors in getting an overall effective policy implementation. A study done by Desimone (2009) throws a lot of light on the importance of professional development that should be focused on content, embedded in active learning, and sustained for a long period. As explained by Garet et al. (2001) the above-stated professional development increases teachers' knowledge and skills so that they can better adapt to new policies.

Support systems, including administrative support, peer collaboration, and access to resources are necessary for teacher adaptation (Leithwood et al., 2004; Louis et al., 2010), so the role leaders play in creating supportive environments is key (Hallinger & Heck, 2010). Bryk et al. (2010) and Robinson et al. (2008) in their studies stress leadership's role in building a culture of continuous improvement and innovation.

Coburn (2004) shows that policies must be transformed to the local context to be put into practice. For this reason, Cultural and contextual factors have also a great influence on how teachers interpret and adjust themselves to the new policies (Ball, 1990; Hofstede, 2001). The sociocultural context of schools such as the community's norms and values can impact accepting and implementing changes in policies (Sahlberg, 2011).

Likewise, teacher agency refers to teachers' 'ability to purposefully and constructively steer their professional growth and contribute to shaping the profession positively in times of change' (Biesta et al., 2015). Moreover, greater

teacher autonomy and involvement in decision-making are related to the successful implementation of reforms (Smith & Wohlstetter, 2001). In line with Priestley et al. (2015) discussion, supporting teacher agency is also important for the sustainability of policy initiatives.

Collaborative approaches, including team teaching, and peer observation enhance the teachers' flexibility and adaptation (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Little, 2002). Being in a peer group allows teachers to engage in discussing best practices and addressing the problems of policy enacted by the group (Lieberman & Mace, 2010). Also, the teachers' conception of their profession will affect how they respond to new policies (Fang, 1996). Examination of Richardson (1996) indicates that teachers' prior views may be helpful or detrimental to their acceptance of new views. Engaging with the beliefs through reflection and professional development practices can help achieve successful adaptation (Kagan, 1992).

The need for technology integration in education is also reinforced in the National Education Policy of India which was enacted in 2020 to improve learning outcomes (Singh, 2024). It has been found that teachers' skills in using technology and attitudes toward technology in education affect their readiness for change to technology-sponsored policies and practices (Ertmer & Ottenbreit-Leftwich, 2010). Professional development concerning educational technology is nothing that less than fundamental for efficient execution (Koehler & Mishra, 2005).

Teachers modify their practices in response to the educational policies enacted as evidenced by the implementation studies carried out in various institutions. To give an example, Opfer and Pedder's (2011) research showcases how the interaction between the individual, school, and policy is critical for teachers' learning and adjustment. Sleegers et al. (2014) were also interested in understanding the factors behind the successful implementation of such educational reforms where their characteristics and constituent features have long been highlighted in the literature.

After analyzing and reviewing the above literature, it has been seen that no study has been conducted on the perceptions of secondary school teachers regarding the New Education Policy, let alone the detailed exploration of the challenges and opportunities these educators face in adapting to the new policy. Thus, the present study intends to fill this gap. Therefore, the study's point of departure is to explore and understand the perceptions of secondary school teachers concerning the New Education Policy. More importantly, the pivotal objective of this study lies in assessing the overall impact of the New Education Policy on the quality of education in secondary schools, thereby augmenting our comprehension of the policy's practical implications and its influence on the educational landscape.

Method

Theoretical framework

This study adopted the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) (Ajzen 1991) that addresses behaviors as an outcome of interactions between attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. This theory has been used to predict and explain human behavior in many areas. TPB, in this study, offers a

theoretically sound premise to investigate the adaptation of teachers within change-oriented educational policies through its dimensions, attitudes, subjective norms, and control beliefs.

Behavioral intentions are the immediate determinants of behavior, whereas these intentions are accounted for by three core constructs: attitude toward the act, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control (Ajzen, 1991). Innovative adoption is best described when the teachers' perceptions of the new education policy (NEP) will dictate their ability to enact the changes. Those with positive attitudes towards it are likely to seek motivation for their change processes, while those with negative attitudes risk being stagnant in the new changes to be adopted (Ajzen, 2002). It is further believed that teachers' perceptions of changes made in educational systems will bring about better outcomes and or overcome negative elements will enhance the application of those changes in their teaching contexts (Bandura, 1997; Pajares, 1992).

Hence, subjective norms are the behavioral tendencies that are perceived as important by others, implying a tendency to act accordingly or not (Ajzen, 1991). In the learning environment, this includes colleagues, administrators, and the wider educational community. Teachers are more likely to comply with these expectations where they feel adequate support and encouragement from their colleagues and superiors on the NEP (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2010). Studies reveal that resourced teachers in collaborative systems benefit in their learning and implementation of the new order in practice (Goddard, et al., 2000; Vescio, et al., 2008).

Likewise, perceived behavioral control means the degree of an individual's belief in their ability to perform the given action (Ajzen, 1991). For teachers, this includes the belief that they can bring about the implementation of the NEP appropriately and this can be affected by their self-efficacy, resources, and support offered. Perceived control over an outcome positively influences the performance of the behavior in question (Bandura, 1986; Schwarzer, 1992). Teachers adopting and changing new educational reforms are likely to be the ones who are prepared and supported to do so (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001; Zimmerman, 2000).

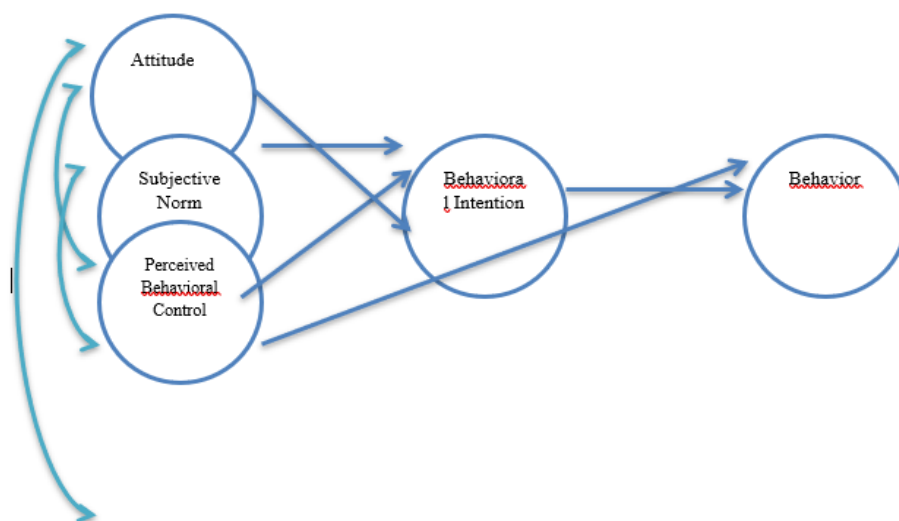


Figure 1. Theory of planned behavior

Within the context of TPB's application, it is important to note the interaction of these variables. It has been noted through attitudinal research performed in educational contexts that the attitudes of teachers toward reforms in educational policies are critical for the success of such education changes (Fullan, 2001; Guskey, 2002). On top of this, the contribution of subjective norms as social influence has been witnessed in various studies that emphasize the significance of positive professional culture for desired professional behavior (Little, 1982; Schein, 1992).

It seems that perceived behavioral control provides an understanding of the constraints and opportunities that teachers face while trying to adapt (Ajzen, 2002). Teachers' professional development programs that address self-efficacy and other contextualizing influences have been found to have significant implications for teachers' abilities to readopt new policy changes (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Desimone, 2009). Therefore, the researchers integrate the TPB with this study to offer a deeper understanding of how teachers' beliefs, social context, and perceived control regarding the NEP, influence their behavior in secondary schools.

Sampling and procedure

In this study, a mixed-mode method is applied to collect primary data. To collect quantitative data, a survey is conducted using one set of questionnaire forms containing 15 questions in total. The answers given by the respondents are measured by a 5-point Likert scale. The questionnaire forms are paper-based and were handed in physically. The data are analyzed with Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) v.23. The final result is demonstrated by using figures in Microsoft Word 2016.

For this study, a total of 48 secondary school teachers were selected from 7 different schools in Khulna city. The sample includes teachers from 13 academic disciplines, ensuring a diverse representation of subject areas. The educators were selected through purposive sampling to ensure diversity in the experiences and positions.

So far as professional roles are concerned, there were 72.9 % assistant teachers, 22.9 % were senior teachers and the remaining respondents were classified as other categories of teachers. This distribution is significant because it shows a favorable aspect of the mid-level teaching cadres which provides a perspective to the implementation of the policy from the grassroots level.

The experience of the respondents in their field of teaching also varied with 33.3 % of them having between one to five years, 20.8 % between six to ten years, 31.3 % between eleven to fifteen years, 2.1% six to twenty years, and 12.5 % having twenty-one years and above. Such diversity in the length of service of subjects is enough to understand how the policy might be perceived and adapted to from all manner of teaching experiences.

Among the survey participants, nine respondents volunteered for semi-structured interviews to share their opinions and views in depth. To avoid misunderstanding and/or misinterpretation of the respondents' responses, some of the interviews were carried out in the first language of the participants and translated those responses into English by the researchers later. The interview

sessions were recorded through a recording device. Then the recordings were transcribed into written form. This qualitative data is analyzed using NVivo.

Findings and Discussion

Findings

Quantitative analysis

The data on the perception and professional adaptation of teachers in secondary schools of Khulna regarding the implementation of the New Education Policy (NEP) reveals a range of responses that reflect the complexity of educational reforms.

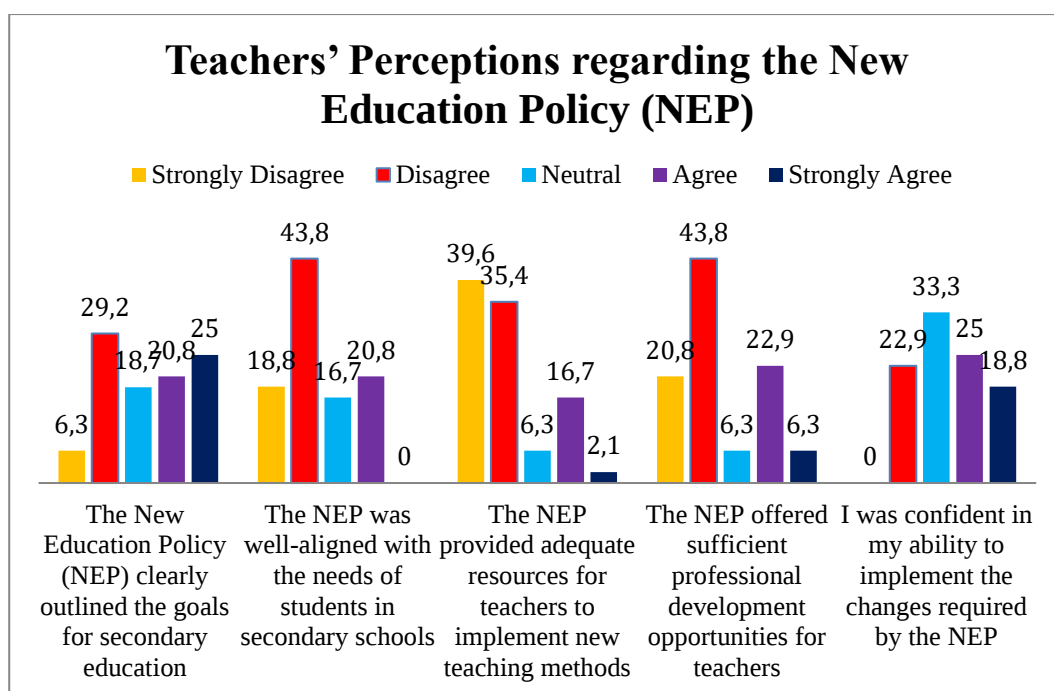


Figure 2. Teachers' perceptions regarding the new education policy (NEP)

In terms of the clarity of the NEP's goals for secondary education, 6.3% of respondents strongly disagreed, and 29.2% disagreed, indicating that a significant portion of teachers found the policy unclear. However, 45.8% of the teachers agreed or strongly agreed that the policy goals were clearly outlined, showing a moderate level of acceptance, though a notable 18.7% remained neutral. This division highlights a mix of perceptions about the policy's clarity, which may stem from different levels of engagement or understanding among teachers.

When asked whether the NEP was aligned with the needs of students, the responses were more negative. Only 20.8% of the teachers agreed, while none strongly agreed. On the contrary, 43.8% disagreed and 18.8% strongly disagreed along the same line, hinting at the common perception that the policy aimed at was far from the needs of the students. This striking contrast indicates a worrisome factor in how those objectives relate, and are perceived to relate, to the actual situation of Khulna's secondary education. The neutral responses (16.7%) point to some confusion, probably because of poor explanation or that it was not clear what the policy was all about.

Regarding resources for teachers to implement new teaching methods, the majority of respondents were dissatisfied, with 39.6% strongly disagreeing and 35.4% disagreeing. Only 16.7% of teachers agreed, and 2.1% strongly agreed that adequate resources were provided, showing a significant gap in the material and infrastructural support necessary for implementing the NEP. This data suggests that the lack of resources is a major barrier to the effective implementation of the policy, contributing to the overall sense of unpreparedness among teachers.

In terms of professional development, the data similarly shows dissatisfaction. A combined 64.6% of teachers disagreed or strongly disagreed that the NEP provided sufficient professional development opportunities. This finding indicates that many teachers felt ill-equipped to meet the demands of the new policy. Nevertheless, 22.9% of respondents agreed, and 6.3% strongly agreed, suggesting that a small portion of the teaching force may have benefited from some form of professional development under the NEP.

Confidence in implementing the NEP's required changes also varied. Only 18.8% strongly agreed and 25% agreed, suggesting that about 43.8% of teachers felt confident in their ability to implement the changes. However, a significant number (33.3%) remained neutral, indicating uncertainty, while 22.9% disagreed with this statement, suggesting a lack of confidence among a notable portion of the teaching workforce.

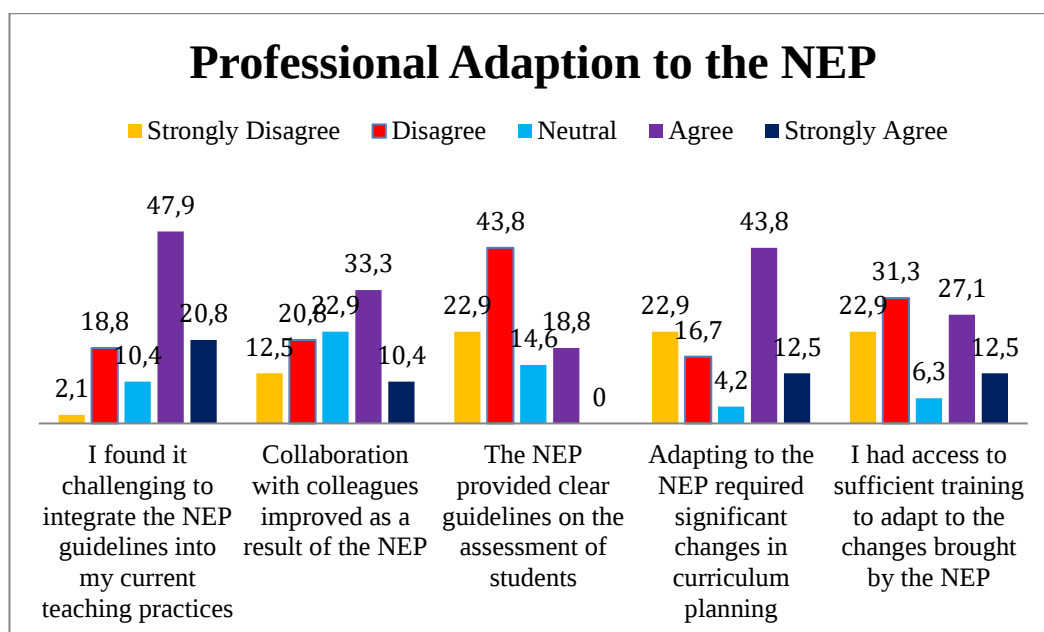


Figure 3. Professional adaption to the NEP

The data reveals a spectrum of responses regarding the teachers' perception and professional adaptation to the New Education Policy (NEP) in secondary schools in Khulna. When asked about the challenge of integrating NEP guidelines into their teaching practices, a significant portion of teachers either agreed (47.9%) or strongly agreed (20.8%), indicating that the majority found it challenging to adjust to the new directives. Only a minority, 2.1%, strongly disagreed, suggesting that the integration of NEP guidelines into existing teaching

frameworks was perceived as difficult for many. This difficulty could be tied to the lack of clarity or preparedness related to the policy's implementation.

Collaboration among colleagues improved for 33.3% of respondents, who agreed that the NEP positively influenced this aspect, while 10.4% strongly agreed. However, 12.5% strongly disagreed, and another 20.8% disagreed, revealing a mixed impact on collaboration. The number of neutral respondents (22.9%) further underscores this ambivalence. This suggests that while the NEP fostered collaboration for some, others did not experience significant shifts, potentially due to institutional or personal factors that limited collaboration opportunities.

A substantial majority found the NEP guidelines on student assessment unclear, as indicated by 43.8% who disagreed and 22.9% who strongly disagreed. Only 18.8% agreed with the clarity of the guidelines, while no respondents strongly agreed. This confusion regarding student assessment protocols highlights a critical area where the policy seems to fall short, leaving many teachers uncertain about how to assess their students effectively under the new policy framework.

When it came to curriculum planning, 43.8% agreed that adapting to the NEP required significant changes, with 12.5% strongly agreeing. However, 22.9% strongly disagreed, and 16.7% disagreed, reflecting a divide in how teachers experienced the policy's impact on curriculum planning. This could be seen as a reflection of how prepared they are and how difficult it is to try and implement a NEP alignment strategy to their curriculum. The scope of neutral responses was very low (4.2 %) and this indicated that teachers were either completely changed by these issues or were not changed at all by these issues.

Training emerged as another area of concern, with 31.3% disagreeing and 22.9% strongly disagreeing that they had received sufficient training to adapt to the NEP. Only 27.1% agreed, and 12.5% strongly agreed, indicating that access to training was inadequate for many. This lack of training may also be one of the sources of the moderate level of success in implementing the policy since the importance of proper training to help in coping with new policies cannot be understated.

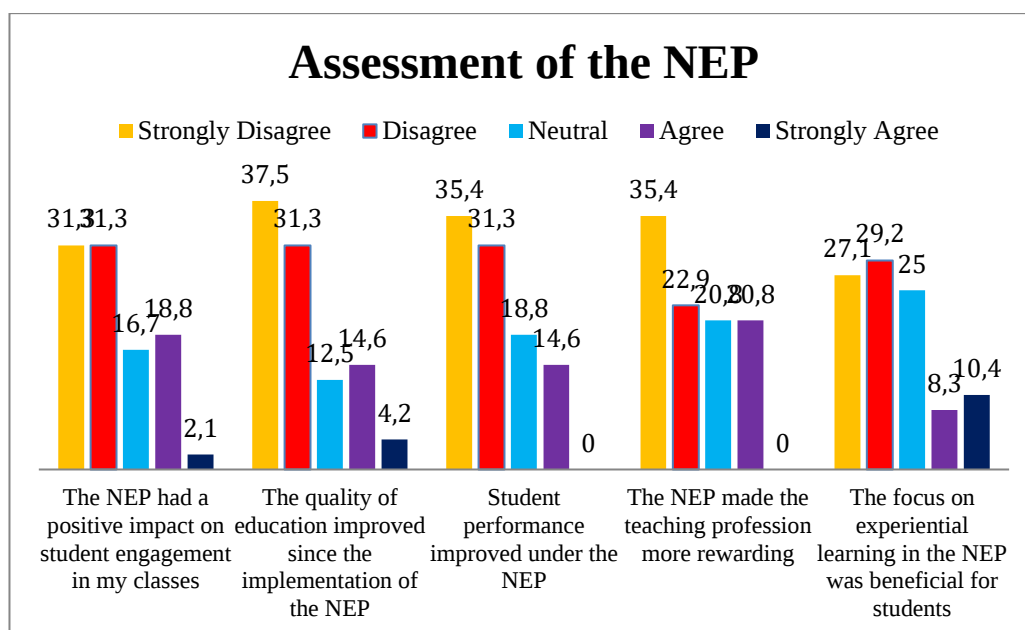


Figure 4. Assessment of the NEP

The data analysis of the perceptions of teachers in secondary schools of Khulna regarding the implementation of the New Education Policy (NEP) reveals a general skepticism and mixed reactions toward its outcomes. For instance, a significant proportion of teachers, 31.3% strongly disagreed, and an equal 31.3% disagreed that the NEP had a positive impact on student engagement in their classes, with only 18.8% agreeing and a mere 2.1% strongly agreeing. This suggests that over 60% of the respondents felt that student engagement had not substantially improved under the new policy.

Similarly, when asked whether the quality of education had improved since the implementation of the NEP, 37.5% strongly disagreed and 31.3% disagreed, while only 14.6% agreed, and 4.2% strongly agreed, further indicating a general dissatisfaction with the outcomes of the policy.

Student performance, another key metric, exhibited even stronger negative perceptions, with 35.4% of the teachers strongly disagreeing and 31.3% disagreeing that student performance had improved under the NEP. Only 14.6% agreed, and no one strongly agreed, underscoring a widespread belief that the policy has not significantly benefited students academically.

Additionally, the NEP's impact on making the teaching profession more rewarding received similarly low support, with 35.4% strongly disagreeing and 22.9% disagreeing, compared to 20.8% of teachers who agreed. This suggests that a considerable number of educators feel that the policy has not enhanced their professional experience.

Lastly, the NEP's focus on experiential learning was viewed more favorably by some teachers, though opinions were still divided. While 27.1% strongly disagreed and 29.2% disagreed that it was beneficial for students, 10.4% strongly agreed, and 8.3% agreed. This indicates that while experiential learning has some supporters among the teaching staff, the majority remain unconvinced about its efficacy.

Qualitative analysis

In the analysis of the responses related to the implementation of NEP in secondary schools of Khulna, several recurring issues were found. Mostly teachers explained the barriers they faced to implement NEP in their schools. Firstly, teachers reported that they had experienced several problems coping with NEP because many other tangible and infrastructural problems became obstacles at their schools. Participant 1 pointed out that it was difficult to handle a big classroom with students while some work on activity-based curriculum like fieldwork or practical work which needs to be done in groups. Participant 5 argued that due to the high ratio between students and teachers, they did not get time to give feedback to individual learners and creating a chance for personalized learning became impossible. There were also complaints about resources. Participant 2 exclaimed that his school did not have the required ICT equipment but he is to teach ICT classes.

Participant 7 said that “in developed countries, students frequently go on field trips or visit different institutions. But in our country (Bangladesh) it is not easy to do so because of our socio-economic situation.” Similarly, related to group work (one of the important practices of NEP) Participant 9 said that they face difficulties during practicing group work as well as more necessary infrastructures of the classroom i.e., round tables are needed for doing group work but in many classrooms, there are no round tables.

Despite these challenges, teachers identified a few possibilities that the NEP had begun to create. For instance, Participant 4 noted that arts and culture being introduced in the curriculum made students do something creative which were less valued before. Similarly, Participant 6 reported that now students get time to think things more critically because the days of memorizing without understanding are gone. It’s all project-based and concept-based based so learners have to apply their minds. Thus, thinking capacity, improving problem-solving skills, and organizing things, are all gained from it. This was further echoed by Participant 3, who reported an increase in student participation and practical engagement due to the shift towards a more hands-on approach.

In terms of teaching approaches, most teachers reported a shift from traditional teacher-centered methods to more interactive and student-centered ones. Participant 1 described how the NEP influenced their teaching: “First, students’ autonomy has been promoted in classroom activities”. This was echoed by other participants also noting that their teaching had become more student-oriented with the NEP. Participant 3 commented that their role had changed from being an authoritative figure to becoming a facilitator of learning. However, not all participants were able to facilitate balanced group work effectively; this is reflected in Participant 1’s comment as well: “But some of them did not participate actively and I think I am still weak in encouraging them to do so”. Participant 7 also mentioned that they had to gradually shift their approach from memorizing-based learning at the beginning of the course “to focused material and real-life learning because today’s learners are living in a technology era where information is accessible abundantly everywhere”.

The above theme was also reflected in the learning of students as reported by a few participants. Some of them reported increased involvement and sharing of ideas among students due to working in groups. According to Participant 3,

“Students are more involved in group activities, where they share their ideas with friends and learn from each other”. On the contrary, other participants reported about students who were not able to perform well in the new system or new curriculum. For example, Participant 4 said, “Low-graded students face difficulties in understanding the new curriculum”. Participant 6 commented, “Students are doing well in the practical works but scoring low marks during the assessment test”.

Discussion

One of the key indicators assessed was the clarity of the NEP’s goals for secondary education. There was a great diversity in the results, with some of the respondents reflecting satisfaction or discontent towards the NEP. For instance, while 25% of the respondents expressed strong agreement that the NEP set out its goals quite clearly, a sum of 30% either disagreed or strongly did so. Some aspects of this finding corroborate the literature on policy implementation. The concept of policy goals as a clarifying proposition has been discussed or has been always acknowledged as a necessary precondition to successful policy actions (Fullan, 2001). According to Spillane et al. (2002), policies that are ambiguous or not clearly articulated are often met with resistance or varying interpretations among implementers, in this case, teachers.

On the other hand, the gap that exists between the NEP’s goals and the comprehension by teachers can be explained because these are not easy to implement. Teachers on several occasions have to be given time to comprehend and process new policies since in many cases these will require a change in years of practice. Research conducted by Leithwood et al. (2002) pointed out that the proper order of actions in initiation implementation includes the provision of information to educators to avert potential discrepancies about what will be done. The divided opinion among respondents in this study emphasizes the need for more targeted communication strategies to improve teachers’ understanding of the NEP’s goals.

Moreover, the overwhelming disagreement regarding the NEP’s alignment with student needs (62.6% either strongly disagreed or disagreed) is particularly concerning. This issue resonates with Ball’s (2012) argument that education policies often face challenges at the ground level because they may not adequately address the diverse and specific needs of students in different contexts. The fact that no teachers in this study strongly agreed that the NEP was well-aligned with student needs suggests that policymakers may need to reconsider the extent to which local educational needs and cultural contexts were factored into the development of the NEP.

For an educational reform to be successful, it has to have both the resources and professional development available. And yet the teachers in this study overwhelmingly reported they lacked both. The explanation or resource support to adopt new types of teaching methods is made only by 16.7% of teachers whereas a total number of 75% disagree and strongly disagree with the statement. This tends to reflect the findings in comparable studies where low resourcing was cited as the principal barrier to the implementation of educational reform (OECD, 2009). Fullan and Miles (1992) pointed out that without appropriate investments

in resources, such as textbooks, technology, or classroom facilities to support policy reforms those reforms will encounter serious obstacles from educators.

Additionally, only 22.9% of the respondents agreed that the NEP provided adequate professional development opportunities (43.8% disagree; 20.8% strongly disagree). This also reflects Guskey's (2002) belief that professional development is an essential aspect of the success of educational change, particularly if teachers are being asked to use new instructional techniques. According to Wei et al. (2009), effective professional development should not only be ongoing but also directly linked to the instructional changes that the policy seeks to promote.

While the NEP prescribes new methodologies, teachers in Khulna are not likely to develop professional skills to implement them. When teachers do not feel supported, they can fall back on a more traditional way of teaching, even if these are misaligned with the NEP's objectives. Therefore, increasing professional development opportunities for teachers is essential for the long-term success of the NEP in Khulna.

The responses to the challenges of implementing the NEP portray some level of concern among the teaching fraternity. Nearly 70% of the respondents said they had experienced difficulty in implementing the NEP guidelines in their teaching practices. In this regard, this finding supports the arguments by Cohen and Hill (2001) that the reasons behind the implementation of new policies are incongruities between teaching practices and reform.

The need for curriculum changes also emerged as a significant theme, with 56.3% of teachers agreeing or strongly agreeing that adapting to the NEP required major changes in curriculum planning. According to Tyack and Cuban (1995), such big changes often require changing the substantive content of the curriculum, a trickier proposition for teachers who have become used to pedagogical practices. Teachers' responses in this study also suggest that the NEP posed significant disturbances to their usual planning, which compounded with other complications during the implementation process.

While the primary goal of the NEP is to improve student engagement and performance, the findings of this study suggest that teachers are sceptical of its impact. When asked about the NEP's effect on student engagement, 31.3% strongly disagreed, and another 31.3% disagreed, while only 20.9% of teachers agreed or strongly agreed. The literature on student engagement (Fredericks, et al., 2004) emphasizes that changes in curriculum and instructional methods are key to increasing student engagement. However, if teachers are not fully supported in implementing these changes, student engagement may suffer as a result.

Similarly, 37.5% of teachers strongly disagreed that the quality of education had improved since the implementation of the NEP, with only 18.8% agreeing or strongly agreeing. This aligns with the findings of Hattie (2009), who suggested that the quality of education reforms is contingent on how effectively they are implemented at the classroom level. If teachers lack the resources, training, and confidence to implement the NEP, it is unlikely to result in significant improvements in student outcomes.

The finding that NEP promotes student-centered and practical learning aligns with contemporary educational theories advocating for experiential and collaborative learning (Kolb, 2015). Participants acknowledged the potential benefits of this approach, noting how it fosters critical thinking and creativity.

However, the challenges of scaling these practices in resource-poor environments remain consistent with the struggles reported in the present study, particularly in terms of large class sizes and the absence of physical infrastructure to support group work.

Moreover, Participants also noted an overall movement from traditional rote memorization in favor of more active techniques such as group work, project-based learning, and the integration of external materials, which is well aligned with reforms' implementation around the world. Thus, hands-on and collaborative learning environments can assist in the cognitive development of students (Dewey, 2012). However, the fact that participants raise concerns in terms of practical issues with conducting group work in larger classes, and time shortage, implies a substantial implementation gap. This gap is also compounded by the socio-cultural context when issues like gender and specific cultural and security challenges arise in working with female students. This echoes with issues highlighted by Nussbaum (2012) regarding gender and education in the developing world.

The NEP has positive impacts on students' learning, in terms of becoming more cooperative and critical. Participant 3 suggests that students improved by talking about ideas with classmates, which is supported by research arguing that peer learning can help students enhance their understanding (Johnson & Johnson, 1994). Nevertheless, it seems that the weaker students find it difficult to cope with this system of learning. Participants 4 and 5 seem to suggest a need for additional support to achieve equitable outcomes, which is also consistent with Banerjee et al. (2007) advocating for differentiated instruction in a classroom with diverse learners.

Conclusion

In the arena of educational policy, the enactment of reforms frequently exposes a philosophical disconnection between theory and practice. Policies such as the New Education Policy (NEP) in Bangladesh, implemented with reformative aspirations, may flounder when not sufficiently prepared for or engaged with relevant stakeholders. Dewey (2012) reminds us that the significance of educational reform is not just about how it is grounded conceptually but also about how it conveys itself into the actuality of human beings who are impacted by it. The findings presented in this article reveal how intentions and unintended consequences of policies interact, begetting implications for secondary school teachers in Khulna.

The findings of the study revealed that the implementation of NEP in secondary schools of Khulna is not satisfactory. It is evident from all discussed indicators that teachers have mixed perceptions about the clarity, student needs, and provision of resources. The majority of the teachers were dissatisfied with the clarity of goals, matching with students' local needs and resources, or professional development opportunities. Learning to cope with new curriculum and pedagogical change was difficult for most teachers. Therefore, it can be concluded that NEP in Khulna was implemented without pre-implementation preparation or thoughts about what this change would demand from teachers and students.

The departure of Sheikh Hasina and the subsequent postponement of the NEP by the interim government reflect broader public dissatisfaction with the

policy, as students and the general public voiced their concerns about its potential impact on the education system. The abrupt nature of this political shift left teachers and educational institutions in a state of uncertainty, further complicating the implementation of the policy.

Based on the above discussion, it is recommended that in any future effort to reintroduce the NEP or implementation of similar reforms, more systematic planning and dialogue with teachers would be necessary. The goals of the policy need to be made more explicit and related to local concerns to facilitate teacher engagement and action. Equally important is a provision of support in terms of resources and professional development opportunities to assist teachers in developing new skills. In addition, it may be useful for policy-makers to engage with constraints faced by teachers at school as well as non-school context particularly those related to sociocultural factors, before formulating policies to make them workable or acceptable for all relevant stakeholders.

Several limitations in this study need to be indicated. To begin with, the surveyed sample size was 48 teachers only, and out of the nine respondents interviewed in depth. Such a depth may not represent fully the variety of teacher experiences and perspectives across the region in question. Furthermore, the study is limited to Khulna City only. Therefore, it can be said that the findings of this study may not apply to rural or other urban areas of Bangladesh.

Future research should include a larger and more representative sample of teachers and investigate the longer-term impacts of the NEP with its reincorporation or modification. Furthermore, while formulating any educational reform, local context should be taken into consideration.

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