



Bridging Policy and Practice: Teacher Competencies and Challenges in Implementing NEP 2020 English Language Teaching Reforms

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Abstract

Educational policy reforms often face challenges in implementation because of the discrepancies between broad planning and the actual conditions in classrooms. In India, the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 requires a change in English Language Teaching (ELT) from memorization to learner-focused, communicative, and experiential approaches. Nonetheless, the effective realization of this vision relies significantly on teacher preparedness and organisational capability. This research explores the perceptions of secondary school English teachers regarding their teaching competencies in relation to NEP 2020 directives, while also identifying systemic obstacles that impede the implementation of the policy. Employing a descriptive survey research approach, data were gathered from fifty (N = 50) secondary English language instructors in Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) institutions located in Vadodara, Gujarat. The data gathering included a self-evaluation matrix for teacher competency and a systematic questionnaire on challenges, analysed via descriptive statistics and thematic classification. The results indicate a clear disparity between policy goals and classroom implementation. Although educators exhibit strong awareness and a favourable attitude toward communicative approaches, their real-world application is limited by institutional obstacles. The main issues recognised involve oversized class sizes, strict assessment systems centred on final exams, insufficient ongoing and applicable professional development training, and restricted availability of modern digital learning resources. The research finds that top-down educational policies need structured, grassroots backing regarding



school infrastructure and tailored teacher training to be successful. These findings provide practical applications for school leaders, curriculum developers, and policymakers operating in new educational environments.

Keywords: NEP 2020, Teacher Competencies, Institutional Constraints, English Language Teaching, Secondary Education, Policy-Practice Gap.

Introduction

Global educational policy reforms face structural obstacles in their implementation, primarily caused by the conflict between macro-level strategies and micro-level classroom situations. Although macro frameworks offer optimistic and forward-thinking educational ideals, their true achievement or shortcomings depend solely on the abilities of grassroots educators and the opportunities provided by local institutional environments. In the realm of English Language Teaching (ELT) in developing economies, this "policy-practice gap" is especially evident. Nations in the Global South regularly revise their language programs to meet global economic needs, but these revised frameworks often face obstacles when they intersect with established teaching traditions and limited resources. The difficulty extends beyond theoretical concerns; it is practical, as educators must implement contemporary teaching requirements without a simultaneous restructuring of the frameworks in which they operate. In India, the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 signifies a remarkable transformation focused on revitalizing the educational system. In language education, particularly in English Language Teaching (ELT), the policy clearly requires a shift from structural, memorization-based methods to communicative, experiential, and learner-focused approaches. It emphasizes greatly on cultivating multi-lingual, practical communicative skills instead of mere grammatical proficiency. The policy imagines a classroom where students learn English organically through interactive activities, teamwork, and significant conversations, instead of just memorizing it to pass tests. Yet, implementing these progressive national mandates into everyday secondary school practices necessitates significant teacher flexibility, strong ongoing professional development (CPD), and adequate structural institutional capacity.

Although Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) schools in metropolitan areas such as Vadodara are often viewed as better-equipped and more advanced than state-board schools, secondary English educators in these establishments encounter distinctive, overlapping



institutional challenges. The educational landscape of a growing city such as Vadodara, Gujarat, provides an essential micro-context for examining these broader dynamics. In these contexts, schools face competing demands: the forward-thinking educational standards of contemporary national systems and the conventional, market-oriented performance indicators required by parents and institutional stakeholders. As a result, secondary school English language educators are positioned at the heart of this conflict, juggling the aspirational objectives outlined in policy papers with the practical, everyday constraints of their work settings.

This research examines the convergence of teacher skills and systemic limitations among fifty secondary school English teachers in Vadodara city, investigating how overarching policy goals correspond with everyday practical situations. Grasping this alignment is essential because the secondary level (Classes 9 and 10) acts as a critical passage to higher education, where language skills emerge as a fundamental factor in achieving academic and career success. This paper explores a critical gap in existing ELT literature by assessing the self-assessed preparedness of these educators in conjunction with the structural obstacles they face, focusing on the practical viability of top-down curriculum reforms within specific urban contexts.

Statement of the Problem

The main issue in current Indian language education is not the development of forward-thinking curricula but rather the structural and professional obstacles that hinder their implementation in classrooms. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 establishes an ambitious framework for a hands-on and interactive English language classroom. However, initial observations suggest that conventional, teacher-led lecture techniques and grammar-translation methods remain prevalent in secondary school teaching. This establishes a clear disparity between policy goals and the realities of classroom practices. Although educators often participate in informational workshops on the NEP 2020 philosophy, there is a notable absence of definitive research on their perceived pedagogical preparedness to apply these changes. Moreover, the institutional framework of CBSE schools presents particular systemic obstacles, including predetermined academic schedules, large class sizes, and strict, high-pressure assessment systems that could hinder teachers from implementing innovative



approaches. Consequently, this study tackles the significant gap between the communicative pedagogical skills anticipated from secondary English teachers by NEP 2020 and the limiting institutional circumstances that influence their everyday tasks in CBSE schools in Vadodara. In the absence of empirical data clearly indicating the boundary between teacher capacity and institutional limitations, educational mandates risk turning into symbolic gestures instead of effective instruments for enhancing classroom performance. This research methodically explores this gap to offer a solid, evidence-based view of the practical aspects of secondary-level ELT reform.

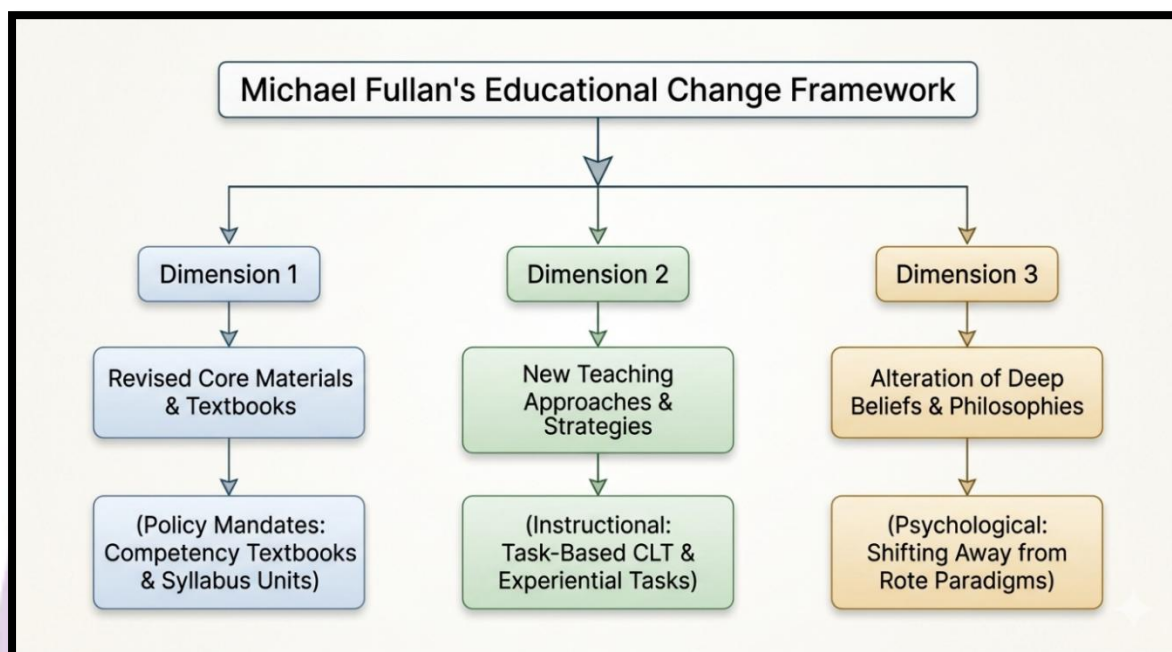
Theoretical Framework

To systematically analyze the disconnect between educational policy design and classroom execution, this study is theoretically anchored in Michael Fullan's Theory of Educational Change. Fullan's framework is widely recognized in international educational research for its pragmatic approach to understanding why large-scale, top-down curricular reforms frequently falter at the grassroots level. Rather than viewing policy implementation as a simple, linear transmission of directives from the government to the school, Fullan conceptualizes change as a complex, non-linear process that relies heavily on how local actors experience and interpret the reform.

According to Fullan, the successful implementation of any new educational policy or curricular shift is not a single event, but a tri-dimensional transformation. For a reform to be genuinely integrated into an educational system, changes must occur simultaneously across three distinct dimensions:

- i. **The Use of New or Revised Materials:** This represents the most visible, macro-level dimension of change, encompassing updated textbooks, altered syllabi, newly integrated digital platforms, and revised structural toolkits.
- ii. **The Use of New Teaching Approaches or Pedagogical Strategies:** This dimension demands that educators actively alter their classroom behaviours, instructional techniques, and student engagement models (e.g., shifting from teacher-fronted lecturing to facilitating peer-led communicative tasks).
- iii. **The Alteration of Beliefs and Pedagogical Assumptions:** The deepest and most challenging dimension, this requires teachers to fundamentally change their underlying philosophies

regarding how learning occurs (e.g., moving from the belief that language acquisition happens through memorizing grammar rules to the belief that it happens through active, social communication).



When applied to the implementation of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 within the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) schools of Vadodara, Fullan's framework serves as an excellent diagnostic tool. The mandates of NEP 2020 explicitly demand a total tri-dimensional shift in English Language Teaching (ELT): schools are expected to provide interactive digital tools (materials), teachers are directed to use experiential, task-based methodologies (approaches), and educators must view students as active language producers rather than passive rote learners (beliefs).

However, Fullan emphasizes that these three dimensions are highly interdependent, yet they develop at completely different speeds. While an institutional system can rapidly alter the first dimension by distributing new textbooks or issuing administrative circulars, changing teaching approaches and underlying beliefs requires substantial time, ongoing support, and a collaborative environment.

In many cases, an implementation gap or "superficial implementation" occurs. This happens when schools adopt the new materials and teachers learn the updated policy vocabulary, but the actual classroom strategies remain unchanged because the institutional ecosystem is too



restrictive. This study uses Fullan's tri-dimensional matrix to investigate whether the 50 surveyed secondary English teachers are experiencing a holistic educational transformation, or if systemic barriers such as rigid exam structures and large class sizes are forcing them into a state of superficial compliance where policy ideals are talked about but traditional methodologies continue to dominate.

Objectives of the Study

To systematically examine the relationship between macro-level educational policy and grassroots classroom execution, this study isolates two interconnected research objectives. These objectives are designed to separate the assessment of internal teacher capacity from the external, structural limitations imposed by the school environment:

Objective 1: To evaluate the self-perceived pedagogical competencies of secondary-level CBSE English language teachers in Vadodara city regarding the specific experiential, communicative, and learner-centric instructional mandates introduced by the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020.

Objective 2: To identify, categorize, and rank the operational, institutional, and systemic challenges that hinder these secondary educators from effectively translating contemporary language education policies into daily classroom practices.

By addressing these dual objectives, the study provides a clear, empirical overview of where teacher readiness meets structural barriers, helping to identify the root causes of the policy-practice gap in urban secondary school environments.

Research Methodology

To investigate the alignment between national policy and classroom realities, this study requires a structured methodological framework that can capture both numerical patterns and detailed teacher feedback. This section outlines the research design, participant demographics, study variables, instrumentation, data collection procedures, and data analysis methods used to evaluate the experiences of the fifty surveyed English teachers.

Research Design

This study adopts a quantitative descriptive survey research design supplemented by qualitative descriptive elements, creating a mixed-methods framework. The quantitative component is essential for systematically measuring and profiling the frequency of specific teacher



competencies and demographic patterns across the sample. Conversely, the qualitative component uses open-ended fields to allow teachers to describe the day-to-day institutional barriers they experience in their own words. This combined approach ensures that the study does not merely report statistical averages, but anchors those numbers in the actual, lived experiences of classroom practitioners, aligning with the empirical standards required by contemporary educational research.

Population and Sample

The target population for this study comprises secondary school English language teachers (specifically instructing Classes 9 and 10) working within Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) affiliated institutions in the city of Vadodara, Gujarat. From this population, a sample of fifty ($N = 50$) English teachers was selected using a non-probability convenience and purposive sampling strategy. Purposive selection criteria ensured that all participating educators were actively teaching the secondary English curriculum under the CBSE board, making them directly accountable for implementing national mandates. Convenience sampling was utilized to navigate access constraints and secure voluntary participation from active educators across diverse geographical zones within the city limits during the ongoing academic session.

Variables of the Study

To maintain a precise focus on policy execution and systemic friction, the operational variables are organized into two distinct categories:

- **Independent/Demographic Variables:** These include the structural attributes of the participants, such as their formal academic and professional qualifications (e.g., M.A., B.Ed., M.Ed.), total teaching experience in years (categorized into distinct career stages), and their level of exposure to recent professional development or NEP 2020 orientation workshops.
- **Dependent Variables:** These consist of the teachers' self-perceived pedagogical competency levels across specific core indices mandated by NEP 2020 (such as experiential language delivery and formative assessment tracking) and the perceived severity of the institutional constraints they encounter.



Research Tools

The primary data collection tool was a two-part research instrument adapted from the researcher's larger dissertation framework, refined to focus specifically on policy implementation and challenges:

- i. *Teacher Competency Self-Assessment Matrix*: This structured, closed-ended rating scale presents teachers with specific pedagogical requirements established by NEP 2020. Teachers rate their familiarity, execution frequency, and perceived confidence across indices like task-based language teaching, integration of multi-lingual classroom strategies, and continuous formative assessment design.
- ii. *Institutional Challenges Questionnaire*: This semi-structured tool features a series of closed-ended ranking items where teachers evaluate predefined physical and systemic barriers (e.g., class sizes, textbook availability, administrative workloads). Crucially, it includes structured open-ended text fields that prompt educators to write candidly about the specific institutional factors that restrict their pedagogical choices.

Data Collection and Ethical Considerations

Data collection was carried out through systematic field administration using both physical print questionnaires and secure digital forms to accommodate varying school schedules. Formal administrative clearance was obtained from the principals and management boards of the respective CBSE schools before contacting the teachers. Every participant was provided with an informed consent briefing explaining the purely academic nature of the study. Complete anonymity and institutional confidentiality were guaranteed; no school names or personal identifiers were recorded. Participants were explicitly assured that their feedback would be analyzed collectively, creating a safe environment for them to report genuine institutional challenges without fear of professional liability.

Data Analysis Framework

The data obtained from the fifty participants were processed using a dual-analysis framework tailored to the nature of the responses:

Quantitative Analysis: Numerical data from the demographic sheets and the competency self-assessment matrices were coded, cleaned, and compiled in Microsoft Excel. Analysis was conducted using descriptive statistics, utilizing frequency distributions, simple percentages,



and arithmetic mean scores. These metrics are used to rank the institutional barriers by severity and establish baseline competency profiles.

Qualitative Analysis: The text data generated from the open-ended sections of the challenge's questionnaire was evaluated using systematic thematic analysis. This process involved an initial reading of all responses to achieve immersion, followed by open coding of specific teacher complaints. These codes were then clustered into broader, distinct themes (such as "Assessment-Driven Constraints" or "Infrastructural Deficits") to provide a clear narrative that explains the statistical patterns observed in the quantitative data.

Results and Data Presentation

Demographic Profile of Respondents

The structural and professional backgrounds of the fifty surveyed English language teachers (N = 50) provide crucial context for understanding how national policy directives translate into practice. The raw dataset from the participants was systematically calculated to construct a comprehensive profile based on three core indicators: teaching experience at the secondary level, highest formal qualifications related to English Language Teaching (ELT) methodology, and their perceived lack of access to targeted Professional Development (PD) training.

Table 1: Demographic and Professional Profile of Sample Educators (N = 50)

Demographic Indicators	Sub-Categories	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Teaching Experience <i>(Secondary Level - Classes IX & X)</i>	Less than 2 years	10	20.0%
	2–5 years	14	28.0%
	6–10 years	15	30.0%
	More than 10 years	11	22.0%
Highest Professional Qualification <i>(ELT Methodology Related)</i>	B.Ed. General	16	32.0%
	M.A. in English / M.Ed.	29	58.0%
	Specialized Certification (TEFL/TESOL/CEFR/CIFL)	5	10.0%
Perceived Training Gap Severity <i>(Lack of access to PD/Training)</i>	Low Severity (Rating 1–2)	9	18.0%
	Moderate Severity (Rating 3)	12	24.0%
	High Severity (Rating 4–5)	29	58.0%



Source: Survey Data compiled from Dissertation Work

The data in Table 1 reveals that the sample is well-distributed in terms of teaching experience, with 52% representing early-to-mid career teachers (under 5 years) and 52% comprising experienced educators (6 years or more). Academically, the group is highly qualified, with a commanding majority of 58% holding post-graduate degrees (M.A. in English/M.Ed.) and 32% possessing a general B.Ed. degree. However, only a minimal 10% have acquired specialized certifications specifically tailored to modern language teaching methodologies, such as TEFL, TESOL, or advanced CEFR frameworks. Crucially, despite their solid academic standing, 58% of these educators explicitly rate the lack of access to targeted, policy-driven professional training as a severe, high-level constraint (Rating 4–5). This indicates a profound systemic deficit in ongoing instructional support across the surveyed CBSE institutions.

Teacher Competency Scores

To evaluate the true extent of the policy-practice gap, the secondary teachers' self-perceived pedagogical competencies were mathematically aggregated and cross-referenced with their actual implementation frequencies across key NEP 2020 instructional indices. This analysis highlights a clear disconnect: high conceptual awareness of modern methodologies does not automatically result in active, day-to-day classroom execution.

Table 2: Matrix of Teacher Competency and Classroom Implementation Frequencies (N = 50)

Key Policy Indices Directives)	Pedagogical (NEP 2020)	Theoretical Awareness Mean Score (Max: 5.00)	Practical Classroom Execution Mean Score (Max: 5.00)	Statistical Variance (Gap Index)	Perceived Competency Level
Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) <i>Focus on natural interactive tasks and social dialogue</i>		4.42	2.54	-1.88	High Awareness / Low Execution
Experiential Learning Integration		4.16	2.12	-2.04	High Awareness / Low Execution



<i>Focus on language projects and collaborative role-play</i>				
Multilingual Classroom Strategies <i>Focus on cross-linguistic scaffolding for complex syntax</i>	3.88	2.92	-0.96	Moderate Alignment
Continuous Formative Assessment <i>Focus on descriptive trackers over rote summative tests</i>	4.56	2.06	-2.50	Critical Implementation Gap

Source: Compiled from Teacher Competency Self-Assessment Matrix

The statistical matrix presented in Table 2 exposes a substantial gap across all core pedagogical dimensions. Teachers demonstrate remarkably high levels of theoretical awareness regarding Continuous Formative Assessment (Mean = 4.56) and Communicative Language Teaching (Mean = 4.42). They understand the underlying philosophy of the policy and express positive attitudes toward student-centred setups. However, when examining actual classroom execution, the mean scores plummet drastically.

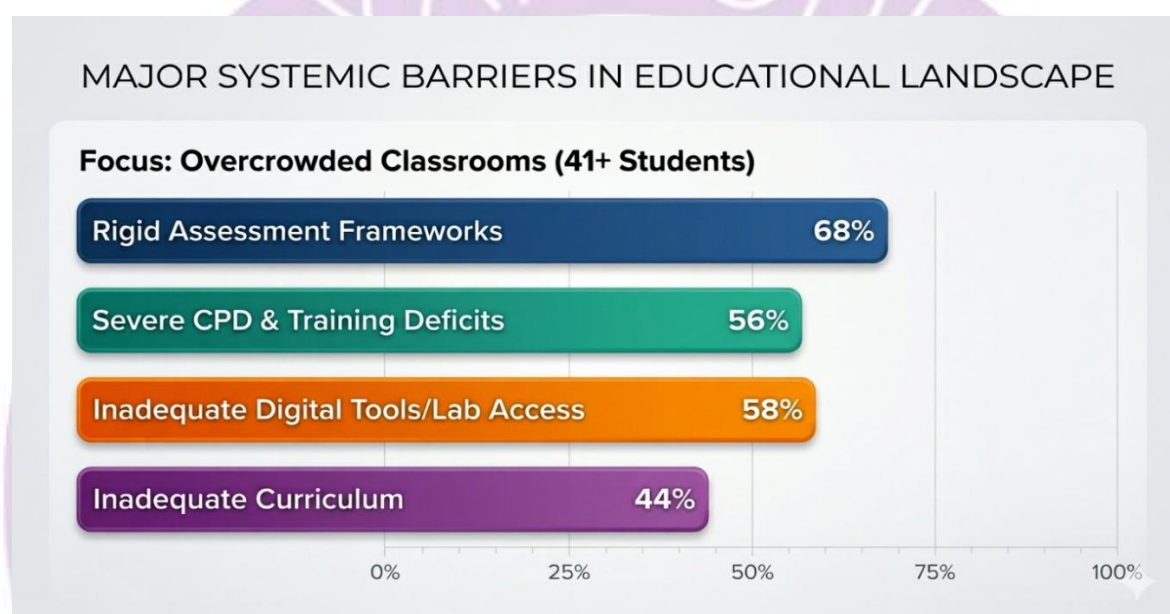
The largest operational variance occurs in Continuous Formative Assessment, with a critical implementation gap of -2.50. While teachers recognize the benefit of continuous portfolio tracking, their real-world application remains minimal (Mean = 2.06). Similarly, Experiential Learning Integration displays a severe gap of -2.04, showing that active language production tasks are frequently dropped in daily practice. The smallest gap is observed in Multilingual Strategies (-0.96), where the practical demands of clarifying text meaning force a natural, though unstandardized, reliance on cross-linguistic support. Overall, this data confirms that while the first dimension of Fullan's change theory (ideological awareness of materials and vocabulary) has been achieved, the second dimension (actual pedagogical practice) remains heavily blocked by structural institutional barriers.



Systemic and Institutional Challenges

To gain an understanding of the operational roadblocks that create the policy-practice gap, the quantitative ranking of structural barriers was aggregated into an overarching impact chart. Figure 1 displays the percentage-wise distribution and severe constraint ranking of the primary systemic challenges identified by the fifty surveyed secondary English language teachers (N = 50).

Figure 1: Percentage Distribution of Top Systemic Barriers in ELT (N=50)



Source: Analyzed from Quantitative Survey Responses

To understand the core reasons behind these percentages, a thematic analysis was performed on the teachers' open-ended text responses. The qualitative feedback details a tense teaching environment where structural limitations regularly override the interactive mandates of NEP 2020.

i. Overcrowded Classrooms and Speaking Skill Dilution

The quantitative data shows that 68% of the educators identify large class sizes as a heavy operational constraint, with the underlying spreadsheets revealing that a majority of classrooms pack 41 to over 50 students into a single instructional space. When teachers try to implement the speaking and listening tasks required by modern language policies, this density creates severe logistical challenges. One secondary English teacher explained the problem clearly:



"Handling speaking practice in a large classroom is challenging... With 40+ students, the key is to maximize student talk time and reduce teacher talk, but it requires highly structured grouping that easily breaks into noise if not monitored constantly."

Other participants noted that large student numbers reduce individual teaching attention down to a minimum. An educator shared:

"I use pair work and small groups to ensure everyone speaks, but it is difficult to give individualized interactions or monitor the quality of speech across rotating stations when class sizes are so large."

As a result, rather than acting as a natural setting for interactive language acquisition, the physical realities of the classroom force teachers back into traditional, lecture-based methods just to maintain basic classroom control.

ii. Rigid Evaluation Frameworks and the Pressure of Summative Exams

While teachers display high theoretical support for formative assessment indices (Mean = 4.56), their practical application is limited by an institutional framework focused almost entirely on final, high-stakes written board examinations. This focus creates a standard "washback effect," where teachers filter out interactive language activities if they do not contribute directly to final exam scores. One teacher observed:

"CBSE used to have compulsory ALS (Assessment of Speaking and Listening) tasks where students were paired and given topics on the spot... It was an interesting measure but was unfortunately scraped off or diluted. I would like them to add more of such exercises because currently, the assessment has become an end-of-year formality focused on pen-and-paper tests."

Another respondent highlighted the friction between interactive teaching and strict administrative deadlines:

"It's a constant juggle... The pressure of board exam results and rigid syllabus completion dates makes interactive, activity-based teaching difficult. School administrations and parents prioritize exam marks over communicative fluency."

The qualitative analysis shows that because final evaluations heavily favour written recall and rote grammar mechanics, teachers are pushed into an "exam-oriented practice" loop, spending



precious instructional hours reviewing previous board exam papers instead of building real-world communicative skills.

iii. The Deficit of Practical Continuous Professional Development (CPD)

The data highlights a significant lack of institutional support: 58% of the sampled teachers report a high severity gap regarding access to high-quality professional development. While teachers are taught *what* NEP 2020 expects conceptually, they receive little guidance on *how* to execute these strategies under standard classroom limitations. The feedback shows that current teacher workshops are perceived as superficial administrative exercises rather than practical training sessions. As one teacher directly put it:

"Training should not be rituals only; it should be practical and student-based. We need workshops on how to handle project-based learning and how to manage diverse learning levels in overcrowded, large classrooms, rather than just hearing theoretical policy explanations."

Another teacher discussed the challenges of modern, mixed-ability classrooms without adequate training:

"When differently-abled students and students from diverse linguistic backgrounds come together under the same classroom, it challenges my teaching skills. I need specialized training in differentiated instruction and modern assessment rubrics to help them effectively."

This qualitative data illustrates that teachers feel isolated in their professional growth. They find themselves caught between progressive top-down policy expectations and a lack of practical training, leaving them without the concrete tools needed to change their daily teaching habits successfully.

iv. Inadequate Digital Tools and Language Lab Access

The quantitative data show that 44% of the surveyed educators rate inadequate digital tool availability and poor access to specialised language labs as a notable or major operational barrier in their schools. Despite CBSE regulations and NEP 2020 frameworks encouraging technology-driven English Language Teaching (ELT) environments, the actual availability of these systems at the secondary school level is highly inconsistent. The qualitative feedback shows that even when digital platforms exist within school buildings, they are frequently unavailable for regular language training. One teacher shared their frustration with resource availability:



"Is a dedicated Language Lab or multimedia resources for English Language Teaching consistently available? No, never available in my section. We have smart boards, but specialized interactive language platforms are completely missing, forcing us to rely on traditional, textbook-only instruction."

Other participants highlighted that without working equipment, developing listening and speaking skills under the new curriculum guidelines becomes a very difficult task. An educator noted:

"Training in the effective use of digital tools would help me enhance student engagement... but right now, we face limited access to updated digital learning tools, and our language lab sessions have essentially become a formality rather than a regular tool for training listening comprehension or recording speech."

The thematic analysis indicates that this infrastructure gap directly impacts teachers' pedagogical choices. Without a reliable technical setup, teachers cannot easily assign interactive listening tasks or monitor spoken audio, pushing them further away from the progressive goals of NEP 2020 and back toward conventional pen-and-paper writing routines.

Discussion and Critical Analysis

The empirical data gathered from fifty English language teachers in Vadodara offers a clear insight into the actual experiences of educators regarding the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 at the grassroots level. Interpreting these results through Michael Fullan's Theory of Educational Change reveals a clear trend. The information indicates a notable "policy-practice gap" or "decoupling" in the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) framework. This gap is marked by a significant discrepancy between the teachers' strong theoretical understanding and their poor practical application ratings in essential pedagogical domains. Although the educational system has effectively addressed the first dimension of Fullan's theory by introducing new curriculum terminology and enhancing conceptual understanding, it has significantly struggled to accomplish the second and third dimensions: altering daily teaching methods and transforming fundamental pedagogical beliefs.

The Implementation Gap in Educational Change

The quantitative data reveal a significant difference between teachers' knowledge and their actual practices. This trend is most apparent in the Continuous Formative Assessment index,



revealing a significant statistical difference of -2.50, and the Experiential Learning Integration index, which displays a gap of -2.04. These significant figures suggest that the ambitious objectives of NEP 2020 are facing serious structural issues within schools. Educators are not opposing these contemporary techniques out of ideological bias; rather, they are compelled to adapt because their everyday organizational settings do not endorse these modifications.

Fullan's framework posits that genuine educational reform necessitates a balance of revised instructional resources, contemporary teaching methods, and updated pedagogical beliefs. In CBSE schools in Vadodara, this equilibrium is disrupted. The educational system has provided revised, competency-based textbooks, and educators have learned the appropriate terminology during policy training sessions. Nonetheless, since the fundamental institutional frameworks like high-pressure final examinations and packed classrooms stay entirely unaltered, educators are driven into a condition of superficial adherence. They recognize and endorse communicative, experiential language teaching in principle, yet they persist in depending on conventional teacher-centred instruction in practice to address their institutional circumstances.

Class Size Barriers to Communicative Teaching

The qualitative and quantitative data indicate that overcrowded classrooms serve as a major obstacle hindering the establishment of modern language teaching. With 68% of the teachers surveyed recognizing large class sizes as a significant issue, and the evidence indicating that classrooms often accommodate 41 to more than 50 students, the logistical difficulty is clear. NEP 2020 clearly calls for a transition to Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), emphasizing the active engagement of students in practicing speaking and listening via collaborative activities and authentic communication. Nonetheless, attempting to conduct interactive speaking activities in a space filled with fifty teenagers poses significant logistical challenges. When a teacher tries to set up group discussions or cooperative role-playing tasks in a packed classroom, the physical area soon becomes hard to control. According to the teacher feedback, these interactive setups can quickly devolve into chaos and disruption if not consistently supervised, consuming valuable instructional time. Additionally, having a class size of fifty students prevents a teacher from providing personalized attention to students or effectively assessing speech quality during rotating activities. Under the strain of overseeing a packed room and a rigid timetable, educators instinctively fall back on conventional, lecture-



focused techniques. This mechanical setting undermines the communicative purpose of the policy. Rather than acquiring English organically for authentic interactions, students are reverted to a passive status, merely absorbing the teacher's explanations of grammar rules from the front.

Exam Pressures and Assessment Constraints

The second significant institutional obstacle is the intense "washback effect" produced by a stringent assessment system. This dynamic accounts for the significant statistical difference of -2.50 in the Continuous Formative Assessment index. Although educators largely agree theoretically that language assessment should focus on both fluency and accuracy, the prevailing school culture continues to be deeply rooted in conventional, high-stakes final written tests. This emphasis leads to a significant systemic conflict: the national policy instructs educators to employ interactive, process-centred teaching, yet the institutional culture continues to evaluate both teachers and students exclusively based on final written exam results. The qualitative responses emphasize how this exam pressure alters teaching priorities within the classroom. Since final board exams mainly assess written recall and reading comprehension, educators believe they need to align their daily lessons with those particular objectives. Interactive activities such as the Assessment of Speaking and Listening (ALS) or creative skits are frequently regarded as insignificant formalities or eliminated altogether since they hold minimal importance in the overall grading system. When school administrations and parents evaluate educational quality mainly based on final percentages, teachers cannot devote class time to engaging oral activities that won't be included in the final exam. This pressure establishes a constricting setting where educators are compelled to prioritize finishing the curriculum and administering exam-centric practices, which directly contradicts the experiential learning goals of NEP 2020.

The Teacher Training and Development Deficit

The information also reveals a significant weakness in the management of professional development in the education system. Although 58% of teachers are highly qualified post-graduates (possessing an M.A. in English or an M.Ed. degree), 58% also indicate a significant deficiency in access to effective, high-quality professional development. This indicates a distinct discrepancy in training. The workshops offered to teachers are often seen as shallow



administrative sessions that emphasize the philosophy of NEP 2020 instead of offering practical strategies for the classroom. Educators are consistently informed of their goals, yet they are seldom provided with guidance on how to accomplish them in a typical school setting that has limited resources. The absence of hands-on training makes educators feel unprepared to manage contemporary, varied classrooms. For example, educators express concern about effectively applying differentiated instruction for diverse ability groups or managing multilingualism constructively in a busy environment. Lacking specific training in creating effective rubrics, handling large-group discussions, or utilizing digital tools for language evaluation, educators typically revert to the conventional strategies they encountered in their own schooling. This cycle shows that top-down policy directives cannot alter real teaching practices unless they are backed by ongoing, relevant, and interactive teacher training. Informational lectures alone are insufficient to enable teachers to alter their everyday classroom practices.

Technology Gaps and Resource Constraints

Finally, the lack of consistent access to working digital tools and language labs acts as a major physical barrier to modern language teaching. While 44% of teachers identify this as a major challenge, the qualitative data reveals an even deeper issue: a clear disconnect between a school's public image and its actual classroom resources. Many urban CBSE schools feature smart boards in their classrooms, allowing them to appear modern and well-equipped. However, the specialized interactive tools required for active language development such as dedicated multimedia language labs or speech-recording software are frequently broken, unavailable, or missing entirely.

This digital deficit directly limits a teacher's ability to run effective listening and speaking tasks. Without reliable audio systems or interactive language software, conducting academic listening comprehension exercises or evaluating individual pronunciation becomes very difficult in a large class. Rather than serving as an active tool for student learning, technology use is often reduced to simply projecting static text onto a screen. This lack of proper infrastructure prevents teachers from breaking away from textbook-centered methods, forcing them to remain dependent on conventional pen-and-paper writing routines.



Broader Policy Context and Global Trends

The policy-practice gap observed among these fifty teachers in Vadodara is not an isolated local failure; rather, it reflects a widespread challenge documented in language education research across many developing nations. Studies examining large-scale ELT reforms in countries across Asia and Latin America consistently show that top-down educational directives regularly fail when they ignore grassroots classroom realities. When a state introduces a modern, communicative curriculum without reducing class sizes, updating exam systems, or providing practical teacher training, the reform inevitably stalls at the classroom door.

This study shows that the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) framework faces these exact same structural problems. Although urban CBSE schools are often seen as leaders in educational quality within India, their teachers are trapped by the exact same systemic limitations that affect the wider educational landscape. The grand educational vision of NEP 2020 cannot be realized by simply rewriting textbooks or updating policy documents. To bridge this divide, the school system must move away from top-down administrative demands and focus on providing bottom-up support. This means reducing class sizes, transforming final assessment patterns to reward communicative fluency, providing practical classroom workshops, and ensuring consistent access to working digital language tools. Until these core structural issues are directly addressed, progressive educational policies will remain ideal goals on paper rather than active practices in the classroom.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study demonstrates that macro-level educational policies like the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 cannot successfully transform language acquisition without resolving grassroots operational realities. The empirical data collected from fifty secondary school English language teachers across CBSE schools in Vadodara confirms that while teachers have achieved high conceptual and theoretical awareness of modern, communicative language delivery models, a severe policy-practice gap remains in actual classroom execution.

When analyzed through the lens of educational change theory, it is evident that teachers are not ideologically resistant to these progressive changes. Instead, they are functionally restricted by entrenched institutional barriers. The ambitious vision of building active, real-world



communicative competence is consistently undermined by overcrowded classrooms, a rigid evaluation framework that values summative written scores over interactive fluency, a lack of practical continuous professional development (CPD), and unreliable access to specialized digital infrastructure. Top-down educational mandates run the risk of becoming symbolic gestures unless they are supported by a deliberate, bottom-up restructuring of the school ecosystem.

Pedagogical and Policy Recommendations

To systematically bridge the policy-practice gap and support secondary school English teachers, the following actions are recommended:

- i. **Contextualized and Practical Teacher Training:** Continuous Professional Development (CPD) frameworks must move away from top-down lecture models that explain policy philosophy. Instead, they must offer hands-on, practical strategy workshops. Training should focus specifically on large-class management techniques, the design of active communicative tasks for forty-plus students, and practical rubrics for mixed-ability groups.
- ii. **Re-engineering Assessment Patterns:** School administrations and curriculum planners must structurally balance internal evaluation patterns to break the standard "washback effect." Substantial grading weight must be permanently assigned to oral communication, group debates, and portfolio-based formative assessments, rather than relying almost entirely on final, pen-and-paper written exams.
- iii. **Targeted Resource Allocation:** Schools must ensure consistent access to working digital language toolkits and interactive multi-media platforms. Technology should not be treated as a public-relations display; it must be treated as a core resource, giving teachers the physical means to run regular listening comprehension and oral activities.

Limitations and Future Directions

This study is limited by its sample size of fifty teachers within a single urban CBSE cluster using convenience sampling. Future research should expand this inquiry across diverse school boards (such as state and international boards) and include semi-urban or rural educational contexts. This broader scope will provide a more comprehensive view of national language policy implementation across the changing educational landscape.



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