

ACADEMIC PERCEPTIONS ON THE ROLE OF STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP IN NEP IMPLEMENTATION: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

Navinder Kaur Ruprai

Research Scholar

Department of Business Management & Commerce, Desh Bhagat University,
Mandi Gobindgarh, Punjab

Manpreet Kaur

Assistant Professor

Department of Business Management & Commerce, Desh Bhagat University,
Mandi Gobindgarh, Punjab

ABSTRACT

Strategic leadership has emerged as a pivotal determinant of the successful implementation of India's National Education Policy 2020 in K-12 school settings. While the policy articulates a transformative vision for Indian education, the academic understanding of how school leaders perceive, experience, and navigate this mandate remains empirically limited. This study adopted a qualitative approach- grounded in in-depth interviews and thematic analysis- to explore educators' perceptions of the role of strategic leadership in NEP implementation across K-12 schools in North India. Drawing on semi-structured interviews with school principals, academic coordinators, and experienced teachers, the study surfaces three interconnected themes: leadership as a catalyst for pedagogical transformation, distributed responsibility as a structural necessity for reform, and contextual constraints as persistent mediators of leadership effectiveness. The study further identified and maps existing research gaps in the literature on educational leadership and NEP implementation, including the absence of empirically validated India-specific leadership frameworks, limited scholarly attention to vocational education leadership, and the near-absence of research on AI-integrated leadership practices in school reform contexts. The findings contributed to both the theoretical literature on educational leadership and the practical discourse on building school leadership capacity for large-scale policy reform in India.

Keywords: [Strategic Leadership, NEP 2020, Qualitative Research, Thematic Analysis, K-12 Education, Educational Reform, Academic Perceptions]

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The National Education Policy 2020 represents the most comprehensive reimagining of India's educational framework in more than three decades. Encompassing the entire spectrum of formal education- from early childhood care and the foundational years of schooling through to higher education- it sets out an ambitious agenda: the replacement of a pedagogical culture built on content memorisation and high-stakes examinations with one centred on competency-based learning, critical inquiry, holistic student development, and institutional flexibility. The policy's ambitions are significant and have been broadly welcomed by the academic community. Yet, as scholars of educational reform have consistently demonstrated, the distance between a policy's vision and its realisation on the ground is rarely closed by the quality of the vision alone. It is left open to the quality of leadership that mediates the translation of policy into practice.

In this context, strategic leadership understood as the capacity of school administrators, principals, and academic leaders to align institutional direction with broader reform mandates, build organisational capacity for sustained change, and foster a professional culture in which innovation is valued and supported has come to occupy a central position in the academic debate about NEP implementation. Scholars in educational administration and policy studies increasingly agree that the success of NEP 2020 will depend not so much on the sophistication of its design as on the strength and depth of leadership capacity developed across all levels of India's school education system.

This paper contributes to the discourse by examining a specific and relatively underexplored dimension. Instead of evaluating leadership outcomes through quantitative metrics, it aims to explore how educator who are both the drivers and recipients of NEP reforms perceive the role of strategic leadership in the implementation process. In doing so, it also undertakes a systematic examination of the existing research landscape to identify where the scholarly conversation has progressed, and where it has yet to begin. The study is conducted within the K-12 schooling sector in North India, a context that combines the scale and diversity needed for nationally relevant findings with the institutional specificity that makes qualitative inquiry meaningful.

1.1 Background and Context

North India's K-12 school sector presents a uniquely demanding environment for NEP implementation. Spanning states including Punjab, Haryana, Delhi NCR, and Uttar Pradesh, it encompasses government-aided schools serving rural and semi-urban populations with limited infrastructure alongside well-resourced private schools in urban centres. Teacher preparation for NEP's pedagogical demands is uneven across this landscape, community expectations about schooling remain shaped by examination-oriented traditions, and the professional development infrastructure for school leaders has historically been underdeveloped and compliance-focused rather than strategic and developmental. It is within this complex setting that the perceptions explored in this study are formed and expressed.

1.2 Purpose and Scope of the Study

This study had two primary purposes. First, it explored educators' perceptions and lived experiences of strategic leadership in the context of NEP 2020 implementation, seeking to understand the meanings that school-based professionals attach to leadership in a period of significant institutional change. Second, it mapped the existing research gaps in the literature on educational leadership and NEP implementation, with the aim of identifying the directions in which future scholarly inquiry is most urgently needed. The study adopted a deliberately qualitative approach, grounded in the understanding that perceptions, meanings, and lived experiences cannot be fully captured through numerical measures and instead require interpretive methods that retain the voices and contextual realities of the participants.

2. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To explore educators' perceptions and experiences of strategic leadership in the implementation of NEP 2020 across K-12 schools in North India.
2. To identify and map existing research gaps in the literature on the role of strategic leadership in educational policy reform, with specific reference to NEP 2020.

3. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

3.1 Strategic Leadership and Educational Reform

The relationship between leadership and school improvement has been one of the most extensively studied areas in educational research over the past three decades. The weight of evidence points consistently toward the same conclusion: the quality of institutional leadership is the single most powerful within-school factor influencing educational outcomes, second only to the quality of classroom teaching itself. This conclusion, originally derived from studies conducted in Western school systems, has found increasing support in research conducted across diverse international contexts, including developing nations where reform implementation challenges are compounded by resource scarcity and institutional fragility.

Within the broader literature on educational leadership, the concept of strategic leadership — which emphasises the leader's capacity to position an institution within its external environment, build adaptive internal capability, and sustain a directional commitment to long-term goals through periods of uncertainty — has gained prominence as the most relevant framework for understanding leadership in reform-driven contexts. Unlike purely instructional or transformational framings, strategic leadership encompasses both the inward-facing work of building institutional capacity and the outward-facing work of managing relationships with policy makers, communities, and regulatory bodies- a dual orientation that is particularly relevant for school heads navigating the complex demands of NEP implementation.

3.2 Academic Perceptions of Leadership in NEP Implementation

3.2.1 Leadership as the Foundation of NEP Reform

A dominant and recurring theme in academic writing on NEP implementation is the view that strategic leadership is not simply a supportive condition for reform but its foundational enabling condition. Scholars working in educational administration in India have argued that the policy's sweeping ambitions- the shift to competency-based learning, the integration of vocational education, the promotion of mother-tongue instruction, the mainstreaming of foundational literacy- each require a specific kind of leadership response: one that can simultaneously communicate a compelling vision of what change is for, build teacher confidence in new pedagogical approaches, and create the structural conditions under which experimentation and professional growth can occur.

Academicians have been particularly attentive to the distinction between leadership as positional authority and leadership as distributed organisational practice. The former, concentrated in the hands of the principal or head teacher is widely seen in the literature as insufficient for the scale of change that NEP demands. The latter, spread across department heads, curriculum coordinators, senior teachers, and community liaisons is increasingly presented as the structural prerequisite for whole-school reform. This perspective reflects a broader shift in the educational leadership literature from heroic, individual-centred models to relational, community-embedded models that are better suited to the complexity of large-scale policy implementation.

3.2.2 Leadership Orientations Most Associated with NEP Effectiveness

Academic scholarship on the specific leadership orientations most strongly associated with NEP implementation effectiveness converges around three interconnected approaches. Transformational leadership characterised by the articulation of a shared institutional vision aligned with NEP's goals, the cultivation of teacher motivation and professional identity, and the creation of a school culture in which change is embraced rather than resisted is

consistently identified in the literature as the most potent driver of pedagogical reform. Researchers note that principals who demonstrate genuine familiarity with NEP's philosophical commitments, and who can speak about them with personal conviction rather than bureaucratic compliance, are significantly more effective at building teacher buy-in than those whose engagement with the policy remains primarily administrative.

Instructional leadership defined as the principal's active, knowledgeable engagement with the curriculum and with classroom practice is identified as the mechanism through which NEP's pedagogical aspirations reach individual students. Scholars in this area emphasise that the effectiveness of instructional leadership depends critically on the principal's willingness to remain close to the instructional core of the school: observing lessons, using learning data to shape professional development decisions, and providing teachers with specific, actionable feedback grounded in an understanding of NEP's competency-based model. Collaborative leadership enacted through the intentional development of Professional Learning Communities within schools, where teachers engage in shared learning, collective reflection, and exercise professional agency in problem-solving is conceptualized as the key structural mechanism for building and sustaining collective institutional capacity over time.

3.2.3 Contextual Constraints as Mediators of Leadership Effectiveness

Academic opinion is equally attentive to the structural and contextual factors that constrain leadership effectiveness in the Indian school system. Researchers examining NEP implementation across varied institutional settings in India have consistently highlighted a mismatch between the policy's uniform national ambitions and the deeply unequal conditions in which different schools are expected to deliver on those ambitions. Resource scarcity, high teacher attrition, limited digital infrastructure, bureaucratic constraints on principal autonomy, and the ongoing influence of examination-oriented community expectations are among the factors most frequently cited in the literature as limiting the effectiveness of even well-intentioned and capable school leaders.

A further concern that recurs in the academic literature is the professional development deficit among school principals in India. Many school heads were trained in an era when leadership was understood primarily in administrative terms as the management of schedules, resources, and compliance requirements rather than in the strategic, pedagogical, and relational terms that NEP implementation now demands. Scholars have argued, with increasing urgency, that closing this deficit requires not incremental adjustments to existing training programmes but a fundamental redesign of how school leaders in India are prepared, supported, and developed throughout their careers.

3.3 Theoretical Frameworks Informing the Study

This study draws on three established theoretical frameworks that together provide the conceptual architecture for interpreting the qualitative data.

Transformational Leadership Theory (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000): Holds that effective school leaders motivate through shared meaning and vision, making reform feel personally valuable rather than externally imposed.

Distributed Leadership Theory (Harris, 2008): Argues that leadership effectiveness in complex reform contexts depends on the distribution of leadership functions across multiple institutional actors rather than their concentration at the top of the hierarchy.

Fullan's Change Management Framework (2001): Presents educational reform as a deeply human and non-linear process, emphasising the leader's role in building relational trust, developing individual and collective capacity, and sustaining reform momentum over time.

4. EXISTING RESEARCH GAPS

A systematic examination of the existing literature on educational leadership and NEP 2020 implementation reveals several significant and consequential gaps that this study begins to address and that future research must prioritise.

4.1 Absence of Empirically Validated, India-Specific Leadership Frameworks

The most foundational gap in the existing literature is the absence of a leadership framework that has been both specifically designed for and empirically validated within the Indian K-12 school context. The frameworks most commonly cited in the Indian educational leadership literature—transformational leadership, distributed leadership, instructional leadership—were developed primarily through research conducted in Western school systems, most often in the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, and Australia. While these frameworks offer valuable conceptual resources, their application to the Indian school context raises unresolved questions about cultural fit, institutional relevance, and contextual validity. The Indian school system operates within a distinctive set of institutional, cultural, and political conditions including highly centralised regulatory structures, significant resource heterogeneity between states and between school types, deep-rooted community expectations shaped by examination culture, and a professional identity among teachers that has been historically shaped by compliance rather than autonomy. A leadership framework that does not account for these conditions cannot serve as a reliable guide for either researchers or practitioners. The development of such a framework grounded in Indian data, tested across diverse institutional contexts, and validated through rigorous empirical methods represents one of the most urgent needs in the current literature.

4.2 Limited Large-Scale Empirical Research on NEP Implementation

Despite the significance of NEP 2020 as a policy event, the volume of large-scale, empirically grounded research on its implementation at the school level remains amazingly limited. The majority of published work on NEP takes the form of policy analysis, normative commentary, or theoretical discussion forms of scholarship that are valuable but that cannot substitute for systematic empirical evidence about what is actually happening in schools, classrooms, and leadership offices across the country. Quantitative studies that measure the relationship between specific leadership practices and NEP implementation outcomes are rare; qualitative studies that explore the lived experiences of school leaders navigating reform are rarer still. This evidential vacuum means that policymakers, school improvement practitioners, and principal training institutions are currently making consequential decisions about NEP implementation without the empirical foundation that responsible decision-making requires.

4.3 Neglect of Vocational Education and Kaushal Bodh Leadership

NEP 2020's mandate for the mainstreaming of vocational education from the middle school stage onward operationalised in part through the Kaushal Bodh programme represents a significant departure from the historical marginalisation of skill-based learning within India's formal education system. Yet the leadership challenges associated with this mandate have received almost no scholarly attention. How are school principals managing the integration of vocational learning into already crowded timetables? What strategies are most effective for building productive partnerships with industry mentors and vocational training providers? How are leaders shifting the attitudes of teachers and parents who continue to regard skill-based education as a lesser alternative to academic learning? These questions are urgent and practically consequential, but the literature currently offers very limited answers.

4.4 AI, Computational Thinking, and Leadership — An Unexplored Intersection

NEP 2020's emphasis on computational thinking as a foundational skill and its vision of a technology-enriched learning environment signal a significant new dimension of educational leadership that the existing literature has barely begun to explore. As artificial intelligence increasingly reshapes both the tools available to educators and the skills that students will need in the labour market of the future, school leaders face new and complex demands: integrating AI-assisted learning platforms into pedagogical planning, supporting teachers whose digital competence is uneven, managing the ethical dimensions of student data use, and ensuring that the benefits of digital education reach students in schools that lack basic connectivity. Research on how school leaders in India are navigating this landscape and what leadership capacities are most relevant to it is almost entirely absent from the current literature.

4.5 Gender and Leadership in NEP Implementation

Female school principals constitute a significant proportion of the educational leadership workforce in India, yet the specific leadership challenges and strategies of women leaders in the context of NEP reform have received minimal research attention. The intersection of gender with institutional authority, community expectations, and professional development access in the Indian school context creates a distinctive set of leadership experiences that are not captured by gender-neutral frameworks. Research that specifically examines the leadership experiences of female principals and that considers how gender shapes both the challenges they face and the strategies they develop would be a valuable and currently absent contribution to the literature.

4.6 Student and Parent Voices in the Leadership Narrative

A consistent limitation of the existing literature on educational leadership and NEP implementation is its near-exclusive focus on the perspectives of educators comprising of principals, teachers, and administrators. The students and parents who are the ultimate beneficiaries of NEP reforms are largely absent from the scholarly conversation. Research that specifically captures student perceptions of how their learning experience is changing under NEP and parental assessments of the policy's impact on their children's development would provide a more complete and democratically grounded picture of the reform's progress and its relationship to school leadership quality.

4.7 Longitudinal Evidence on Leadership and Reform Sustainability

Since NEP 2020 is still in the early years of implementation, the existing literature is necessarily cross-sectional in its orientation. There is currently no longitudinal evidence on whether the leadership practices associated with early NEP implementation gains are also associated with the sustained, durable improvements in educational quality that the policy's long-term vision requires. Longitudinal studies that track the same schools and their leaders over five to ten years would be invaluable in establishing whether specific leadership orientations, transformational, distributed, instructional, produce improvement trajectories that hold over time or whether early gains are fragile and context-dependent.

Summary of Research Gaps

#	Research Gap	Current Status in Literature	Priority Level
1	India-specific validated leadership framework for	Absent- Western models applied without validation	Critical

#	Research Gap	Current Status in Literature	Priority Level
	NEP		
2	Large-scale empirical data on NEP school-level implementation	Very limited- mostly policy commentary	High
3	Vocational education & Kaushal Bodh leadership	Negligible- almost no published work	High
4	AI integration and computational thinking in school leadership	Emerging- very few India-specific studies	High
5	Gender and leadership effectiveness in NEP reform	Minimal- no focused studies in Indian context	Moderate
6	Student and parent perspectives on leadership and reform	Absent- entirely educator-centric literature	Moderate
7	Longitudinal evidence on leadership and reform sustainability	Absent- only cross-sectional studies exist	High

5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

5.1 Research Paradigm and Approach

This study is located within an interpretivist research paradigm, which holds that social reality is not objectively given but is constructed through the meanings, interpretations, and lived experiences of the individuals who inhabit it. This epistemological position is particularly appropriate for a study whose central interest is in how educators perceive and make sense of strategic leadership in the context of NEP reform- a question that cannot be adequately addressed through numerical measurement alone. The study adopts a qualitative research approach, drawing on in-depth semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis as its primary methodological tools.

5.2 Research Design

A qualitative case-based design is employed, centred on in-depth semi-structured interviews with purposively selected educational professionals across K-12 schools in North India. This design is appropriate for the study's objectives because it allows the researcher to capture the depth, complexity, and contextual specificity of participants' perceptions and experiences preserving the nuance and ambiguity that quantitative instruments necessarily suppress. The case-based orientation further ensures that the perceptions gathered are grounded in specific institutional contexts, making the findings practically relevant as well as theoretically meaningful.

5.3 Participants and Sampling

Purposive sampling was employed to select participants who have direct, substantive, and reflective experience of strategic leadership and NEP implementation. The sample comprised approximately 150 educational professionals across four states- Punjab, Haryana, Delhi NCR, and Uttar Pradesh including school principals, academic coordinators, senior subject teachers,

and educational administrators. Participants were drawn from a range of institutional types (government-aided and privately managed) and locations (urban, semi-urban, and rural), ensuring the diversity needed for theoretically rich and contextually grounded findings. Sampling continues until theoretical saturation point at which additional interviews no longer generate new themes or conceptual insights is achieved.

5.4 Data Collection: In-Depth Interviews

Data was collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews of approximately 45 to 60 minutes in duration. The interview guide was designed to elicit participants' reflective accounts of their experiences with strategic leadership and NEP implementation, covering the following thematic domains:

- Perceptions of what strategic leadership means in the context of NEP reform
- Specific leadership practices that participants associate with effective NEP implementation
- Challenges and barriers encountered in exercising strategic leadership for reform
- The role of professional development in building strategic leadership capacity
- Perceptions of how leadership interacts with institutional culture, community expectations, and resource availability

Interviews were conducted in person according to participant preference and availability, and were audio-recorded with informed consent. Verbatim transcription is completed for all interviews prior to analysis.

5.5 Data Analysis: Thematic Analysis

Qualitative data is analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework for thematic analysis — a rigorous and widely validated approach for identifying, organising, and interpreting patterns of meaning within qualitative data. The six phases are applied as follows:

Phase 1- Data Familiarisation: Repeated reading of all transcripts to develop an initial holistic sense of the data and to begin noting preliminary observations.

Phase 2- Initial Coding: Systematic line-by-line coding of all transcripts to identify semantic units of meaning relevant to the study's research questions.

Phase 3- Theme Generation: Grouping of initial codes into potential themes that capture broader patterns of meaning across the dataset.

Phase 4- Theme Review: Critical evaluation of generated themes against the full dataset to assess coherence, distinctiveness, and analytical significance.

Phase 5- Theme Definition: Precise articulation of each theme's core meaning, its relationship to other themes, and its contribution to the study's overall analytical narrative.

Phase 6- Write-Up: Integration of themes into a coherent analytical account that addresses the study's research objectives and engages with the theoretical literature.

5.6 Rigour and Trustworthiness

The credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the qualitative findings are ensured through four complementary strategies. Member checking and sharing preliminary findings with a subset of participants to validate interpretive accuracy ensured credibility. Rich, contextually detailed description of the research setting and participant

characteristics supports transferability. An audit trail documenting all analytical decisions ensures dependability. Reflexive engagement with the researcher's own positionality and its potential influence on data interpretation ensures confirmability.

5.7 Ethical Considerations

Ethical clearance was obtained from the institutional review board prior to data collection. All participants provide written informed consent and are informed of their right to withdraw at any point without consequence. Participant identities were protected through the use of coded pseudonyms in all data reporting. Audio recordings and transcripts were stored securely and accessed only by the research team.

6. PRELIMINARY THEMATIC FINDINGS

While the full analytical findings of this study will be reported upon completion of data collection and analysis, the preliminary thematic structure emerging from initial interviews suggests three overarching themes that are likely to organise the final analysis.

Theme 1: Leadership as Catalyst for Pedagogical Transformation

Participants consistently identify the school principal's personal engagement with NEP's pedagogical philosophy rather than mere administrative compliance with its directives as the critical differentiator between schools where genuine pedagogical change is occurring and those where reform remains superficial. Educators in schools led by principals who actively champion NEP's vision of competency-based, student-centred learning report higher levels of professional motivation, greater willingness to experiment with new teaching approaches, and a stronger sense of shared institutional purpose.

"When our principal started talking about NEP not as a government order but as something she genuinely believed in, something shifted in the staffroom. We stopped asking 'what do we have to do?' and started asking 'what can we try?'- that is a completely different energy."

Theme 2: Distributed Responsibility as Structural Necessity

A recurring finding across the interview data is that educators in schools where NEP implementation is progressing well report a pattern of shared leadership in which responsibility for different dimensions of reform is distributed across multiple individuals- department heads managing curriculum transition, senior teachers mentoring their colleagues in new pedagogical approaches, and parent liaison officers managing community communication. Educators in schools where implementation is struggling more often describe a top-down model in which the principal bears the full burden of reform management, with little ownership felt at other levels of the institution.

"One person cannot carry NEP. Our principal understood this early. She gave each of us ownership of something- assessment reform, parent outreach, teacher training. Now it feels like our NEP, not just the principal's."

Theme 3: Contextual Constraints as Persistent Mediators

Across all participant groups and institutional types, the interview data reveals a complex and often frustrating tension between the strategic intentions of school leaders and the structural conditions within which those intentions must be enacted. Resource limitations, bureaucratic constraints on principal autonomy, uneven digital infrastructure, and community resistance to NEP's departure from examination-focused norms are consistently identified as mediating

variables that shape — and frequently limit — the effectiveness of even the most capable and committed school leaders.

"I understand what NEP wants. I believe in what NEP wants. But when I have forty children to a classroom, three teachers on long leave, and parents demanding we go back to rote learning because the board exam is coming, the gap between the policy and my reality can feel very wide."

7. DISCUSSIONS

The preliminary thematic findings of this study resonate closely with and extend the existing theoretical literature on educational leadership and reform. The identification of principal conviction and personal engagement with NEP's philosophy as the primary driver of genuine pedagogical change aligns with and empirically supports the core claims of Transformational Leadership Theory as articulated by Leithwood and Jantzi (2000). The finding that distributed leadership structures are associated with stronger implementation trajectories provides India-based empirical grounding for Harris's (2008) theoretical arguments about the organisational benefits of shared leadership in complex reform contexts. The consistent identification of contextual constraints particularly resource scarcity and bureaucratic limitation as mediators of leadership effectiveness echoes and extends Fullan's (2001) account of the non-linear, context-dependent nature of educational change.

What this study adds to these established theoretical positions is a situated, contextually specific account of how they play out in the distinctive institutional landscape of North Indian K-12 schooling. The gap between the policy's aspirations and the ground-level realities described by participants is not simply a matter of implementation failure; it reflects the systemic under-investment in school leadership capacity that has characterised the Indian educational system for decades, and that NEP 2020 itself acknowledges without yet adequately addressing. The study's contribution lies in making this gap visible, specific, and empirically documented, providing a foundation for the policy and practical interventions that could begin to close it.

The research gaps identified enrich this discussion by locating the study's findings within a broader landscape of scholarly need. The absence of a validated India-specific leadership framework, the limited large-scale empirical data on NEP implementation, and the near-complete neglect of vocational education leadership, AI-integrated pedagogy, and gender dynamics in the existing literature collectively suggest that the scholarly understanding of educational leadership in India is still in its formative stages. This study contributes to that formation while pointing toward the much larger body of research that remains to be done.

8. CONCLUSIONS

This study set out to explore how educators in K-12 schools across North India perceive the role of strategic leadership in NEP 2020 implementation, and to identify the existing gaps in scholarly understanding of this relationship. Its preliminary findings suggest that strategic leadership expressed as principal conviction, distributed institutional responsibility, and sustained professional engagement with NEP's pedagogical vision is indeed the central enabling condition for meaningful reform at the school level. At the same time, the study surfaces the structural constraints that limit leadership effectiveness and that the policy has not yet adequately addressed, including resource inequality, bureaucratic rigidity, and the professional development deficit among school heads.

The research gaps identified in this study are significant and numerous. The absence of empirically validated India-specific leadership frameworks, the limited large-scale evidence

on NEP school-level implementation, the neglect of vocational education and Kaushal Bodh leadership, the unexplored intersection of AI and school leadership, and the absence of longitudinal evidence on reform sustainability each represent an important direction for future inquiry. Together, they suggest that the scholarly conversation about educational leadership and NEP reform is, despite its urgency, still very much in its early chapters.

It is hoped that this study contributes meaningfully to that conversation not only by adding to the empirical record but by demonstrating the particular value of qualitative methods for capturing the human dimensions of educational reform: the convictions, the frustrations, the inventiveness, and the resilience of the educators who are working, day by day, to make NEP 2020 a reality in India's schools.

REFERENCES

1. Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology, *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101.
2. Bush, T., & Middlewood, D. (2013). *Leading and managing people in education (3rd ed.)*, SAGE Publications.
3. Fullan, M. (2001). Leading in a culture of change. *Journal of Educational Change*, 2(3), 195–212.
4. Government of India, Ministry of Education. (2020), *National Education Policy 2020*. <https://www.education.gov.in/nep/about-nep>
5. Frantz, J., Marais, J. E., & Du Plessis, M. (2022). Exploring the views of academics on an academic leadership programme in higher education, *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 36(1), 136–153. <https://doi.org/10.20853/36-1-4327>
6. Harris, A. (2008). Distributed leadership: According to the evidence, *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 36(1), 11–39.
7. Leithwood, K., & Jantzi, D. (2000). The effects of transformational leadership on organizational conditions and student engagement with school, *Journal of Educational Administration*, 38(2), 112–129.
8. Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*, SAGE Publications.
9. Ministry of Education (2020). *National Education Policy 2020*, Government of India.
10. Murphy, J. (2013). Reculturing schools as professional learning communities, *International Journal of Educational Management*, 27(6), 653–667.
11. NIEPA. (2022). *School education in India: Flash statistics 2021-22*, National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration.
12. Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods (4th ed.)*, SAGE Publications.
13. Singh, K. (2022). NEP-2020: Rejuvenating Quality of Indian Education System, *International Journal of Innovative Science and Research Technology*, 7(11).
14. Spillane, J. P., & Hopkins, M. (2012). Organizing for instruction in educational systems: A managerial perspective on the state of the field, *Educational Policy*, 26(5), 651–681.

15. Tiwari, M. (2024). Reimagining Teacher Education in India: Evaluating NEP 2020's Impact and Implementation Challenges, *International Journal of Education Sciences (IJES)*, 2(1), 9–13.
16. UNESCO. (2021). *Reimagining our futures together: A new social contract for education*, UNESCO Publishing.