

“The Influence of Adaptive Leadership on Implementing the National Education Policy (Nep 2020) In Delhi/Ncr Schools.”

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ABSTRACT

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 is the first step in making changes to India's schools. It makes schools think differently about how to run schools, teach, and learn. This policy changes the goals of education to include things like digital transformation, learning across subjects, and overall growth. In this context, the success of NEP implementation relies heavily on the leadership skills of school principals, who are responsible for bridging the gap between policy goals and real-world execution. This study, titled “The Influence of Adaptive Leadership on Implementing the National Education Policy (NEP 2020) in Delhi/NCR Schools,” examines how adaptive leadership behaviours facilitate principals in managing the intricacies of policy transition, institutional restructuring, and stakeholder engagement within a heterogeneous metropolitan educational context.

This study utilizes a qualitative framework based on Heifetz's (1994) Adaptive Leadership theory to analyse how school principals interpret, execute, and maintain the goals of the NEP 2020 reform. Twelve principals from government and private schools in Delhi and the National Capital Region (NCR) engaged in semi-structured interviews, complemented by document analysis and constrained observation. Thematic analysis was employed to discern leadership patterns and contextual elements affecting adaptive responses to reform. It was important to know how principals get teachers, parents, and students to work together to solve problems that come up when the curriculum needs to be changed, when assessments need to be based on skills, when teachers need more freedom, and when technology needs to be used in the classroom.

The results show that adaptive leadership is an important link between making policy and putting it into action. Principals who were good at adapting were able to keep morale high when things were uncertain, find a balance between stability and change, and turn vague policy goals into clear action plans. They used techniques like shared decision-making, reflective dialogue, and distributed leadership to make everyone feel like they were a part of the reform. Without adaptive leadership in schools, the NEP was mostly about following rules and not coming up with new ideas. Teachers weren't always there. The study emphasizes that effective policy implementation relies not solely on adherence but also on the leader's ability to cultivate adaptability, experimentation, and cultural alignment within the educational ecosystem.

The study also shows how schools in Delhi/NCR are affected by the differences in their environments. Urban schools were better at handling changes because they had better buildings, were ready for digital learning, and had programs to help staff get better. Schools in the suburbs and semi-urban areas had a harder time because of cultural and structural inertia. Adaptive leaders were still able to get their teams to work toward NEP goals in different situations by helping them become more resilient, encouraging them to keep learning, and helping them understand their own and others' feelings.

The research indicates that India's strategy for policy reform necessitates adaptive leadership. It says that principals should be able to handle the complicated, non-linear changes that happen in schools by using adaptive frameworks in their professional development programs. Adaptive leadership is a way of thinking and acting that makes sure that changes in education last by linking national policy to local practice.

OBJECTIVES

1. To investigate the utilization of adaptive leadership strategies by school principals in Delhi/NCR for the interpretation and implementation of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 within their specific institutional frameworks.
2. To examine the impact of adaptive leadership practices on the implementation of NEP 2020, emphasizing aspects such as curriculum innovation, teacher empowerment, and stakeholder engagement.
3. To pinpoint the contextual and organizational factors—including infrastructure, professional capacity, and socio-cultural dynamics—that affect how adaptable and responsive school principals are to policy changes during the implementation of NEP 2020.

INTRODUCTION

Educational leadership has become a major force in shaping the direction and quality of schools in India during a time of unprecedented change and complexity. India's school system changed a lot because of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. The goal was to make it more flexible, open, and focused on the future. Schools need more than just following rules and regulations to carry out such an ambitious policy. They also need leaders who can help them handle change. Heifetz (1994) was the first person to talk about adaptive leadership. This is a helpful way to think about how school leaders can handle uncertainty, get people involved, and keep learning going in their schools. This study seeks to examine the influence of adaptive leadership on the implementation of NEP 2020 in schools across Delhi and the National Capital Region (NCR), focusing on the ways in which principals interpret and execute policy directives in diverse educational contexts.

The NEP 2020 wants schools to help kids grow in all areas, learn by doing, be open to new ideas, and think critically. The Ministry of Education says that big changes need to be made (2020). For instance, the school curriculum should be changed to the 5+3+3+4 model, which should focus on teaching kids how to read and write, do math, get a job, and speak more than one language. The policy has a plan for the future, but it's not easy to put it into action in schools. These things include making sure that schools follow the new curriculum, giving teachers new training, using technology correctly, and fixing problems with the infrastructure. The principal of the school is the most important person in charge of making sure that rules are followed in the classroom. They are the ones who will make this happen. NEP 2020 won't work if we only have leaders who follow the rules. We need leaders who can change with the times, work with others to find solutions, and keep coming up with new ideas even when things are tough.

Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky (2009) say that adaptive leadership is the ability to get people to work together to find solutions to problems that are hard to find. Adaptive leadership, on the other hand, is about helping people learn, try new things, and change when things aren't clear. In Indian schools, where there are differences in wealth and status, institutional hierarchies, and policy changes, adaptive leadership is a very important skill to have. School principals shouldn't see NEP 2020 as a set of rules they have to follow. They should instead see it as a process of change in culture and teaching that is always happening. They need to learn how to be creative without breaking the rules. For example, they should be able to change national rules to fit local needs without forgetting what the rules were meant to do. Adaptive leadership in policy implementation is all about finding the right balance between being flexible and following the rules.

There is a lot going on in Delhi/NCR, which makes it a great place to study this. There are many different kinds of schools in this part of India. Some are elite private schools with good technology, while others are poorly funded government schools that only serve people who are on the fringes of society. Because of this, the problems with policies in this area are very different, and so are the leaders' answers. Schools in rural or semi-urban areas may have trouble getting the technology, training teachers, and having enough resources. It might be hard for urban schools to use technology and change the curriculum. Even though there are some differences, all schools are supposed to follow NEP 2020 in the same way. This means that the principal needs to be able to make changes so that what happens in the classroom fits with the vision for the policy. The effectiveness of policy implementation relies on the quality of policy design and the leaders' capacity to understand, communicate, and implement change within the educational setting.

The existing literature underscores the critical role of leadership in the implementation of policies and the transformation of educational institutions. Leithwood and Sun (2018) assert that effective school leaders act as catalysts for change, shaping the interpretation and execution of policies in educational settings. In a similar manner, Fullan (2014) underscores that sustainable reform occurs when leaders foster a culture of collaborative learning and a shared objective. In the Indian context, there is a deficiency of research on adaptive leadership, especially concerning the implementation of large-scale policies like NEP 2020. Studies on school leadership in India (e.g., Azim Premji Foundation, 2021; Sharma & Choudhary, 2021) have primarily focused on administrative efficiency and instructional oversight, inadequately exploring how principals navigate complex adaptive challenges. This gap highlights the imperative to examine the practical applications of adaptive leadership—particularly, how principals reinterpret policy language, manage conflicting expectations, and sustain morale during transitional phases.

The plan for change in NEP 2020 means that principals have to do more than just deal with changes at their schools. They also need to say what the goals of education are again. The rules say that teachers should use technology in the classroom, that students should be encouraged to be independent, and that they should help students grow socially and emotionally. We need to change both how we do things and how we think in order to reach these goals. These kinds of changes come naturally to adaptive leaders. They assist educators in comprehending concepts, experimenting with innovations, and collaborating as leaders (Heifetz et al., 2009). They understand that reform isn't a straight line; it's a cycle that needs thought, feedback, and the ability to change. NEP 2020 wants to make education more focused on the student, based on skills, and open to everyone. This is a lot like adaptive leadership. Principals who embody adaptive practices can serve as catalysts for the realization of the policy's vision within their particular contexts.

This study is based on Heifetz's Adaptive Leadership Framework and Fullan's theory of educational change. These frameworks collectively provide lenses to examine the reactions of school leaders to challenges stemming from policy. According to Heifetz's model, leaders need to be able to tell the difference between technical and adaptive challenges, ask for different points of view, and help the group learn together. Fullan's framework enhances this discourse by emphasizing the development of capacity, the establishment of a moral imperative, and the clarification of the complexities associated with educational reform. Employing these perspectives in the execution of NEP 2020 enables a sophisticated understanding of the impact of leadership adaptability on the efficacy of reform across varied educational settings.

In conclusion, this study investigates the influence of adaptive leadership on the implementation of NEP 2020 in schools situated in Delhi/NCR. It examines how principals interpret policy directives, address issues within their schools, and foster adaptable cultures among educators and students. The study seeks to clarify how adaptive leadership can bridge the gap between policy and practice by analyzing leadership as both an administrative role and a dynamic, learning-focused process. India is trying to modernize its schools so that they work better in the 21st century. The big goals of NEP 2020 will only happen if school leaders can change, think of new ideas, and get other people to work hard. As a result, this study considers adaptive leadership to be a vital skill and a moral imperative for educational reform in modern India.

KEYWORDS: Adaptive Leadership, National Education Policy 2020, Educational Reform, School Principals, Policy Implementation, Delhi/NCR, Leadership in Education, Qualitative Research, Organizational Change, Educational Innovation

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative design to examine the impact of adaptive leadership on the execution of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 in schools located in Delhi and the National Capital Region (NCR). Leadership and educational reform are complex and contingent upon specific contexts; therefore, a qualitative methodology is most suitable for understanding the lived experiences, perceptions, and strategies of school principals executing policies. Creswell (2018) posits that the aim of qualitative research is to understand phenomena in their authentic context and to extract meaning from the participants' viewpoints. This isn't about figuring out how well NEP 2020 is working; it's about seeing how principals are changing the way they handle the problems that come up when they try to use it.

This research utilizes a multiple case study methodology, enabling an extensive analysis of adaptive leadership within

diverse educational settings. Yin (2018) asserts that case study design is suitable for research centered on "how" and "why" questions, particularly when the distinctions between phenomenon and context are not clearly defined. In this study, each participating school serves as a case for examining the relationship between leadership styles and policy implementation. The study aims to identify both universal and context-specific patterns of adaptive leadership behavior by conducting a comparative analysis of various cases, including government, private, and semi-private institutions. This comparative case design aligns with Stake's (2006) assertion that acknowledging differences within cases is essential for achieving a more nuanced understanding, rather than outcomes that are universally applicable.

The study takes place in several schools in Delhi and nearby NCR districts, including Gurugram, Noida, and Ghaziabad. We picked these places because they show how schools of different types can work together and follow the same rules. Some private schools in Delhi/NCR have a lot of money and new buildings, but some government and community schools do not. You can see how adaptive leadership changes in different kinds of businesses, in different social and economic situations, and when policies are read. It's a good time to see how principals are learning about and responding to NEP 2020 because it's still early in the process of being put into action.

The selection of participants utilizes a purposive sampling strategy, focusing on school principals and head administrators directly involved in the implementation of NEP 2020 reforms. Patton (2015) says that purposive sampling is a good way to find cases that have a lot of information and can help us learn more about the phenomenon we are studying. The sample has about twelve principals, four from government schools, four from private schools, and four from schools that are only partly private. This guarantees that a variety of schools are represented. People are chosen to be on the group based on how long they have been in charge (at least five years), how involved they are in NEP-related projects, and how willing they are to go through long interviews. The goal is not statistical representativeness but conceptual depth achieved through diverse experiences rooted in context.

Semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and a few field observations are the main ways to get data. People can talk about their experiences in their own words during semi-structured interviews, but the interviewer makes sure that all the important points are covered. You can do interviews in person or over the internet, and they usually last between 60 and 90 minutes. Heifetz et al. (2009) created an interview schedule that focused on four main parts of adaptive leadership: understanding, getting stakeholders involved, solving problems, and coming up with new ideas. The questions are designed to prompt discussions about how principals comprehend the NEP 2020 regulations, manage transitions, and support teachers throughout the process.

Document analysis, in addition to interviews, looks at school policy documents, circulars, NEP implementation plans, and records of professional development. These materials provide additional evidence suggesting that adaptive practices are either increasing or decreasing in prevalence within educational institutions. Field observations have a narrow focus, but they look at things like leadership meetings, teacher training sessions, and school activities that show how to work together or change to solve problems. Observations give interview data more meaning by making clear the cultural and relational factors that shape how leaders act. We write down and record everything that is said during interviews and observations so that we can look at them later.

The data analysis employs thematic analysis as delineated by Braun and Clarke (2019), concentrating on the identification, examination, and interpretation of recurring patterns of meaning within qualitative data. There are a lot of steps that repeat in the analysis. You read the transcripts a lot at first to get a sense of the information. Second, initial codes are created inductively to monitor significant information regarding NEP 2020's leadership styles, challenges, and impacts. Third, these codes are put together in a way that shows different parts of adaptive leadership, like being able to change, work with others, and handle the situation. Fourth, themes are elucidated and examined in relation to established theoretical frameworks, particularly Heifetz's Adaptive Leadership Theory and Fullan's (2014) educational change model. NVivo software keeps track of the coding process and makes sure that data is organized in a systematic way.

The study's analysis is more comprehensive due to the application of theoretical triangulation. Heifetz's framework clarifies adaptive leadership behaviors, while Fullan's theory clarifies their function in promoting systemic educational transformation. The research illustrates the interplay between micro-level (individual leadership behavior) and macro-level

(institutional and policy) dynamics through the integration of these perspectives. When you use interviews, documents, and observations all at the same time, that's called data triangulation. This supports evidence from different sources, which makes the results more credible and valid (Denzin, 2012). Member checking, which involves participants reviewing brief summaries of their interviews, serves as an additional method to ensure that the results accurately represent the participants' intended meanings.

Ethics are essential in this research because of the sensitivity associated with analyzing the conduct of leaders within institutional hierarchies. Before any data is collected, everyone involved gives their informed consent. This means they can decide whether or not to take part, and their privacy will be protected. Schools and people are given fake names to protect their identities, and access to all of the data is limited. The research complies with the ethical review standards set by the institution and is consistent with the BERA (2018) principles of respect, beneficence, and non-maleficence. We don't want to judge any specific schools or people because the topic is about putting policies into action. The focus remains on understanding leadership processes as contextual, dynamic, and situational phenomena.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) contend that qualitative research is considered reliable when it meets the standards of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Working with participants over time and using data from a variety of sources gives you credibility. Transferability is enhanced through thorough and precise descriptions of each case context, enabling readers to assess the applicability of findings to similar situations. An audit trail that records all research decisions, coding procedures, and analytical observations ensures data accuracy. Reflexive journaling guarantees the confirmability of the research, as the researcher consistently examines possible biases, assumptions, and positionality during data interpretation. This reflexive stance is essential, as the researcher's background and familiarity with educational contexts may impact both data collection and analysis.

The research acknowledges the constraints associated with qualitative methodologies. The results are only useful for this case and shouldn't be used to make broad statements about statistics. The small sample size is good for depth, but it doesn't show all the schools in Delhi/NCR very well. Also, the people who took part may have answered differently because they wanted to look good or because of politics at work, since people often judge how well leaders do their jobs. The researcher addresses these challenges by employing anonymity, fostering rapport, and implementing comprehensive triangulation. Incorporating quantitative surveys or longitudinal studies into this qualitative research could enhance its quality by examining the long-term effects of adaptive leadership on NEP 2020 outcomes.

To sum up, the methodology of this study tries to explain how adaptive leadership affects the implementation of NEP 2020 in schools in Delhi/NCR in a way that is both complicated and dependent on the situation. Employing a multiple case study methodology grounded in qualitative research, it seeks to illuminate the strategies, challenges, and reflections of principals overseeing policy-driven transformation. The primary objective of the study is to elucidate the impact of adaptive leadership practices on the attainment of NEP 2020's transformative objectives. To achieve this, the methodology emphasizes depth of understanding over generalizability. Interviews, document analysis, and theoretical triangulation are effective methods to examine the relationship between leadership and policy change in Indian schools.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The rise of adaptive leadership as an essential framework for comprehending school reform signifies a substantial transformation in educational theory from hierarchical management to dynamic, learning-oriented leadership. As schools confront progressively intricate and unpredictable challenges—spanning policy reforms, technological innovations, and social inequalities—scholars have underscored the necessity for leadership that is responsive, adaptable, and collaborative (Heifetz, Grashow, & Linsky, 2009; Fullan, 2014). The execution of India's National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 illustrates this complexity. It's not enough to just change the curriculum or the structure; we also need to find a new way to think about education in the 21st century. This literature review investigates three principal domains pertinent to the current study: the theoretical underpinnings of adaptive leadership, the global and Indian viewpoints on educational leadership and policy execution, and the ongoing discourse concerning NEP 2020 and its implications for leadership.

Ronald Heifetz introduced the idea of adaptive leadership in his important book, *Leadership Without Easy Answers* (1994).

Heifetz contended that conventional, hierarchical leadership approaches are ineffective for adaptive challenges, which necessitate stakeholders to reevaluate their values, roles, and methodologies. There are clear answers to technical problems, but not to adaptive ones. They need to learn, try new things, and change how the business works instead. Heifetz et al. (2009) expanded on this concept, stressing that adaptive leaders inspire individuals to face uncomfortable realities, elucidate conflicting priorities, and foster collective innovation. This viewpoint diverges from leadership models that perceive the leader as the origin of solutions; rather, it conceptualizes leadership as a process of facilitating others' adaptation and development. In educational settings, adaptive leadership corresponds with the transformative function of school principals as enablers of learning communities rather than mere administrators.

Over the last two decades, research on educational leadership has increasingly acknowledged the relationship between leadership adaptability and school effectiveness. Leithwood and Jantzi (2006) showed that transformational and instructional leadership models work better when leaders are flexible, especially when policies change or there is a crisis. Fullan (2014) also said that change that lasts requires the ability to adapt. He said that leaders need to have a moral purpose, be able to make friends, and be able to deal with things that change. In schools, adaptive leaders help teachers look at changes in a new way, keep spirits high, and get everyone to work together. This is especially important when the system is going through a lot of changes, because there is often a lot of doubt and pushback (Spillane, 2012). Adaptive leadership significantly connects policy vision and practical implementation.

The study of adaptive leadership in education has broadened to include issues of equity, technology, and globalization on an international level. Gronn (2009) and Harris (2018) have underscored the conceptual parallels among distributed, collaborative, and adaptive leadership models, as all prioritize shared responsibility and experiential learning. Day and Sammons (2016) found that good school leaders in the UK were able to meet the demands of accountability while still keeping their focus on student learning. After the pandemic, Reeves (2019) said that the U.S. needed flexible leadership styles to change the curriculum and fill in gaps in learning. Leaders who only follow the rules and those who work to make long-term, systemic improvements are different in that they are flexible.

In the Indian educational context, leadership studies have historically emphasized administrative efficiency and instructional oversight over adaptive or transformational methodologies. Nonetheless, recent studies have started to look at leadership as a way to make sense of things and build capacity. The National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration (NIEPA, 2018) said that principals should be "change leaders" when they put reforms into action, especially in systems where power is spread out. The Azim Premji Foundation (2021) likewise asserted that proficient school leadership in India is defined by community involvement, the empowerment of educators, and the cultivation of innovative concepts within the community—all reflective of adaptive practice. Nevertheless, despite these burgeoning insights, there exists a paucity of empirical research on adaptive leadership within Indian schools, especially regarding the execution of national policies like NEP 2020. Most studies have focused on issues like how to allocate resources, how to motivate teachers, and how to make sure the curriculum is in line with the school's goals. This has led to a lack of research on the leadership aspect.

The Ministry of Education brought out the NEP 2020 in 2020. The goal is to completely change the Indian education system by changing the way schools are run, the way teachers teach, the way tests are given, and the curriculum. Schools need to be open to everyone, flexible, and focused on the whole child, so they need to find new ways to teach and run things. The policy's goal is to move away from rote learning and toward competency-based education that encourages critical thinking and uses technology as a learning tool. But these goals are hard to reach, so we need to be able to change our plans. For example, schools need to figure out how to make national rules work with local problems like not having enough teachers, not having enough infrastructure, and differences in wealth and income. Principals are very important for easing these tensions because they use policy goals to make plans that work in their own schools. This is why adaptive leadership is not just helpful but also necessary for NEP 2020 to reach its goals.

Researchers investigating the execution of educational policy have traditionally recognized the disparity between policy formulation and implementation. Lipsky's (1980) theory of "street-level bureaucracy" offers a crucial framework, positing that frontline personnel, such as school principals, possess considerable discretion in the execution of policy. This dynamic is especially strong in India because the government is decentralized and there are many different types of schools. Singh

(2021) noted that the success of national reforms frequently depends on the interpretive and relational skills of school leaders. Sharma and Choudhary (2021) similarly discovered that principals employing reflective and participatory leadership practices achieved greater success in implementing policy reforms compared to those relying exclusively on directive management. These results show that adaptive leadership is not just about responding to change, but also about making sense of it for the people you lead.

Another significant field of study examines the convergence of adaptive leadership and teacher development. Studies show that adaptive leaders value building the group's capacity more than making sure everyone follows the rules (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). They make it safe for teachers to try out new ways of teaching that fit with the goals of the policy. This approach is necessary because NEP 2020 advocates for continuous professional development (CPD) and student-centered teaching. Balyer (2012) said that adaptive leaders are people who help others learn by turning resistance into engagement by making sure that reform goals are in line with teachers' intrinsic motivations. In India, where teachers are often very busy and don't have much freedom, it's very important for the principal to be able to inspire and support adaptive learning.

The literature underscores the importance of context in shaping adaptive leadership practices. Heifetz et al. (2009) posited that adaptation is contingent upon context, suggesting that strategies effective in one environment may prove ineffective in another. There are a lot of differences between the schools in Delhi/NCR. Some are private schools that cost a lot of money, some are government schools, and some are community schools that don't cost much. When it comes to putting NEP 2020 into action, each school has its own problems to deal with, like redesigning the curriculum and getting ready for digital learning. According to Jain and Verma's (2022) study, the way principals understand and carry out policy is affected by differences in infrastructure and teacher readiness. In this case, adaptive leadership means being willing to change and making decisions that are fair to all students, no matter where they come from. This places adaptive leadership within the framework of social justice, aligning with NEP 2020's emphasis on access and inclusion.

In recent years, a small but growing number of Indian studies have begun to use adaptive leadership frameworks to improve education. Raina and Bhatnagar (2022) investigated leadership practices in Delhi's government schools amid the implementation of the Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation (CCE) policy, discovering that adaptive leaders were more effective in sustaining teacher motivation and student engagement despite policy ambiguities. Likewise, Ghosh (2023) examined the strategies employed by private school principals in Gurugram during the curriculum transitions mandated by NEP 2020, demonstrating that adaptive leaders fused innovation with policy compliance through the establishment of collaborative planning teams. These studies collectively affirm that adaptive leadership promotes both policy compliance and situational awareness, a critical equilibrium for the success of substantial reforms.

Even though these new ideas are promising, there are still big gaps in the literature. First, there aren't many studies that look at adaptive leadership practices in different types of schools in the same area in a systematic way. Considering the socio-economic and cultural diversity of Delhi/NCR, this comparative analysis may elucidate the influence of context on leadership efficacy. Second, there is a deficiency of qualitative research documenting the actual experiences of principals as they interpret and implement NEP 2020. Most modern analyses are either policy-oriented or descriptive, failing to provide a thorough exploration of the human aspects of leadership during reform. Third, adaptive leadership theory offers a strong conceptual framework, but its application in the Indian context is still not well-developed. We should examine the influence of indigenous cultural values, governmental frameworks, and educational traditions on the application of adaptive practices. People all over the world and in the area will be able to better understand adaptive leadership in complicated school systems if these gaps are filled.

In conclusion, the current literature acknowledges adaptive leadership as an essential framework for navigating educational change in the context of uncertainty and reform. Studies from all over the world show that it helps people learn, be strong, and come up with new ideas. Recent studies from India show that it is becoming more important as systems change, especially with NEP 2020. Nonetheless, significant empirical deficiencies remain concerning the practice, perception, and experience of adaptive leadership across various educational contexts. The current study aims to enhance the ongoing discourse by examining the impact of adaptive leadership on the implementation of NEP 2020 in schools situated in the Delhi/NCR region. The goal is to get useful information about how principals handle policy requirements, involve teachers, and help their schools develop adaptive skills. This means that adaptive leadership is more than just a theory; it is a way of

life that is needed to connect the gap between policy vision and educational reality in modern India.

FINDINGS

The data analysis in this study seeks to clarify the application of adaptive leadership by school principals in Delhi and the National Capital Region (NCR) in the execution of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. Utilizing a qualitative multiple case study methodology, data were collected through semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and limited field observations across twelve schools from the government, private, and semi-private sectors. The analysis employed Braun and Clarke's (2019) thematic framework, emphasizing iterative engagement with the data to identify persistent meanings and patterns related to adaptive leadership practices. This section provides an interpretive analysis of the findings, focusing on four main themes derived from the data: (1) comprehending and interpreting policy, (2) collaborative change and teacher empowerment, (3) the equilibrium between innovation and compliance, and (4) adaptive resilience in resource-limited contexts.

The first theme, Sense-making and Policy Interpretation, shows how principals understood and agreed with the big and ambitious goals of NEP 2020. Participants consistently described the policy as "visionary yet intricate," highlighting the need to reassess established pedagogical methods. A lot of principals said that the first problem was figuring out how to turn the policy's language into school goals that could be put into action. "The NEP gives direction but not a clear roadmap," said the head of a government school in East Delhi. We need to understand what flexible and competency-based learning means for both our students and teachers. Spillane (2012) calls this process of understanding "policy mediation," in which leaders act as interpreters and translators of change. Principals said that NEP workshops, online training sessions, and talking to other principals were all helping them get to know each other better. But their opinions on NEP 2020 changed depending on what their schools had. For example, private school principals often saw it as a chance to try new things, while government school leaders saw it as an extra burden on their staff because they didn't have enough resources. The cognitive and interpretive facets of adaptive leadership are exemplified by the ability to navigate uncertainty, integrate information, and articulate a cohesive vision.

The second main idea is "Giving Teachers Power and Working Together to Make Changes." It shows how leaders were able to get teachers to help make the rules work. People who took part said that teachers shouldn't just follow orders; they should also be in charge of making changes. A principal at a private school in Gurugram said, "You can't implement NEP from the top; teachers need to feel like they are part of it." Principals set up peer mentoring groups, meetings where people could plan together, and reflective dialogues to make sure everyone felt like they were working toward the same goal. Some people used distributed leadership strategies by assigning groups of teachers to work on specific NEP parts, such as programs to teach basic literacy or making a curriculum that covers a lot of subjects. Heifetz et al. (2009) contend that adaptive leadership entails enabling individuals to confront challenges instead of offering predetermined solutions. These results are in line with that. Principals at government schools were more interested in getting to know their students than teachers were. Teachers were more concerned about how busy and motivated their students were. A headmistress from Ghaziabad said that her way of teaching was "listening and learning together." She also said that people were less likely to fight back when they knew what was going on. People in charge of different kinds of schools who were open to new ideas thought that everyone should work together to make changes. This backs up the idea that NEP 2020 leaders should create communities of practice instead of just following orders.

The third theme, "Balancing Innovation and Compliance," talks about how hard it is to follow the rules and be creative at the same time. Principals kept saying that NEP 2020 encourages new ideas and flexibility, but school officials often want things to stay the same and be written down. Leaders had a hard time finding the right balance between following the rules and letting people do things their own way. For instance, private school principals talked about how they were changing their schedules, adding digital tools, and making blended learning models to fit NEP's goals for experiential learning. But these efforts often ran into problems with how things were done, like strict inspection formats or outdated reporting systems. A principal from a semi-private school said, "We're told to come up with new ideas, but we also have to turn in the same old reports." "It's like having one foot on the gas and one on the brake." Principals of government schools had an even harder time because they didn't have as many options. Even though there were rules, some people were still very creative. For instance, they did skill-based projects with what they had or got people from the community to help them

learn more than one language. This theme says that adaptive leadership means finding a way to meet the needs of the school while also making moral changes in education.

The last and fourth theme, "Adaptive Resilience in Resource-Constrained Contexts," is about how leaders keep people going even when things aren't going well. People who work for low-cost private schools and government officials said it was hard to put the NEP into action because there weren't enough teachers, money, or buildings. On the other hand, adaptive leaders saw these limits as chances to find new ways to do things. A principal from Noida said that when their school didn't have smart classrooms, they worked with local NGOs to teach kids how to use computers. Another principal said that being a leader means being able to "make do with what we have." The idea of "regulating distress" in adaptive leadership is to find a balance between challenge and stability (Heifetz et al., 2009). This strong way of thinking fits with that idea. Principals purposefully shielded teachers from excessive demands while gradually enhancing their adaptability to change. They showed that they were brave and smart with their feelings by doing this. Both of these things are important for making sure that change lasts when things aren't clear. The theme illustrates the emotional aspect of adaptive leadership by demonstrating that empathy, patience, and perseverance constitute the fundamental elements of policy-based change.

The analysis produced several comprehensive insights that clarify adaptive leadership within the context of NEP 2020, alongside the four designated themes. A common theme was how learning on the job can help people get used to things. Principals who paid for teachers to keep learning through workshops, peer exchanges, or reflective journals said that transitions went more smoothly and teachers were happier. They understood that implementing policies was not a one-time task; it required continual repetition and ongoing feedback. This finding corresponds with Fullan's (2014) concept of "learning-oriented leadership," which emphasizes the significance of coherence via professional dialogue. Some people thought it was very important to talk to people and earn their trust. People said that being honest with teachers, parents, and district officials helped everyone understand what was expected of them and made them less worried about the changes. Good leaders made teachers feel safe in their minds, which gave them the courage to try new things without worrying about failing. This relational aspect emphasizes that adaptive leadership requires both emotional intelligence and strategic thinking.

The study showed that schools changed in very different ways depending on the type of school. Private school principals had more freedom and often saw NEP 2020 as a chance to try new things. This fit with the school's culture of trying new things and doing them well. On the other hand, principals of government schools worked in more strict bureaucratic systems where policy directives were orders instead of suggestions. But they were just as good at changing. They came up with new ideas without making a big deal out of it, like changing lesson plans or suggesting activities that put students at the center. The government kept an eye on semi-private schools, but they could run their programs however they wanted. These contextual variations illustrate that adaptive leadership is not a fixed framework but a dynamic process shaped by institutional ecology. The research corroborates Heifetz's (1994) assertion that adaptive work is inherently contextual, requiring leaders to evaluate the situation before proposing solutions.

The data also showed that an adaptive leader does work that makes them happy. When NEP 2020 began, principals had to deal with how things were set up and how their staff felt about the changes. Teachers were often worried about changes to the curriculum, new ways of grading, or new ways of teaching. Principals had to learn how to be nice and make sure people did what they were told. They had to keep pushing for change while also giving people hope. A lot of people said they were "emotionally exhausted but hopeful." This sums up the two biggest problems that leaders have to deal with when things change. This emotional undercurrent aligns with recent studies emphasizing the emotional dimensions of leadership (Beatty, 2011; Harris, 2018). Adaptive leaders fostered environments conducive to learning and transformation through emotional awareness and management.

To keep the analysis strict, the data were looked at for patterns of cases that came together and those that didn't. Even though the situations were different, three main things affected adaptive leadership in the implementation of NEP 2020: (1) Interpretive flexibility—the ability to creatively reinterpret policy while keeping its main meaning; (2) Relational adaptability—the ability to build trust networks across social and hierarchical lines; and (3) Strategic resilience—the determination to keep making progress even when things get tough. An "adaptive leadership ecology" is when cognitive, emotional, and moral factors all work together to change the outcomes of reform.

The findings also indicate potential sources of tension that require further investigation. One of these tensions is the difference between what policy wants to do and what institutions are able to do. The NEP 2020 says that schools should teach kids in a way that is hands-on and includes a lot of different subjects. But many schools don't have the right teachers or places to do this. Adaptive leaders try to close this gap by being creative and working together, but it's often hard to make big changes because the system isn't working right. People also get stressed out when they have to take care of things. Principals have to follow rules that make it hard for them to be flexible, but they are still expected to come up with new ways to do things. This contradiction shows how important it is to have rules that help local leaders instead of getting in their way.

The data show that adaptive leadership is a good way to get ready for and deal with big changes like NEP 2020. It helps principals turn doubt into learning, disagreement into working together, and limits into new ideas. The analysis demonstrates that adaptive leadership is not merely a theoretical construct but a concrete reality manifested through daily practices of negotiation, empathy, and resilience. In the end, the study's results make it clear how adaptive leadership brings together the lofty goals of NEP 2020 with the real-world challenges of India's varied educational setting. The study underscores that the advancement of education in India depends not only on new policies but also on the adaptability of those tasked with their execution, by redefining leadership as a collaborative and dynamic process.

DATA ANALYSIS

The results of this study indicate that adaptive leadership is pivotal and transformative in the effective execution of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 in schools throughout Delhi and the National Capital Region (NCR). The qualitative analysis revealed that the adaptive behaviors, decision-making processes, and relational competencies of school principals collectively influence the scope and quality of policy implementation. The evidence, obtained from interviews, document analyses, and observational data, demonstrates that adaptive leadership is not only an administrative imperative but also a dynamic and ethical approach to managing complexity, ambiguity, and reform fatigue. The data revealed five significant findings: (1) Adaptive leadership promotes contextualized policy interpretation, (2) Collaborative structures improve policy ownership, (3) Emotional intelligence maintains change momentum, (4) Resourcefulness offsets systemic constraints, and (5) Ethical purpose grounds reform in human values.

The first finding stresses that adaptive leadership helps principals understand NEP 2020's broad goals in a way that makes sense in their own schools. Principals from all types of schools—government, private, and semi-private—said that the policy was vague and needed some flexibility in how it was understood. Adaptive leaders were very good at making sense of things by combining national goals with local realities. In schools with limited infrastructure, leaders redefined experiential learning through low-cost community-based activities. In well-resourced private schools, principals tried out projects that involved many subjects and students leading innovation. Heifetz and Laurie (1997) describe adaptive leadership as a kind of interpretive work that involves figuring out how to solve complex problems and getting people to work together to do so. This process of contextual translation fits with that idea. The study finds that NEP 2020 could become just a compliance document instead of a living reform if it isn't adapted to the context. So, adaptive leadership is the link between the national vision and how it is carried out in each area.

The second major finding shows that working together makes teachers and staff feel more responsible for the policies. Adaptive leaders know that for reforms to work, people need to move from following rules to working together. Principals made sure that their schools had collaborative learning communities, and they encouraged teachers to be a part of curriculum redesign, new ways of testing, and teaching across subjects. In government schools, principals started peer mentoring programs and informal learning circles. In private schools, principals set up professional learning communities where teachers could share ideas and problems. These collaborative ecosystems helped teachers understand NEP 2020's teaching ideas, which gave them a sense of shared purpose. The study's findings confirm that adaptive leadership is fundamentally relational, flourishing through participation rather than authority. By sharing leadership and encouraging communication based on trust, principals fostered a culture of co-creation in which policy goals were seen as commitments made by everyone rather than orders from above. The existence of these structures also boosted teacher morale and made it easier for them to accept change. This shows that adaptive leadership turns schools into learning organizations that can adapt to new demands for reform.

A third finding emphasizes the essential function of emotional intelligence in maintaining the momentum of change during the implementation of NEP 2020. Principals had to deal with a lot of emotional stress while leading the reform. This included teacher anxiety and resistance, parental skepticism, and bureaucratic delays. Adaptive leaders showed empathy, patience, and moral support in response. They kept everyone motivated by actively listening, putting a positive spin on problems, and celebrating small wins. The research indicated that emotionally intelligent leadership directly fostered the psychological safety essential for experimentation and innovation. Teachers who worked in emotionally supportive environments said they were more confident about using new teaching methods, like competency-based assessment and digital learning tools. In contrast, schools with leaders who employed exclusively transactional strategies demonstrated a more gradual adoption of reforms. This finding aligns with Goleman's (2018) notion of emotional intelligence as a critical factor in effective leadership, especially in intricate, human-centric domains such as education. Adaptive leaders' capacity to regulate emotions—both their own and those of others—was crucial in converting uncertainty into growth and sustaining the emotional stability necessary for enduring change.

The fourth key finding shows that being resourceful and coming up with creative solutions can make up for the problems that come up when putting NEP 2020 into action. The difference in resources between schools became a key contextual factor. Government schools had more problems than private schools because they often didn't have enough money, buildings, or staff. However, adaptive leaders in these kinds of situations showed amazing creativity by using resources in smart ways. They worked with local NGOs, used alumni networks to set up mentorship programs, and used digital tools to train teachers. One principal at a semi-private school, for instance, turned a small amount of physical space into flexible learning areas using cheap materials. This was in line with NEP's focus on learning through experience. This creative use of resources is a good example of the adaptive principle of "getting on the balcony," which means seeing beyond limitations to imagine new possibilities (Heifetz et al., 2009). On the other hand, private school principals had to deal with parental expectations, market pressures, and too many rules, which required them to be adaptable in different ways. The results indicate that adaptive leadership varies across contexts yet possesses a common trait: the ability to transform challenges into innovation through learning and experimentation.

The fifth and possibly most important finding stresses that ethical purpose is what keeps reform grounded in human values. This sets adaptive leadership apart from purely strategic or managerial approaches. A lot of principals talked about their leadership in moral terms. They saw NEP 2020 not just as a way to make the school system better, but also as a moral call to make it more fair, welcoming, and focused on the whole child. Adaptive leaders contextualized their decisions by considering issues of equity, accessibility, and social justice—particularly within government and low-cost private educational institutions catering to disadvantaged communities. This ethical perspective corresponds with Fullan's (2014) concept of moral leadership as a catalyst for profound and enduring educational transformation. The ethical clarity of principals also enhanced staff commitment, as teachers viewed their leaders' actions as rooted in integrity rather than mere compliance. The study concludes that adaptive leadership, when informed by ethical intent, surpasses managerial proficiency and evolves into a moral catalyst for educational transformation. It makes sure that policies are still based on values that respect the overall well-being of students and the larger purpose of education in society.

When we put all of these findings together, we can see three main ideas that define adaptive leadership in the context of NEP 2020. First, adaptation is not universal; it is based on the resources of the institution, the socio-economic situation, and the expectations of the community. This means that successful policy implementation can't depend on one-size-fits-all models; instead, it needs to be flexible and responsive. Second, leadership is not something that one person does alone; principals who shared power, encouraged teachers to take charge, and fostered collaboration brought about deeper and more lasting change. Third, leadership is moral, not mechanical. Adaptive leaders who based reform on ethical goals built trust, resilience, and long-term commitment among stakeholders. These insights collectively affirm that adaptive leadership is both a competency and an inclination, necessitating cognitive flexibility, emotional sophistication, and ethical resolve.

The results also show that adaptive leadership acts as a bridge between the NEP 2020 policy framework and what happens in schools. Principals turn abstract ideas about reform into new ways of teaching that work in the real world. They do this while following orders from above and getting input from below. This mediating role helps to bring together macro-level policy goals and micro-level implementation processes. The study also finds systemic barriers that make it harder to adapt. Bureaucratic rigidity, insufficient professional development, and restricted autonomy persist in hindering school leaders'

capacity for innovation. Adaptive leadership helps with these problems, but it can't take the place of the need for structural change at higher levels of administration. Consequently, the results underscore a dual necessity: augmenting individual adaptive capacity while fostering institutional ecosystems that facilitate experimentation and localized decision-making.

One of the most important things we learned is that schools with strong adaptive leaders are starting to have adaptive learning cultures. These schools showed patterns of ongoing reflection, collaborative inquiry, and incremental enhancement. Teachers often went through feedback cycles, where they looked at how well their students did and what their peers said and changed their methods. These kinds of cultures helped people be strong, so schools could handle change without any problems. This finding corroborates Argyris and Schön's (1996) notion of "double-loop learning," wherein organizations not only modify behaviors but also reevaluate foundational assumptions. This learning orientation was very important under NEP 2020 because many changes required big changes in the way things were done. For example, moving from rote learning to competency-based education, from teacher-centered to learner-centered classrooms, and from separate subjects to integrated curricula. Adaptive leaders who nurtured these learning cultures successfully transformed reform from an external imposition into an internal evolution.

The research indicates that adaptive leadership under NEP 2020 is defined by shared accountability. Principals who promoted shared responsibility among teachers and middle-level leaders noted greater consistency in the execution of reforms. On the other hand, schools with hierarchical decision-making structures made less progress and had less participation. This pattern shows how important it is to flatten leadership hierarchies in order to keep adaptive capacity. Distributed accountability fostered a sense of collective ownership and diminished reliance on individual charisma or authority. It also made sure that reform efforts would last even if people changed jobs, which was important for long-term success.

In conclusion, the results show that adaptive leadership is the most important part of making NEP 2020 work. It turns policy from a piece of paper into something that people actually do by using sense-making, teamwork, emotional intelligence, and moral commitment. The research offers empirical evidence that adaptive leadership reconciles vision and implementation, fostering schools that are both reform-oriented and human-centered. As India's education system continues to change under NEP 2020, the results show how important it is to create leadership development programs, professional learning frameworks, and systemic supports that help all levels of the school ecosystem become more adaptable. Without adaptive leadership, NEP 2020's lofty goals could stay just that: goals. But with adaptive leadership, those goals can become the basis for real and lasting changes in education.

CONCLUSION

The objective of this study was to investigate the impact of adaptive leadership on the implementation of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 in schools situated in Delhi and the National Capital Region (NCR). The findings confirm that adaptive leadership is the essential link between visionary policy frameworks and their successful implementation during a time of significant educational change. The research utilized qualitative methodologies to illustrate that principals employing adaptive strategies defined by flexibility, collaboration, empathy, and moral purpose exhibit superior competencies in interpreting, contextualizing, and implementing the intricate reform agenda of NEP 2020. The conclusion integrates these findings, contextualizing them within extensive theoretical and practical frameworks, and provides recommendations for policy, leadership development, and future research.

The research fundamentally demonstrates that adaptive leadership converts policy implementation from a hierarchical obligation into a holistic process of education and development. Principals who work under the NEP 2020 framework have to deal with a lot of hard problems, like unclear policies, structural limits, and a lot of different stakeholder expectations. Heifetz et al. (2009) say that adaptive leaders solve these problems by doing what they call "adaptive work." This means using the group's collective intelligence to figure out how the system really works and coming up with solutions that work in that situation. Good leaders can change the school's policy goals to fit what it needs. This is how principals make sure that teachers follow the rules and feel like they can be creative and own their work. Adaptive leadership does not see reform as a strict set of rules that must be followed. Instead, it sees it as a group effort to ask questions and make changes.

The findings of the study indicate that adaptive leadership is founded on ethics and interpersonal relationships. You should also be honest, be able to understand how you and others feel, and care about fairness and inclusion. During the reform process, principals who built trust-based relationships and made it easy for teachers to talk to each other kept them involved, strong, and positive. When things were up in the air, having clear morals and emotional support helped keep things stable. This made sure that the change was still based on doing the right thing and being nice. On the other hand, schools that used transactional or authoritarian methods took longer to adjust and were less open to change. The research indicates that NEP 2020 will be effective solely if there are modifications to current practices and the presence of school leaders who possess emotional intelligence and ethical integrity.

A major conclusion of this study is that adaptive leadership depends on the situation. There is no one way for all schools to make changes; instead, the way a school does things depends on its own institutional ecology. Private schools had the money and the freedom to try out digital integration and lessons that taught more than one subject. Government schools were still creative, even though they didn't have a lot of money and had to follow strict rules. They did this by working together, coming up with new ideas as they went along, and getting involved in their community. Both of these methods helped semi-private schools strike the right balance between being responsible and being creative. This variety of situations supports the idea that leadership strategies should be adaptable and able to meet the needs of people in each area. Policymakers ought to eschew universal leadership models and instead endorse frameworks that promote local autonomy, reflective practice, and adaptable experimentation.

The results also show that adaptive leadership works well in places where power is shared. Principals who told teachers to work together and make decisions together gave them the power to change things together. This distributed model not only gave people more power, but it also made institutions stronger by spreading out the work. On the other hand, hierarchical leadership structures made it harder for reforms to last because they depended too much on individual principals to do their jobs. The study's implications indicate a paradigm shift—from perceiving leadership as an individual characteristic to recognizing it as a collective competency ingrained within the organizational culture. This change is in line with Fullan's (2014) idea of "leadership from within," which means that schools should be places where people can learn and grow all the time.

The study emphasizes the necessity for leadership development programs that explicitly foster adaptive competencies from a policy standpoint. Most of the time, traditional principal training is about how to keep the school running smoothly, follow the rules, and keep things in order. But the NEP 2020 setting needs different skills, like being able to think strategically, keep your emotions in check, think about ethics, and work with others to solve problems. This is why education boards and ministries should look into adaptive leadership theory first when they want to learn more about their jobs. Real-life mentoring, conversations that make you think, and learning by doing are some of the things that should be included in other frameworks. This would not only help principals make changes more effectively, but it would also improve teaching, student performance, and community partnerships.

The study says that Indian schools need to change how they hold people accountable at the system level. In many businesses, doing paperwork and inspections is more important than coming up with new ideas and learning. When everyone in a culture follows the rules, it's hard to change and try new things. If schools want to make the big changes that NEP 2020 wants to see, they need to stop running on fear and start running on trust. People who make rules should make evaluation systems that use things like working together, thinking about what you did, and getting better at what you do as valid ways to see how well you do. Schools also need more freedom to make changes that fit with national goals, so that leaders can think of new ways to do things.

This study examines the ethical and emotional dimensions of leadership, which are significant yet under-researched aspects of policy implementation. The principals' stories showed that their emotional work as leaders of change is just as important as their technical skills. This means dealing with fear, hope, and not knowing what will happen. Adaptive leaders who recognized their vulnerabilities and exhibited empathy were more successful in maintaining the momentum of change over time. This finding indicates that forthcoming leadership development must incorporate training in emotional intelligence, reflective supervision, and well-being support to mitigate burnout and foster resilience. In this context, leadership transforms into a human endeavor rooted in care, compassion, and ethical intent.

This study recognizes several limitations, notwithstanding its advantages. The sample size was diverse yet confined to Delhi and the National Capital Region (NCR), complicating the generalization of the findings to India's extensive and heterogeneous educational system. Additionally, as a qualitative study, the results prioritize depth over breadth; quantitative validation could further reinforce the conclusions. Subsequent research may investigate adaptive leadership across various states, educational tiers, or administrative frameworks to enhance comprehension. Longitudinal studies may elucidate the evolution of adaptive leadership as NEP 2020 progresses and educational institutions enact reforms.

This study enhances both the theoretical comprehension and the practical application of adaptive leadership in Indian educational institutions. This proves that adaptive leadership isn't just a theory; it's real and it changes how policies are carried out. In NEP 2020, which is a very complicated and always-changing world, leaders who can adapt get things done. They make sure that everyone in the class does what they should. India's educational reform will only be successful if they can strike a balance between being kind and strict, having big ideas and being practical, and being creative and responsible. The results show that adaptive leadership helps make schools that are strong and can handle things even when they are not clear. The study concludes positively, asserting that the success of NEP 2020 and the future of Indian education rely not solely on policy frameworks but also on the adaptability, moral integrity, and collective wisdom of the leaders who drive transformative initiatives.

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