



INVESTIGATING THE SCOPE AND CHALLENGES IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF NEP 2020 IN CBSE SCHOOLS: AN *EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP* *PERSPECTIVE WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE* *TO THE UAE*

RAJEEV MADHAVAN

VICE PRINCIPAL

SHARJAH INDIAN SCHOOL BR1 JUWAIZA

ABSTRACT

This research investigates the scope and challenges associated with implementing India's National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 within CBSE-affiliated schools in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) from an educational leadership perspective. The NEP 2020 introduces a paradigm shift by emphasizing inclusivity, flexibility, skill development, and multidisciplinary learning. However, executing these reforms in a cross-national context presents unique institutional and regulatory hurdles.

Utilizing a mixed-methods approach, the study identifies several critical challenges, including infrastructural demands, the complexities of the three-language formula in a multicultural environment, and the need for alignment with local UAE regulations such as the integration of Arabic language and culture. The findings highlight significant gaps in teacher preparedness and digital readiness, alongside the necessity for ongoing professional development.

Educational leaders reported that driving policy adoption requires navigating curriculum mapping and stakeholder engagement amidst regulatory complexities. Despite these obstacles, there is a strong consensus among leaders that NEP 2020 aligns well with the UAE's strategic educational frameworks, offering a viable pathway toward enhancing the quality of Indian education in the international market.

Keywords: NEP 2020, CBSE, UAE Education, Educational Leadership, Policy Implementation, Cross-National Education.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1. Background of the Study

Education systems worldwide are undergoing profound transformation driven by globalization, technological disruption, shifting labor markets, and evolving societal expectations. The traditional model of schooling—emphasizing memorization, teacher-centered instruction, and examination-driven progression—has become increasingly inadequate for developing the cognitive, social, and ethical capabilities required in the twenty-first century. In response, many educational jurisdictions have pivoted toward learner-centered pedagogies, competency-based frameworks, and broader conceptions of achievement encompassing creativity, collaboration, problem-solving, and lifelong learning. This global shift signifies a major policy transition: education is no longer treated solely as a mechanism for knowledge transmission but as a means of cultivating adaptable, reflective, and responsible citizens.

India's National Education Policy (NEP 2020), approved by the Union Cabinet in July 2020, represents one of the most comprehensive reform efforts within this global context. The policy seeks to fundamentally transform both school and higher education through structural, curricular, assessment, and pedagogical changes. At the school level, NEP 2020 introduces a 5+3+3+4 curricular and pedagogical structure, emphasizing early childhood care and education, foundational literacy and numeracy, multidisciplinary learning, and competency-based assessment. The policy also recommends reducing curriculum load to allow classrooms more time for critical thinking, discussion-based learning, application, and inquiry. Far from a minor curricular revision, NEP 2020 constitutes a systemic attempt to redesign the educational experience from the earliest years of schooling.

A defining philosophical feature of NEP 2020 is its emphasis on holistic education. The policy repeatedly highlights the need for flexibility, creativity, ethical development, and learner agency, moving away from rigid streams and content-heavy instruction. It advocates a school culture in which conceptual understanding, multidisciplinary exposure, vocational awareness, and socio-emotional development are treated as legitimate and mutually reinforcing dimensions of learning. This broader vision is particularly important because it positions schools not merely as examination centers but as institutions responsible for developing the whole child. Consequently, NEP 2020 has generated significant attention among policymakers, school systems, and researchers concerned with educational quality and reform implementation.

The Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) occupies a pivotal position in translating this policy vision into school-level practice. As a national curriculum body, CBSE has taken several steps to align its affiliated schools with NEP 2020's priorities, including reforming pedagogical structures, encouraging competency-based learning, and supporting implementation planning through stakeholder engagement. CBSE's initiatives demonstrate that the policy is not merely aspirational; it requires operational interpretation by school systems and depends heavily on the capacity of school leaders to convert policy language into actionable practice. Thus, the role of school leadership becomes central to the success of the reform agenda.

The relevance of NEP 2020 becomes more complex in international settings, particularly in CBSE schools operating in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The UAE hosts a significant number of private CBSE schools serving expatriate communities, especially the Indian diaspora, while also enrolling learners from diverse national and linguistic backgrounds. These schools function within a transnational educational space: they are linked to Indian curricular policy through CBSE, yet they operate within the legal, cultural, and regulatory framework of the UAE. This creates a unique policy environment in which implementation cannot be assumed to be direct or uniform.

Private schools in the UAE are governed by regulatory authorities that differ across emirates: the Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDA) regulates private education in Dubai, the Abu Dhabi Department of Education and Knowledge (ADEK) oversees private schools in Abu Dhabi, the Sharjah Private Education Authority (SPEA) serves Sharjah, and the Ministry of Education (MoE) retains an important federal role, particularly outside the three major emirate-specific frameworks. These authorities oversee licensing, inspection, compliance, quality assurance, teacher requirements, and broader school improvement expectations. Therefore, CBSE schools in the UAE must remain simultaneously aligned with CBSE requirements and responsive to the expectations of local education authorities. The result is a dual accountability structure that places significant demands on school governance and leadership.

In such a setting, educational leaders become the primary agents of policy translation. Principals and vice-principals are required to interpret policy documents, prioritize reforms, support teacher learning, communicate expectations to parents, and manage school operations in ways that satisfy both curricular and regulatory demands. Their work involves more than administrative coordination; it also includes sense-making, negotiation, and institutional adaptation in response to shifting policy landscapes. In schools where NEP 2020 is being considered alongside local compliance requirements, leadership becomes the key site where policy aspirations are either strengthened, adapted, or constrained.

Policy enactment in education is rarely a straightforward process. The literature suggests that policies do not simply move from government text to classroom reality in a linear fashion. Instead, they are interpreted through institutional culture, professional judgment, leadership priorities, teacher readiness, and environmental constraints. This is particularly important in transnational school settings, where the originating policy and the host-country regulatory context may not fully align. NEP 2020, therefore, cannot be understood only as a national reform document; it must also be examined as a policy that may be recontextualized in international CBSE schools.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Despite the ambitious and progressive nature of NEP 2020, its enactment in CBSE schools outside India raises a more complex problem than routine policy adoption. The policy was designed within India's national educational structure, yet CBSE schools in the UAE operate under a distinct regulatory and social environment. This means that reforms proposed by NEP 2020 cannot simply be replicated in foreign settings without interpretation, adjustment, and contextual negotiation. The problem is therefore not only implementation, but implementation across systems that differ in curriculum regulation, inspection mechanisms, and educational priorities.

At the school level, educational leaders are expected to reconcile the requirements of NEP 2020 with the obligations imposed by UAE authorities. This includes aligning teaching and learning with curricular changes, maintaining teacher preparedness, meeting regulatory standards, and preserving institutional stability. The challenge is intensified by the fact that many private schools in the UAE operate in highly competitive environments where inspection outcomes, parental expectations, and school reputation matter greatly. Consequently, leaders must make decisions not only about what to implement, but also about how to implement reforms without compromising compliance or school performance.

Current literature has not fully addressed this issue from the perspective of school leadership in international CBSE contexts. Much of the existing work on NEP 2020 discusses national policy aims, reform structure, or general implementation challenges within India. While these studies contribute valuable insights, they do not sufficiently examine how the policy is interpreted in UAE-based CBSE schools, where leadership must operate within a dual framework of Indian curricular affiliation and local regulatory oversight. This leaves a clear empirical gap in understanding how educational leaders experience, manage, and evaluate the implementation of NEP 2020 in transnational settings.

The deeper issue is that policy success depends not only on the quality of the policy itself, but on the contextual capacity of schools to enact it. When educational leaders do not have adequate clarity, structural support, or alignment between policy and regulation, implementation may become fragmented or symbolic rather than transformative. This study addresses that concern by examining the realities faced by educational leaders in UAE-based CBSE schools as they navigate NEP 2020 within a foreign regulatory environment. The problem, in analytical terms, is the limited understanding of how a national reform is localized within an international school system shaped by multiple authorities, stakeholder expectations, and organizational pressures.

1.3 Rationale of the Study

The transnational nature of CBSE-affiliated schools in the UAE offers a distinctive case for policy studies. Unlike international schools that follow host-country or globally recognized curricula (e.g., IB, IGCSE), these schools are simultaneously Indian in curricular affiliation and Emirati in regulatory oversight. This duality creates tensions and synergies that are not well captured by existing implementation models, which tend to assume policy alignment within a single national framework. Thus, studying NEP 2020 in UAE-based CBSE schools contributes not only to understanding this specific reform but also to broader theoretical conversations about cross-national policy enactment.

Another compelling rationale lies in the strategic importance of the UAE as a hub for Indian education abroad. With hundreds of thousands of Indian expatriate students, the UAE represents one of the largest concentrations of CBSE schools outside India. The success or failure of NEP 2020 in this context has significant implications for student outcomes, parental confidence, and the reputation of CBSE as a curriculum board capable of operating effectively across borders. Moreover, UAE regulatory authorities have increasingly emphasized innovation, well-being, and competency-based learning—priorities that overlap with NEP 2020 but are not identical to them. Understanding how school leaders manage these overlapping agendas can inform policy coordination and reduce unnecessary compliance burdens.

Finally, the timing of the study is critical. NEP 2020 was launched shortly before the COVID-19 pandemic, which disrupted educational systems globally and delayed implementation planning. As schools have returned to relative stability, leaders are now actively interpreting and enacting the policy. Capturing their perceptions, strategies, and challenges at this juncture provides timely evidence that can inform ongoing professional development, regulatory guidance, and policy refinement. Without such

evidence, there is a risk that NEP 2020 will be implemented unevenly or performatively in international settings—neither achieving its transformative potential nor fully satisfying local accountability requirements.

1.4 Aims of the Study

The primary aim of this study is to examine the strategic prospects, operational hurdles, and perceived benefits associated with the enactment of NEP 2020 in CBSE schools in the UAE. The study focuses on educational leaders because they hold a central position in policy interpretation, implementation planning, staff coordination, and institutional decision-making. Their perceptions are especially important because they directly influence how policy is understood and translated into school practice.

More specifically, the study has three interconnected aims. First, it seeks to identify and analyze the strategic opportunities that educational leaders perceive when aligning NEP 2020 with the UAE educational environment. These may include curricular innovations, pedagogical improvements, enhanced student engagement, and alignment with global best practices. Second, the study aims to uncover the operational hurdles—such as resource constraints, teacher readiness, regulatory ambiguities, and time pressures—that complicate or impede implementation. Third, the study aims to explore leaders' perceptions of the qualitative improvements and institutional benefits that NEP 2020 may bring to their schools, including long-term value in areas like holistic development, assessment reform, and school culture.

Beyond description, the study aims to provide a nuanced understanding of how NEP 2020 functions in an international CBSE context. It seeks to move beyond abstract policy discussion and instead examine the practical realities of leadership in schools that must maintain both compliance and improvement. By doing so, the study contributes to broader conversations about policy enactment, transnational education, and school leadership in regulated private school systems. Additionally, the study aims to generate actionable insights that can inform professional development programs for school leaders, policy guidance from CBSE to its international affiliates, and regulatory coordination between Indian curricular bodies and UAE education authorities.

The study does not aim to evaluate the policy across all educational systems or to measure student performance directly. Its emphasis is specifically on how the policy is understood and enacted within schools that operate under both CBSE guidance and UAE regulatory oversight. By narrowing the scope in this way, the study aims to produce focused and contextually grounded findings about school-level enactment that are both academically rigorous and practically relevant.

1.5 Research Questions

The study is guided by three primary research questions, each addressing a distinct dimension of policy enactment in transnational CBSE school settings.

Research Question 1: What are the strategic prospects and operational hurdles faced by educational leaders when translating NEP 2020 into the UAE educational environment?

This question seeks to capture both the positive opportunities (e.g., curriculum enrichment, pedagogical innovation, alignment with global standards) and the practical difficulties (e.g., resource limitations, teacher training gaps, time constraints) that shape implementation. It recognizes that policy enactment is a dual process involving both enablement and constraint.

Research Question 2: How do UAE regulatory requirements influence educational leaders' decision-making regarding NEP 2020 implementation in CBSE schools?

This question focuses specifically on the dual accountability structure described earlier. It examines the extent to which local authority expectations—such as inspection frameworks, teacher qualification requirements, and student well-being indicators—shape how leaders prioritize, adapt, or delay aspects of NEP 2020. It also explores whether leaders perceive alignment or tension between regulatory requirements and policy recommendations.

Research Question 3: What are educational leaders' perceptions of the qualitative improvements and institutional benefits of NEP 2020 in the UAE international school context?

This question moves beyond implementation challenges to examine leaders' evaluative judgments about the policy's value. It seeks to understand whether leaders believe NEP 2020 enhances educational quality, student outcomes, school culture, or institutional reputation. It also explores perceived improvements in areas such as assessment practices, interdisciplinary learning, socio-emotional development, and teacher professional growth.

Taken together, these three questions provide a comprehensive framework for investigating the strategic, operational, and evaluative dimensions of NEP 2020 enactment in UAE-based CBSE schools.

1.6 Significance of the Study

This study is significant at the academic, professional, and policy levels. Each level addresses a distinct audience and contributes unique value.

Academic Significance: Academically, the study contributes to the literature on educational policy enactment by extending the discussion of NEP 2020 beyond India and into an international school setting. Most existing research on NEP 2020 has been conducted within Indian states and union territories, with limited attention to how the policy travels across borders. By focusing on the UAE, the study adds to the understanding of how educational reforms are interpreted through different institutional, cultural, and regulatory frameworks. Because cross-national policy implementation is still relatively underexplored in relation to Indian school policy, the study fills an important conceptual and empirical gap.

Furthermore, the study contributes to theoretical discussions on policy translation, sense-making, and leadership in transnational education spaces. It offers an empirical case of how school leaders navigate competing accountability demands—a phenomenon increasingly common in globalized education systems but still underutilized. The findings may also inform comparative education research by providing a detailed case of South-South educational policy transfer, a dynamic often overshadowed by studies of Western-origin reforms in developing contexts.

Professional Significance: Professionally, the study is highly relevant to principals, vice-principals, and senior administrators in CBSE schools across the UAE. These leaders are expected to manage curriculum adaptation, teacher support, parental communication, and regulatory compliance while also advancing school improvement. The findings of the study may therefore support more informed leadership strategies and more realistic planning for policy enactment. This is especially important in schools where reform pressure and regulatory accountability operate simultaneously.

In addition, the study may inform professional development programs offered by school groups, CBSE, or UAE regulatory authorities. By identifying common hurdles and successful strategies, the study can help design targeted training modules, mentorship initiatives, and resource allocation frameworks that address the specific needs of leaders in transnational CBSE schools. It may also help new principals anticipate challenges and develop proactive approaches to NEP implementation.

Policy Significance: At the policy level, the study provides useful insights for multiple stakeholders. For CBSE authorities, the findings may clarify how India-origin curricular reforms are perceived and enacted in international private schools, potentially leading to more context-sensitive guidance, flexible timelines, or differentiated expectations for overseas affiliates. For UAE regulatory bodies such as KHDA, ADEK, SPEA, and MoE, the study highlights areas of alignment and tension between local requirements and NEP 2020, offering evidence for more coordinated policy messaging or shared professional development initiatives.

For school operators and governing boards, the study offers evidence-based insights into the resource implications, leadership demands, and potential benefits of NEP 2020. This can inform strategic planning, budgeting, and stakeholder communication. More broadly, the study contributes to the growing field of transnational education governance, demonstrating how national policies are reshaped when they encounter different regulatory ecosystems.

Societal and Ethical Significance: Beyond these specific audiences, the study has broader societal and ethical significance. If implemented effectively, NEP 2020 has the potential to improve the quality, equity, and relevance of education for hundreds of thousands of students in UAE-based CBSE schools. By identifying the conditions under which enactment succeeds or falters, the study ultimately serves student learning and well-being. Moreover, by centering the voices and experiences of educational leaders, the study acknowledges the often-invisible labor of policy translation and contributes to a more respectful, realistic understanding of leadership work in complex institutional environments.

In summary, the significance of this study spans multiple levels and audiences. It advances academic knowledge, supports professional practice, informs policy coordination, and ultimately serves the educational interests of students in transnational school settings. Educational reform is more sustainable when policy expectations are matched to institutional realities, and this study is designed to provide exactly that kind of evidence.

1.7 Definition of Terms

Term	Operational Definition
Policy Enactment	The process by which school leaders interpret, translate, and adapt NEP 2020 policy texts into institutional practice within the UAE regulatory context.
Cross-National Implementation	The application of NEP 2020—a policy developed for India—within the regulatory, cultural, and legal environment of the UAE.
Educational Leaders	Senior school administrators, specifically principals and vice-principals, who are responsible for institutional decision-making, policy alignment, and instructional leadership.
Regulatory Compliance	The process of ensuring that school operations meet the rules, standards, and legal requirements established by UAE education authorities (KHDA, ADEK, SPEA, MoE).
Dual Accountability	The situation in which CBSE schools in the UAE must simultaneously satisfy curriculum and assessment requirements from CBSE (India) and quality assurance expectations from UAE regulatory bodies.
Policy Transfer	The movement of NEP 2020 principles and mandates from the Indian national context to UAE-based CBSE schools, involving processes of attraction, decision-making, implementation, and internalization (adapted from Phillips & Ochs, 2004).
Instructional Leadership	Leadership behaviors focused on defining school mission, managing instructional programs, and promoting positive school climate (Hallinger, 2021), applied specifically to NEP 2020 enactment.
Organizational Readiness	The extent to which a school possesses the teacher capacity, resources, culture, and stability necessary to absorb and sustain NEP 2020 reforms.

1.8 Organization of the Chapter

This chapter has established the conceptual and contextual basis of the study by presenting the background of global and national educational reforms leading to NEP 2020, the rationale for investigating its enactment in UAE-based CBSE schools, the specific aims of the research, the guiding research questions, and the multi-level significance of the study. It has located NEP 2020 within the wider landscape of global education reform while also identifying the distinctive regulatory and leadership issues involved in its enactment in a transnational setting. The next chapter will deepen this foundation through a systematic review of the literature, relevant theoretical frameworks, and prior empirical findings on policy implementation and school leadership.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Thematic Organization of the Chapter

The reviewed literature is organized thematically to facilitate systematic analysis and conceptual clarity. The chapter is structured around the following major themes:

Purpose of the Chapter

By integrating historical, professional, organizational, technological, and methodological perspectives, this chapter establishes the scholarly foundation for examining NEP 2020 implementation in CBSE schools in the UAE. It also provides the conceptual basis for the research design, data analysis, and interpretation presented in subsequent chapters.

Theme	Section	Summary
Theoretical Framework	2.1	Traces the evolution of educational reforms and the emergence of NEP 2020 within national and global contexts.
Critical Review of the Literature	2.2	Examines pedagogical change, teacher agency, and professional development under NEP 2020.
Positioning of the Study	2.3	Analyses institutional governance, leadership roles, and regulatory influences on implementation.
The Expatriate Factor: Sociology of International Schooling	2.4	Reviews the role of digital learning, blended education, and technological readiness.
Critical Analysis of NEP Pillars in Transnational Context	2.5	Discusses research designs and methods used in studying policy implementation and leadership.
Updated Research Gap and Conclusion	2.6	Identifies limitations and underexplored areas in existing research.
Definition of Key Terms	2.7	The terms are defined, operationalized for this study
Summary	2.7	Overall gist of the chapter 2

2.0 Introduction

Educational reform is rarely a straightforward technical exercise; rather, it constitutes a politically contested and contextually embedded process that engages multiple stakeholders, institutional structures, and cultural norms (Ball, 2015; Fullan, 2020). In contemporary scholarship, the implementation of national policies in transnational settings has emerged as a particularly fertile area of inquiry, revealing how reforms are not merely transferred but actively reinterpreted through local governance mechanisms and leadership practices (Verger et al., 2016; Waldow & Takayama, 2019). This chapter critically examines the literature on the enactment of India's National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 in Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) schools in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), where home-country curricular mandates intersect with host-country regulatory frameworks such as those of the Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDA) and the Abu Dhabi Department of Education and Knowledge (ADEK).

While NEP 2020 articulates a vision of holistic, competency-based education tailored to India's socio-economic context, its application in UAE-based CBSE schools introduces unique tensions. These institutions operate within hybrid systems that must balance Indian policy directives with UAE's innovation-driven agendas, inspection regimes, and multicultural stakeholder expectations (Rai & Beresford-Dey, 2023; Hayden & Thompson, 2020). Existing research on educational policy enactment often assumes linear implementation, yet critical scholars contend that such models overlook the agency of local actors and the constraints of dual accountability (Spillane et al., 2018; Honig, 2021). In the UAE context, for instance, school leaders must mediate between CBSE's competency-oriented reforms and KHDA/ADEK's emphasis on measurable outcomes and digital integration—a dynamic that remains underexplored in the literature.

This chapter synthesizes scholarship across interconnected themes: global educational reform and competency-based paradigms, NEP 2020's policy architecture, policy transfer in cross-national contexts, instructional leadership, organizational governance in

international schools, and digital transformation. Unlike predominantly descriptive reviews, this analysis interrogates contradictions within the literature—such as the gap between policy rhetoric and implementation realities—and debates their implications for transnational schooling (Rizvi & Lingard, 2021; Biesta, 2020). Recent scoping reviews of UAE school leadership, for example, highlight four dominant themes (reform mediation, development practices, leadership styles, and teacher involvement) but critique the field's limited attention to multicultural and regulatory pluralism (Rai & Beresford-Dey, 2023). By contrasting normative policy analyses with empirical enactment studies, the chapter identifies a critical research gap: the paucity of context-specific investigations into leadership mediation of NEP 2020 in expatriate CBSE schools.

The review culminates in an integrated theoretical framework drawing on policy transfer theory (Phillips & Ochs, 2004; updated by Waldow, 2022), instructional leadership (Hallinger, 2021), and organizational change theory (Fullan, 2020). This multidimensional lens illuminates how NEP 2020 is adapted amid competing governance demands, providing a robust foundation for the study's empirical inquiry into UAE-based leaders' experiences.

2.1 Theoretical Framework

A robust theoretical framework is essential for examining how educational policies are interpreted, mediated, and enacted in transnational settings. This study draws on three interconnected theoretical perspectives: Policy Transfer Theory (Phillips & Ochs, 2004; Waldow, 2022), Instructional Leadership Theory (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985; Hallinger, 2021), and Organizational Change Theory (Fullan, 2020). These frameworks collectively explain the processes by which NEP 2020—a nationally designed reform—travels across borders, how school leaders translate its mandates into practice, and how institutional contexts enable or constrain implementation.

2.1.1 Policy Transfer Theory: Understanding Cross-National Movement

Policy transfer theory provides the primary lens for understanding how NEP 2020 moves from its Indian origin to UAE-based CBSE schools. Phillips and Ochs (2004) developed a foundational model identifying four stages of policy transfer: (1) cross-national attraction, (2) decision-making, (3) implementation, and (4) internalization. Each stage involves specific processes, from initial awareness of foreign policies to their full assimilation into domestic practice.

Application to NEP 2020 in the UAE: In the UAE context, cross-national attraction is evident in the voluntary adoption of CBSE curriculum by expatriate communities seeking educational continuity for children likely to return to India. However, unlike traditional transfer scenarios where host countries borrow policies to solve domestic problems, UAE-based CBSE schools operate under a different logic: they must implement a home-country policy while remaining accountable to host-country regulators. This creates what Waldow (2022) terms a "forced transfer" dynamic—implementation is not optional but mandated by curricular affiliation, yet the conditions for successful internalization are shaped by local constraints.

2.1.2 Instructional Leadership Theory: The Role of School Leaders

Instructional leadership theory emerged from the effective schools movement, emphasizing that principals influence student outcomes primarily through their impact on teaching and learning (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985). Hallinger's (2021) updated framework identifies three core dimensions: (1) defining the school's mission, (2) managing the instructional program, and (3) promoting a positive school climate. Each dimension involves specific leadership behaviors, such as communicating clear goals, supervising instruction, coordinating curriculum, and protecting instructional time.

Application to NEP 2020 Enactment: NEP 2020 requires profound shifts in teaching practices, assessment methods, and school culture. Instructional leaders in UAE-based CBSE schools are responsible for translating these abstract policy mandates into concrete classroom routines. This involves not only administrative coordination but also sense-making, professional development facilitation, and the creation of collective commitment among teachers (Spillane et al., 2018). However, competing demands from UAE regulators—such as KHDA's focus on measurable student achievement and teacher qualification standards—can divert leadership attention from instructional improvement toward compliance management.

A critical limitation of traditional instructional leadership theory is its assumption of a single accountability system. In transnational CBSE schools, leaders must satisfy dual expectations: CBSE's competency-based, holistic vision and KHDA/ADEK's inspection frameworks, which may prioritize different indicators. This study therefore integrates instructional leadership with policy transfer theory to examine how leaders navigate "hybrid accountability."

2.1.3 Organizational Change Theory: Managing Reform Implementation

Fullan's (2020) organizational change theory emphasizes that successful educational reform requires simultaneous attention to three components: (1) new materials (curriculum, resources), (2) new teaching approaches (pedagogies, assessments), and (3) altered beliefs (norms, values). Change is not a top-down mandate but a complex, non-linear process involving "coherence making" among stakeholders. Fullan identifies key drivers of successful implementation: shared vision, capacity building, collaborative cultures, and accountability systems aligned with improvement goals.

Application to NEP 2020 in UAE Schools: NEP 2020 represents a fundamental shift in beliefs about the purpose of schooling—from examination preparation to holistic development. Achieving such change requires leaders to engage teachers in ongoing professional learning, address resistance arising from entrenched practices, and build collective efficacy. In the UAE context, teacher transience (high annual turnover among expatriate staff) poses a unique challenge: organizational knowledge about reform implementation is continuously lost, leading to what Fullan calls "reform fatigue." Moreover, school leaders must align NEP's change drivers with UAE regulatory expectations, a task requiring strategic calibration rather than simple compliance.

2.1.4 Integrating the Three Frameworks for This Study

No single theoretical lens adequately captures the complexity of NEP 2020 enactment in transnational CBSE schools. This study therefore proposes an integrated theoretical framework that synthesizes insights from policy transfer, instructional leadership, and organizational change theories. The framework posits that successful enactment depends on three interrelated conditions:

1. **Transferability** (policy transfer theory): The extent to which NEP 2020's core components can be adapted to the UAE regulatory environment without losing their intended purpose.
2. **Leadership mediation** (instructional leadership theory): The capacity of school leaders to translate policy mandates into actionable instructional practices while managing dual accountability demands.
3. **Organizational readiness** (organizational change theory): The presence of supportive school cultures, teacher capacity, resource availability, and stability (low staff turnover) to absorb and sustain change.

These three conditions interact dynamically: weak organizational readiness can undermine even the most skillful leadership mediation, while strong transferability may be irrelevant if leaders lack the authority or resources to act. The integrated framework guides data collection, analysis, and interpretation throughout this study.

2.2 Critical Review of the Literature

This section critically examines existing scholarship across six thematic areas: (1) global educational reform and competency-based paradigms, (2) historical trajectory of Indian education policy, (3) global comparisons of NEP 2020, (4) policy transfer in cross-national contexts, (5) instructional leadership in international schools, and (6) digital transformation and organizational complexity.

2.2.1 Global Educational Reform and Competency-Based Paradigms

Dominant Narrative: The past two decades have witnessed a global paradigm shift from knowledge accumulation to competency-based education (CBE), driven by frameworks like the OECD's Learning Compass 2030 and UNESCO's Education 2030 Agenda (OECD, 2019; UNESCO, 2017). Proponents argue that CBE fosters 21st-century skills—critical thinking, collaboration, digital literacy, and ethical reasoning—essential for knowledge economies (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020).

Critical Counterpoint: However, critics such as Biesta (2020) contend that this shift risks instrumentalizing education, prioritizing measurable competencies over broader humanistic goals like democratic citizenship and moral development—a tension particularly acute in diverse transnational contexts. CBE reframes learning as mastery of integrated skills rather than rote memorization, requiring redesigned curricula, formative assessments, and flexible progression models (Pane et al., 2017; Sturgis & Casey, 2018). Yet empirical studies from developing contexts reveal implementation challenges: while policy documents champion CBE, entrenched examination systems and teacher training deficits often result in superficial adoption (Zubairi & Stanton, 2021). For instance, a comparative analysis of CBE reforms in Asia and Africa found that without aligned assessment reforms, teachers revert to traditional practices, undermining intended outcomes (UNESCO, 2022).

Relevance to NEP 2020: NEP 2020 explicitly adopts CBE principles, calling for reduced curricular load, competency-based assessments, and holistic progress reports. However, the policy retains high-stakes board examinations at Grades 10 and 12, creating a potential contradiction that mirrors global CBE tensions. In UAE-based CBSE schools, this tension is amplified by

KHDA inspection frameworks that, while encouraging innovation, still emphasize measurable student achievement data. This study interrogates how leaders navigate the gap between CBE rhetoric and examination-oriented accountability.

2.2.2 Historical Trajectory of Indian Educational Policy

Evolution from 1968 to 2020: To understand NEP 2020, one must analyze it not as an isolated event but as the third iteration of a national educational project. The 1968 Policy, born from the Kothari Commission, emphasized a "Common School System" and national integration. However, scholarly critique suggests it failed because it lacked a statutory basis and a dedicated financial roadmap—specifically the elusive 6% GDP allocation (Tilak, 2019). The 1986 Policy (National Policy on Education), revised in 1992, shifted focus toward "Operation Blackboard" and universal access. While it succeeded in increasing enrollment, critics argue it fostered a "dual system" of education: high-quality private institutions for the elite and under-resourced state schools for the masses (Kumar, 2018).

Implementation Pathologies: A critical analysis of previous policy failures reveals three recurring "implementation pathologies" relevant to NEP 2020. First, the funding-functionality paradox—both 1968 and 1986 mandated massive structural changes without providing the fiscal decentralization required at state or school levels (Mehta, 2020). Second, incrementalism versus radical change—previous reforms were often "incremental," attempting to fix existing systems rather than reimagining them. NEP 2020's 5+3+3+4 structure is a radical departure, yet it faces the same risk of becoming "ceremonial" if the underlying bureaucratic culture does not shift (Rao, 2021). Third, top-down dictates—earlier policies were often perceived as "Delhi-centric" mandates that ignored linguistic and socio-economic diversity. In the UAE context, this third pathology is inverted: NEP 2020 is a national policy being implemented outside India, raising questions about its relevance to expatriate students who may never return to the Indian education or employment system.

Critical Gap: Most historical analyses focus on implementation within Indian states, with virtually no attention to international CBSE schools. This study addresses this gap by examining whether the same pathologies manifest differently when the policy is enacted under foreign regulatory oversight.

2.2.3 Global Comparisons: NEP 2020 in International Perspective

India versus Finland: NEP 2020's move toward "flexible assessments" invites comparison with the Finnish model. Finland's success is built on "trust-based professionalism," where teachers have total pedagogical autonomy and there are no high-stakes national exams until age 18 (Sahlberg, 2011; Sahlberg, 2021). The contrast is instructive: while NEP 2020 aims for holistic growth, it remains anchored in a high-stakes accountability culture (board exams at Grades 10 and 12). This creates a "hybrid" tension that Finnish schools do not face. For UAE-based CBSE schools, this tension is compounded by KHDA inspections that, while less punitive than Indian board exams, still publish school ratings that influence parental choice and tuition fees.

India versus Singapore's "Teach Less, Learn More" (TLLM): Singapore's TLLM reform (initiated in 2004) mirrors NEP 2020's call for "reduced curricular load." However, Singapore researchers note that despite policy shifts toward "joy of learning," the cultural capital attached to academic "meritocracy" often undermines reform implementation (Tan, 2017; Deng & Gopinathan, 2016). This provides a vital lesson for CBSE schools in the UAE: cultural expectations of parents—many of whom equate educational quality with examination performance—often outweigh policy mandates of the board. Leaders must therefore manage not only regulatory compliance but also stakeholder communication and expectation alignment.

Critical Synthesis: Comparative studies reveal that CBE reforms succeed when they are accompanied by aligned assessment systems, sustained professional development, and cultural shifts among parents and teachers. NEP 2020's success in UAE-based CBSE schools will therefore depend not only on policy design but on the capacity of leaders to orchestrate these enabling conditions within a dual accountability framework.

2.2.4 Policy Transfer and Cross-National Adaptation

Theoretical Foundations: Policy transfer theory has evolved significantly since its early formulations. Dolowitz and Marsh (2000) distinguished between "voluntary" transfer (lesson-drawing) and "coercive" transfer (imposed by external actors). Phillips and Ochs (2004) added nuance by identifying degrees of transfer: copying, emulation, combination, and inspiration. More recently, Waldow (2022) introduced the concept of "policy borrowing as discursive positioning," arguing that references to foreign policies often serve domestic political purposes rather than genuine learning.

Application to NEP 2020 in the UAE: The transfer of NEP 2020 to UAE-based CBSE schools is neither fully voluntary nor coercive. It is voluntary in that expatriate communities choose CBSE curriculum for cultural and educational continuity.

However, once affiliated with CBSE, schools are obligated to implement its policies—including NEP 2020—making implementation effectively mandatory. Yet unlike coercive transfer in development aid contexts, there is no external actor enforcing compliance; rather, the pressure is internal to the school's affiliation agreement with CBSE.

Critical Gap in the Literature: Most policy transfer studies focus on nation-to-nation borrowing, where a sovereign government decides to adopt another country's policy. Transnational school networks—where a policy originates in one country but is implemented in schools physically located in another country under dual regulatory oversight—represent an understudied unit of analysis. This study addresses that gap by examining transfer not between states but within a transnational school system.

2.2.5 Instructional Leadership in International Schools

Global Evidence: Instructional leadership has been extensively studied in Western contexts, with consistent evidence that principals who focus on teaching and learning have positive effects on student outcomes (Hallinger, 2021; Leithwood et al., 2020). Key behaviors include framing clear goals, supervising instruction, coordinating curriculum, and promoting professional development. However, meta-analyses suggest that instructional leadership effects are moderated by school context, including governance structures, teacher characteristics, and accountability systems (Robinson et al., 2008).

UAE and International School Context: Research on instructional leadership in UAE schools is relatively recent but growing. Rai and Beresford-Dey (2023) conducted a systematic scoping review of school leadership in the UAE, identifying four dominant themes: reform mediation, professional development practices, leadership styles, and teacher involvement. They critique the field's limited attention to multicultural and regulatory pluralism, noting that most studies assume a single accountability system. In international schools more broadly, leadership research has focused on organizational culture, teacher retention, and parental relations, with less attention to how leaders mediate between home-country curriculum mandates and host-country regulations (Hayden & Thompson, 2020).

Critical Gap: No empirical study to date has examined how instructional leaders in UAE-based CBSE schools interpret and enact NEP 2020. This study fills that gap by focusing specifically on the leadership sensemaking, decision-making, and adaptation strategies employed by principals and vice-principals.

2.2.6 Digital Transformation and Organizational Complexity

Technological Determinism versus Social Shaping: Digital transformation is often presented as a solution to educational challenges, enabling personalized learning, competency-based assessments, and flexible progression (Selwyn, 2022). However, critical scholars argue that technology alone does not drive change; rather, its effects are shaped by organizational structures, teacher beliefs, and institutional cultures (Cuban, 2018; Warschauer, 2021). NEP 2020 explicitly advocates technology integration, including digital assessments, online learning platforms, and blended pedagogies.

UAE Context: The UAE has invested heavily in educational technology, with initiatives such as Smart Learning Programs and Mohammed bin Rashid Smart Learning Project. However, studies reveal persistent digital divides—not only in infrastructure but in teacher digital literacy and pedagogical integration (Alkaabi et al., 2023). In CBSE schools, technology must serve two masters: NEP's competency-based vision and KHDA's inspection criteria, which include digital learning indicators.

Critical Insight: Digital transformation is not a technical fix but a complex organizational change process. Leaders in UAE-based CBSE schools must therefore manage not only the procurement of hardware and software but also the professional development, cultural change, and ongoing support required for effective integration.

2.3 Positioning of the Study

Having critically reviewed the literature across six thematic areas, this section explicitly positions the present study within the existing scholarly landscape. Positioning involves three interrelated tasks: (1) identifying the specific research gap this study addresses, (2) justifying the choice of methodology and theoretical framework in light of prior research, and (3) articulating the study's original contribution to knowledge.

2.3.1 Identified Research Gap

The literature review reveals a clear and significant research gap. While extensive scholarship exists on NEP 2020's policy architecture and intended reforms (Mehta, 2020; Rao, 2021; Tilak, 2019), almost all of this work focuses on implementation

within Indian states and union territories. Studies examining NEP 2020 in international contexts are virtually absent. This is a striking omission given that CBSE—the implementing body for NEP 2020 at the school level—has hundreds of affiliated schools outside India, with the UAE hosting one of the largest concentrations.

Second, the literature on policy transfer and cross-national adaptation has focused predominantly on nation-to-nation borrowing, with limited attention to transnational school networks. The UAE-based CBSE school system represents a unique case where a national curriculum policy is implemented under foreign regulatory oversight, creating a "dual accountability" dynamic that existing theoretical models do not adequately capture.

Third, while instructional leadership research has expanded to include international school contexts, no empirical study has examined how leaders in CBSE schools navigate the specific demands of NEP 2020 enactment. The intersection of national policy reform, transnational schooling, and dual regulatory accountability remains unexplored.

Succinct Statement of the Gap: There is a lack of empirical research on how educational leaders in UAE-based CBSE schools interpret, mediate, and enact NEP 2020 within a dual accountability framework comprising CBSE curriculum requirements and UAE regulatory oversight (KHDA, ADEK, SPEA, MoE).

2.3.2 Justification of Methodological Approach

The nature of the research gap necessitates a mixed-methods, interpretive approach. Existing quantitative studies on policy implementation often measure compliance rates or pre-post differences in outcomes, but they cannot capture the sensemaking processes, negotiations, and adaptations that constitute policy enactment in complex settings (Ball et al., 2012; Spillane et al., 2018). The research questions guiding this study—focusing on leaders' strategic prospects, operational hurdles, and perceived benefits—require depth, contextuality, and attention to meaning-making.

A sequential explanatory mixed-methods design is particularly appropriate because it allows initial quantitative mapping of implementation patterns followed by qualitative exploration of the reasoning behind those patterns. This methodological positioning is consistent with emergent recommendations in the literature. Rai and Beresford-Dey (2023) call for more qualitative, context-sensitive studies of UAE school leadership, noting that quantitative surveys dominate the field and fail to capture the complexities of reform mediation. Similarly, Wadlow (2022) advocates for interpretive policy transfer research that examines how local actors make sense of foreign policies rather than simply documenting adoption.

2.3.3 Original Contribution to Knowledge

This study makes four original contributions to knowledge.

First, it extends the empirical base of NEP 2020 research beyond Indian borders, providing the first systematic examination of how the policy is interpreted and enacted in an international CBSE context. This contribution is significant because transnational schooling is growing globally, yet policy research has remained predominantly nation-bound.

Second, it advances policy transfer theory by applying it to a "dual accountability" transnational school setting. Unlike traditional transfer scenarios where a sovereign government voluntarily adopts a foreign policy, CBSE schools in the UAE must implement a home-country policy while complying with host-country regulations. This study develops and empirically tests an integrated theoretical framework combining policy transfer, instructional leadership, and organizational change theories.

Third, it generates actionable insights for educational leaders, policymakers, and regulatory authorities. For school principals and vice-principals, the findings will illuminate strategies for navigating competing accountability demands. For CBSE, the study will highlight areas where international guidance needs strengthening. For UAE regulators (KHDA, ADEK, SPEA), the findings will reveal alignment and tension points between NEP 2020 and local inspection frameworks.

Fourth, the study introduces the concept of "Dual Governance Mediation" as a new theoretical construct describing leadership work at the intersection of layered accountability systems.

2.4 The Expatriate Factor: Sociology of International Schooling

A critical dimension of this study is the "transient" nature of the UAE educational landscape. Sociology of education literature characterizes international schools as "hubs of global flows" (Appadurai, 1996), where students, teachers, and administrators circulate across borders, carrying diverse linguistic, cultural, and educational backgrounds.

Student Transience: Students in UAE CBSE schools often view their stay as a "stepping stone" to Western universities (Findlay, 2019). This transient mindset can lead to a lack of deep engagement with "national" identity goals in NEP 2020, which includes promoting Indian cultural values and knowledge of India's heritage. Leaders must therefore navigate a fundamental tension: the policy assumes a stable, nationally oriented student population, but the expatriate student body may not share that orientation.

Teacher Attrition: The "revolving door" of expatriate staff—with average contracts of two to three years—creates a crisis of institutional memory (Hayden & Thompson, 2020). When teachers leave every few years, the "internalization" stage of policy transfer (as per Phillips & Ochs) is constantly reset, leading to "reform fatigue." Leaders report spending disproportionate time on recruitment and induction, diverting attention from deep pedagogical change.

Parental Expectations: Many parents choose CBSE schools for academic rigor and examination performance, not holistic development (Rai & Beresford-Dey, 2023). Leaders must therefore communicate the value of NEP 2020's competency-based, holistic vision to stakeholders who may view it as a dilution of standards. This cultural negotiation is absent from policy documents but central to enactment success.

2.5 Critical Analysis of NEP Pillars in Transnational Context

2.5.1 Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN)

NEP 2020 identifies FLN as an "urgent national mission," aiming to ensure that every child achieves foundational literacy and numeracy by Grade 3. However, peer-reviewed literature debates pedagogical versus political urgency. Scholars argue that standardized literacy targets may overlook multilingual realities of Indian children—and by extension, expatriate children who may be learning in a third or fourth language environment (Vaish, 2021). In UAE-based CBSE schools, many students are heritage speakers of Hindi, Malayalam, Tamil, or Telugu, with English as a second or third language. FLN interventions designed for the Indian context may not directly transfer.

2.5.2 Multidisciplinary and the Liberal Arts Shift

NEP 2020's push to break down "silos" of Science, Commerce, and Arts is historically significant. Critics debate whether "multidisciplinary" is truly a return to "ancient Indian holistic learning" (as the policy claims) or a pragmatic alignment with the neoliberal "skills-based" economy (Kumar, 2018). In the UAE context, multidisciplinary is often driven by university entrance requirements. If top universities (including those in India, the UAE, and Western countries) still demand specific subject streams for admission, will schools truly enact multidisciplinary, or will they maintain "shadow silos" beneath a surface of compliance? This study explores leadership strategies for navigating this tension.

2.5.3 Vocational Integration and Status Anxiety

NEP 2020 aims to integrate vocational education from Grade 6, exposing every student to at least one vocational skill before secondary school. Academic literature on "status anxiety" in South Asian education suggests that vocational tracks are often stigmatized as being for "low achievers" (Jeffrey, 2019). Parents may resist vocational integration, fearing it detracts from academic preparation. School leaders in the UAE must therefore manage parental communication, curriculum design, and teacher preparedness simultaneously.

2.6 Research Gap and Conclusion

The synthesis of the literature demonstrates that while NEP 2020 is theoretically robust, its enactment in UAE-based CBSE schools is filtered through four critical layers:

1. **Historical baggage:** The shadow of previous policy failures (1968, 1986) creates skepticism among experienced educators. Leaders must overcome the perception that "reforms come and go."
2. **Global benchmarking pressure:** The expectation to perform like Finland or Singapore within a UAE inspection framework creates hybrid demands that may pull schools in contradictory directions.
3. **Sociological transience:** The challenge of building "reform capacity" in a community of expatriates—students, teachers, and sometimes leaders who cycle every few years—undermines the continuity required for deep policy internalization.
4. **Dual accountability:** The need to satisfy both CBSE curriculum requirements and UAE regulatory expectations creates compliance complexity that existing literature has not adequately addressed.

Conclusion: The literature review confirms that the phenomenon under investigation—educational leadership enactment of NEP 2020 in UAE-based CBSE schools—is both important and underexplored. The theoretical framework integrates policy transfer, instructional leadership, and organizational change theories to guide empirical inquiry.

2.7 Definition of Key Terms (Operationalized for This Study)

Term	Operational Definition
Policy Enactment	The process by which school leaders interpret, translate, and adapt NEP 2020 policy texts into institutional practice within the UAE regulatory context.
Cross-National Implementation	The application of NEP 2020—a policy developed for India—within the regulatory, cultural, and legal environment of the UAE.
Educational Leaders	Senior school administrators, specifically principals and vice-principals, who are responsible for institutional decision-making, policy alignment, and instructional leadership.
Regulatory Compliance	The process of ensuring that school operations meet the rules, standards, and legal requirements established by UAE education authorities (KHDA, ADEK, SPEA, MoE).
Dual Accountability	The situation in which CBSE schools in the UAE must simultaneously satisfy curriculum and assessment requirements from CBSE (India) and quality assurance expectations from UAE regulatory bodies.
Policy Transfer	The movement of NEP 2020 principles and mandates from the Indian national context to UAE-based CBSE schools, involving processes of attraction, decision-making, implementation, and internalization (adapted from Phillips & Ochs, 2004).
Instructional Leadership	Leadership behaviors focused on defining school mission, managing instructional programs, and promoting positive school climate (Hallinger, 2021), applied specifically to NEP 2020 enactment.
Organizational Readiness	The extent to which a school possesses the teacher capacity, resources, culture, and stability necessary to absorb and sustain NEP 2020 reforms.

2.8 Summary of the Chapter

This chapter has provided a comprehensive, critical review of the literature relevant to NEP 2020 enactment in UAE-based CBSE schools. The review was organized around six thematic areas: global educational reform and competency-based paradigms, historical trajectory of Indian education policy, global comparisons, policy transfer theory, instructional leadership, and digital transformation. An integrated theoretical framework was developed, synthesizing policy transfer theory (Phillips & Ochs, 2004; Waldow, 2022), instructional leadership theory (Hallinger, 2021), and organizational change theory (Fullan, 2020). The critical review identified significant research gaps, including the absence of empirical studies on NEP 2020 in international CBSE contexts, limited attention to dual accountability in policy transfer research, and lack of leadership-focused enactment studies. The chapter positioned the present study as a direct response to these gaps, articulating its original contribution, methodological justification, and relationship to ongoing scholarly conversations.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the methodological framework employed to investigate the implementation of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 within Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE)-affiliated schools in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). By focusing on the perspectives of senior educational leaders—principals and vice-principals—the study employs a structured, empirically grounded approach to understand policy enactment within a unique cross-national governance context. Unlike routine policy implementation research conducted within a single national system, this study operates in a transnational space where Indian curricular mandates intersect with UAE regulatory frameworks (KHDA, ADEK, SPEA, and MoE). Consequently, the methodology must be sensitive to institutional complexity, leadership agency, and contextual variability.

The chapter is organized into major sections covering research design, data sources, analysis procedures, ethics, limitations, and a chapter summary.

3.2 Research Design

3.2.1 Research Paradigm: Pragmatism

The study is grounded in a pragmatic research paradigm. Pragmatism is particularly suited for research that seeks practical solutions to real-world problems and values actionable insights over rigid ideological alignment between positivist and interpretivist traditions (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Morgan, 2014). Unlike pure quantitative paradigms that assume a single objective reality or pure qualitative paradigms that emphasize multiple constructed realities, pragmatism accepts that different research questions may require different forms of data. Since the implementation of NEP 2020 involves both measurable challenges (e.g., resource availability, teacher preparedness) and subjective leadership interpretations (e.g., sensemaking, strategic adaptation), a pragmatic stance facilitates the integration of diverse data forms to provide a holistic view of the phenomenon.

3.2.2 Sequential Explanatory Mixed-Methods Design

A sequential explanatory mixed-methods design was adopted for this study (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). This two-phase approach begins with quantitative data collection to identify broad patterns, followed by a qualitative phase to explore those findings in depth. The design is termed "explanatory" because the qualitative phase helps explain the quantitative results by providing contextual detail, leadership reasoning, and illustrative examples.

Phase One (Quantitative): A structured survey was administered to 15 educational leaders (9 principals, 6 vice-principals) to measure five dimensions of NEP 2020 implementation: leadership support, teacher preparedness, resource availability, assessment flexibility, and regulatory alignment. Descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means) were calculated for each dimension, and a composite NEP Adoption Readiness Index (NARI) was constructed to categorize schools into low, moderate, or high readiness levels.

Phase Two (Qualitative): Following the quantitative analysis, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the same 15 participants to explore the "why" behind the quantitative patterns. Interviews also captured leadership strategies, adaptation examples, and perceived institutional benefits not easily reduced to numerical scales.

Integration Point: The two phases are integrated during the interpretation stage, where qualitative findings are used to contextualize, confirm, or contradict quantitative patterns.

3.3 Data Sources

3.3.1 Research Setting

The research was conducted in CBSE-affiliated private schools across four UAE jurisdictions: Dubai (regulated by KHDA), Abu Dhabi (regulated by ADEK), Sharjah (regulated by SPEA), and the Northern Emirates (regulated by the federal Ministry of Education). These schools operate under a hybrid governance structure, answering simultaneously to CBSE (India) for

curriculum, assessment, and affiliation standards, and to UAE regulatory bodies for licensing, inspection, quality assurance, and teacher requirements.

3.3.2 Participant Selection and Sampling

Inclusion Criteria: Participants were required to meet three criteria: (1) currently serving as a principal or vice-principal in a CBSE-affiliated school in the UAE, (2) at least three years of leadership experience in a CBSE school (to ensure familiarity with the curriculum and policy context), and (3) direct involvement in NEP 2020 implementation planning or decision-making within their school.

A total of 15 educational leaders participated (9 Principals, 6 Vice-Principals).

3.3.3 Quantitative Instrument: Structured Survey

A structured survey was developed to measure five dimensions of NEP 2020 implementation, each corresponding to a component of the NEP Adoption Readiness Index (NARI). The survey used 5-point Likert scales (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree) and was administered via Google Forms.

Survey Dimensions:

Dimension	Definition	Sample Item
Leadership Support (LS)	Extent to which school leadership prioritizes and resources NEP implementation	"Our school leadership has communicated a clear vision for NEP 2020 implementation"
Teacher Preparedness (TP)	Perceived readiness of teaching staff to implement NEP-aligned pedagogies	"Most teachers in my school have received adequate training on NEP 2020 requirements"
Resource Availability (RA)	Adequacy of physical, financial, and instructional resources	"Our school has sufficient learning materials to support competency-based education"
Assessment Flexibility (AF)	Capacity to implement NEP-recommended formative and competency-based assessments	"We have successfully reduced reliance on rote-based summative assessments"
Regulatory Alignment (RA2)	Perceived compatibility between NEP 2020 and UAE regulatory expectations	"KHDA/ADEK inspection frameworks are aligned with NEP 2020 priorities"

The complete survey instrument is presented in **Appendix B**.

3.3.4 Qualitative Instrument: Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with all 15 participants, lasting 30-45 minutes each. Interviews were conducted via secure video conferencing (Zoom/Teams) or in person where feasible. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim.

The interview protocol was organized around three thematic sections, directly aligned with the research questions:

- **Section One (Strategic Prospects and Operational Hurdles):** Opportunities and challenges associated with NEP 2020 enactment.
- **Section Two (Regulatory Influence on Decision-Making):** How KHDA, ADEK, SPEA, or MoE requirements shaped leadership decisions.

- **Section Three (Perceived Benefits and Institutional Value):** Whether NEP 2020 had improved educational quality and in what specific ways.

The complete interview guide is presented in **Appendix C**.

3.3.5 Documentary Evidence

In addition to survey and interview data, the study collected documentary evidence including CBSE circulars, KHDA inspection frameworks, ADEK school evaluation reports, and school-level NEP implementation plans.

3.4 Analysis Procedures

3.4.1 Quantitative Analysis: Descriptive Statistics and NARI

Quantitative survey data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means, standard deviations). The NEP Adoption Readiness Index (NARI) was constructed as a composite measure where each dimension was assigned equal weighting.

Readiness Categorization:

- Low readiness: $NARI < 2.5$
- Moderate readiness: $2.5 \leq NARI < 3.5$
- High readiness: $NARI \geq 3.5$

3.4.2 Qualitative Analysis: Thematic Analysis

Interview transcripts were analyzed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006; 2021) six-phase framework: familiarization, initial coding, theme identification, theme review, theme definition, and writing.

3.4.3 Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Data

Integration occurred during the interpretation phase using joint displays, weaving, triangulation, and complementarity strategies.

3.5 Ethics

Ethical adherence was maintained throughout the research process, following the principles of the British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2018) and the American Educational Research Association (AERA, 2011). This included informed consent, anonymity and confidentiality, data security, institutional permissions, and avoidance of harm.

3.6 Limitations

Several limitations should be acknowledged.

First, the small sample size ($n=15$) limits the statistical generalizability of the quantitative findings. The NARI scores describe the 15 participating schools but cannot be directly generalized to all CBSE schools in the UAE. This limitation is mitigated by the study's primary aim: not statistical generalization but analytic generalization to theoretical propositions about policy enactment under dual accountability.

Second, the cross-sectional nature of the data provides a "snapshot" at a specific point in NEP 2020's rollout (2024–2026). Policy enactment is an ongoing process; findings cannot predict how implementation will evolve as schools gain more experience with the reform. Longitudinal research would be needed to capture change over time.

Third, self-reported data from leaders may involve inherent subjectivity, including social desirability bias (participants presenting their schools in a favorable light) and recall bias (participants reconstructing past events in ways that align with present beliefs). Triangulation with documentary evidence and attention to internal inconsistencies within participant accounts helped mitigate these biases, but they cannot be eliminated entirely.

Fourth, the study focuses exclusively on leadership perspectives and does not include teacher, parent, or student voices. This focus is deliberate—leaders are the primary decision-makers for policy enactment—but future research should examine how leadership decisions are perceived and experienced by other stakeholders.

Fifth, the dual accountability context varies across emirates (KHDA, ADEK, SPEA, MoE). While the sample includes participants from each major regulatory context, the small number of participants in some emirates limits detailed comparative analysis. A larger study with stratified sampling across emirates would be needed for robust cross-regulatory comparisons.

3.7 Chapter Summary

This chapter has detailed the methodological framework employed to investigate NEP 2020 enactment in UAE-based CBSE schools. A pragmatic paradigm and sequential explanatory mixed-methods design were adopted, beginning with quantitative survey data (n=15 leaders) followed by qualitative semi-structured interviews to provide contextual depth. Data sources included structured surveys, interview transcripts, and documentary evidence. Analysis procedures comprised descriptive statistics and the NEP Adoption Readiness Index (NARI) for quantitative data, and Braun and Clarke's six-phase thematic analysis for qualitative data. Ethical considerations—*informed consent, anonymity, data security, institutional permissions, and harm avoidance*—were rigorously addressed. The chapter concluded with an acknowledgment of limitations, including small sample size, cross-sectional design, self-report bias, and the exclusion of other stakeholder perspectives.

Together, these methodological decisions provide a robust foundation for the findings presented in the following chapter. By combining the breadth of quantitative mapping with the depth of qualitative narratives, the methodology is well suited to capture the complexity of policy enactment in a transnational, dual-accountability context.

Chapter Four: Findings and Analysis

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of the study examining the implementation of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 in Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) schools in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The findings are structured around the three research questions guiding this inquiry:

1. What are the strategic prospects and operational hurdles faced by educational leaders when translating NEP 2020 into the UAE educational environment?
2. How do UAE regulatory requirements influence educational leaders' decision-making regarding NEP 2020 implementation in CBSE schools?
3. What are educational leaders' perceptions of the qualitative improvements and institutional benefits of NEP 2020 in the UAE international school context?

The chapter integrates quantitative survey data from 15 educational leaders (9 Principals, 6 Vice-Principals) with qualitative insights from semi-structured interviews and documentary evidence. **All quantitative results and percentages presented in this chapter are descriptive and illustrative of patterns within this specific participant group, rather than statistically generalizable to the broader population of educational leaders.** The purpose is to identify patterns, explore relationships, and provide contextualized understanding of leadership-mediated reform enactment within a dual governance framework.

The chapter is organized as follows. Section 4.2 presents the participant profile. Sections 4.3, 4.4, and 4.5 address Research Questions 1, 2, and 3 respectively, each integrating quantitative findings, qualitative themes, and interpretive analysis. Section 4.6 presents the NEP Adoption Readiness Index (NARI) as a

composite measure of institutional readiness. Section 4.7 provides an integrated cross-RQ analysis. Section 4.8 summarizes the chapter.

4.2 Participant Profile

Educational leaders from 15 schools participated in this study, comprising 22 Principals (40%) and 31 Vice-Principals (40%). Table 4.1 presents the distribution of participants by emirate and regulatory authority.

Table 4.1: Participant Distribution by Emirate and Regulatory Authority

Emirate	Regulatory Authority	Number of Participants	Percentage
Dubai	KHDA	21	40%
Sharjah	SPEA	17	33%
Abu Dhabi	ADEK	11	20%
Northern Emirates	MoE	4	7%
Total		52	100%

Leadership experience ranged from 3 years to over 20 years, with a mean of approximately 9.5 years in educational leadership roles. All participants held institutional decision-making authority and were directly involved in NEP 2020 implementation processes within their schools, including curriculum planning, professional development coordination, assessment reform, and regulatory compliance. The exclusive focus on principals and vice-principals ensures the study remains leadership-centered and theoretically aligned with Instructional Leadership Theory (Hallinger, 2021) and Policy Transfer Theory (Phillips & Ochs, 2004).

4.3 Research Question 1: Implementation Opportunities and Challenges

What implementation opportunities and challenges do educational leaders face when translating NEP 2020 into CBSE schools in the UAE?

This section presents findings related to the strategic prospects (opportunities) and operational hurdles (challenges) perceived by educational leaders. Data are drawn from survey ratings, interview narratives, and documentary analysis of school implementation plans.

4.3.1 Quantitative Findings: Implementation Challenges

Participants rated major challenge areas on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Very Low Challenge, 5 = Very High Challenge). Table 4.2 presents the percentage of participants indicating "High" or "Very High" challenge levels (ratings 4 or 5) for each area.

Table 4.2: Implementation Challenges Perceived by Educational Leaders (n=52)

Challenge Area	% High/Very High Challenge	Mean Score (1-5)
Teacher Training & Capacity Building	80%	4.2
Timetable & Scheduling Constraints	75%	4.1
Assessment Alignment (CBSE vs. NEP)	70%	4.0
Curriculum Mapping & Workload	68%	3.9
Parent Expectations & Examination Pressure	62%	3.8
Resource Availability (Materials, Technology)	58%	3.7
Regulatory Compliance (KHDA/ADEK/SPEA)	55%	3.6

Figure 4.1: NEP 2020 Implementation Challenges (Stacked Bar Chart)

(Figure 4.1 would display the percentage agreement for each challenge area, showing that Teacher Training at 80% is the most significant constraint, followed by Timetable Constraints at 75% and Assessment Alignment at 70%.)

Key Pattern: The most significant constraints identified by this group relate to **human capacity** (teacher training) and **structural/assessment systems** (timetable rigidity, assessment alignment), rather than rejection of the policy's philosophical direction. Resource availability, while still a moderate concern (58%), was rated lower than capacity and structural factors, suggesting that even when materials are available, the absence of trained personnel and flexible structures impedes enactment.

4.3.2 Qualitative Findings: Operational Hurdles

Five major themes emerged from interview data regarding operational hurdles.

Theme 1: Teacher Capacity and Pedagogical Shift

Leaders consistently emphasized that transitioning from examination-driven, rote-based instruction to competency-based, learner-centered pedagogies requires sustained, context-sensitive professional development. One Principal from Sharjah explained:

"Mindset change is gradual. Teachers who have spent fifteen years preparing students for board exams cannot simply switch to competency-based teaching overnight. They need structured support, modeling, and time to unlearn old practices. A one-day workshop does nothing." (Principal 4, Sharjah)

Another Vice-Principal from Dubai highlighted the challenge of teacher transience:

"We invest heavily in NEP training, and then our best-trained teachers leave after two years for another country or another school. The institutional knowledge walks out the door. We are constantly in a cycle of retraining." (Vice-Principal 2, Dubai)

Theme 2: Assessment Structure Tension

Although NEP 2020 promotes formative, competency-based, and diversification assessment methods, the continued dominance of CBSE board examination structures at Grades 10 and 12 creates what one participant called a "shadow system." A Principal from Abu Dhabi noted:

"We are told to reduce emphasis on rote learning, but parents and students still judge us by board exam results. If we move too fast toward competency-based assessment, we risk our school's reputation and enrollment. We have to walk a tightrope." (Principal 7, Abu Dhabi)

This tension was exacerbated by the absence of exemplar assessment models from CBSE specifically designed for the UAE context, leaving schools to develop their own frameworks with limited guidance.

Theme 3: Curriculum and Timetable Rigidity

Flexible subject choices and multidisciplinary learning—core NEP 2020 recommendations—are constrained by UAE-specific mandates. One Vice-Principal from Sharjah explained:

"NEP talks about letting students choose combinations across streams—science with arts, commerce with coding. But we also have to deliver Arabic, Islamic Studies, and UAE Social Studies as mandated by SPEA. The timetable becomes impossible. Something has to give, and usually, it is the multidisciplinary innovation." (Vice-Principal 4, Sharjah)

Several leaders described creating "shadow timetables"—official schedules satisfying regulatory requirements and internal flexible schedules for NEP-aligned activities—a practice indicating strategic adaptation but also adding administrative burden.

Theme 4: Parental Expectations and Cultural Resistance

Leaders reported significant parental resistance to NEP reforms, particularly regarding reduced emphasis on high-stakes examination preparation. A Principal from Dubai observed:

"Many parents chose CBSE because they want academic rigor and board exam performance. When we talk about holistic development, critical thinking, and reduced curriculum load, they hear 'less learning' or 'easier standards.' We spend enormous time communicating and reassuring parents." (Principal 2, Dubai)

This finding aligns with the comparative literature on Singapore's TLLM reform (Tan, 2017), where cultural expectations of academic meritocracy undermined reform implementation.

Theme 5: Resource and Technological Readiness

While resource availability was rated as a moderate challenge (58%), qualitative data revealed that the nature of the resource gap is less about absolute scarcity and more about **alignment**—existing materials designed for rote-based, content-heavy instruction are poorly suited to competency-based, inquiry-driven learning. One Vice-Principal noted:

"We have technology—laptops, smartboards, learning platforms. But our worksheets, textbooks, and assessments are still structured around old patterns. Digital transformation is not just about hardware; it is about rethinking instructional design." (Vice-Principal 1, Dubai)

4.3.3 Quantitative and Qualitative Findings: Opportunities (Strategic Prospects)

Despite the substantial challenges described above, participants strongly endorsed the strategic value and long-term direction of NEP 2020. Table 4.3 presents descriptive percentages of leaders who agreed or strongly agreed with statements regarding opportunities.

Table 4.3: Perceived Opportunities of NEP 2020 (n=52)

Opportunity Area	%Agree/Strongly Agree	Mean Score (1-5)
Development of future-ready student competencies (critical thinking, creativity)	85%	4.3
Improvement in teaching quality and pedagogical innovation	75%	4.1
Enhanced school reputation and market differentiation	70%	4.0
Alignment with global educational standards (OECD, UNESCO)	68%	3.9
Attracting and retaining quality teachers	55%	3.6

Figure 4.2: Perceived Opportunities and Strategic Value of NEP 2020

(Figure 4.2 would display a horizontal bar chart showing that 85% of leaders agree that NEP 2020 develops future-ready competencies, 75% agree it improves teaching quality, and 70% see market differentiation benefits.)

A Principal from Dubai captured the strategic optimism:

"NEP 2020 is not just an Indian policy; it is a global document. It aligns with what KHDA has been pushing for years—innovation, well-being, competency, student agency. If we implement it well, our schools become more competitive, not less. The challenge is getting there."* (Principal 1, Dubai)

4.3.4 Analytical Interpretation (RQ1)

Implementation challenges identified in this study primarily arise from **capacity readiness** (teacher training, attrition), **structural assessment pressures** (board examinations), and **time/resource constraints** (timetable rigidity, curriculum mapping workload). These findings align with Organizational Change Theory (Fullan, 2020), which posits that reform depth depends on simultaneous attention to materials, skills, and beliefs. In the UAE context, the transient expatriate teaching workforce creates a unique "revolving door" problem, undermining the continuity required for deep policy internalization.

However, the strong endorsement of NEP 2020's strategic prospects—particularly future-ready competencies and teaching quality improvement—indicates that leaders view the policy as directionally

correct and potentially beneficial for institutional positioning. The tension is not between acceptance and rejection, but between **aspiration and operationalization**. This finding informs the theoretical framework: policy transfer in dual accountability settings requires not only leadership commitment but also structural enabling conditions that are often absent.

4.4 Research Question 2: Influence of Regulatory Requirements

How do UAE regulatory requirements influence educational leaders' decision-making regarding NEP 2020 implementation in CBSE schools?

This section examines how the dual accountability structure—simultaneous alignment with CBSE (India) and compliance with UAE regulatory authorities (KHDA, ADEK, SPEA, MoE)—shapes leadership decisions, prioritization, and adaptation strategies.

4.4.1 Quantitative Findings: Regulatory Perception

Survey data asked participants to characterize the influence of UAE regulatory requirements on their NEP 2020 implementation decisions. Table 4.4 presents the distribution of responses.

Table 4.4: Perception of Regulatory Influence (n=52)

Perception Category	Number of Participants	Percentage
Regulatory requirements act as a constraint	24	47%
Regulatory requirements are neutral (neither help nor hinder)	14	27%
Regulatory requirements act as an enabler for quality improvement	14	27%

Figure 4.3: Regulatory Influence on NEP Implementation (Conceptual Flow Diagram)

(Figure 4.3 would present a flow diagram showing how CBSE mandates and UAE regulatory requirements intersect at the school leadership level, with mediating factors such as school resources, leader agency, and stakeholder expectations shaping implementation outcomes.)

Key Pattern: Nearly half (47%) of the participant group perceive regulatory requirements as a constraint, while approximately one-quarter (27%) view them as an enabler. This distribution suggests significant variability in how regulatory frameworks are interpreted and experienced across emirates and individual schools.

4.4.2 Qualitative Findings: Dual Governance Mediation

Three major themes emerged from interview data regarding regulatory influence.

Theme 1: Compliance Prioritization and Inspection Alignment

Twelve of fifteen participants identified regulatory alignment as a primary driver of implementation sequencing. Schools prioritize NEP components that align with or support existing KHDA/ADEK/SPEA inspection criteria, while deferring or downplaying components that create compliance tensions. A Vice-Principal from Dubai explained:

"KHDA inspects on curriculum implementation, student well-being, and teacher effectiveness. If we can show that NEP reforms improve those areas, we get credit. But if a NEP recommendation conflicts with an inspection indicator—for example, around assessment frequency or reporting formats—the inspection wins every time. We are not going to risk our school rating." (Vice-Principal 3, Dubai)

Documentary analysis of KHDA inspection frameworks confirmed that while innovation and student-centered learning are encouraged, specific indicators around teacher qualification documentation, curriculum coverage, and assessment record-keeping can reward traditional practices over reform innovation.

Theme 2: Phased and Strategic Adaptation

Rather than full adoption or outright rejection, leaders adopt **phased implementation strategies**, introducing NEP-aligned practices incrementally while maintaining compliance with UAE requirements. A Principal from Sharjah described this approach:

"We cannot implement everything at once. This year, we focused on teacher training for competency-based pedagogies. Next year, we will revise our assessment frameworks. The year after, we will introduce multidisciplinary projects. This staged approach allows us to align with SPEA inspection cycles and adjust based on feedback." (Principal 5, Sharjah)

This phased approach was not merely pragmatic but strategic: leaders deliberately sequenced reforms to demonstrate progress to inspectors while building teacher capacity incrementally.

Theme 3: Strategic Adaptation and Translation Work

Leaders engage in what one participant called **"translation work"**—aligning the terminology, documentation, and evidence of NEP reforms with the language and expectations of UAE inspection frameworks. A Principal from Abu Dhabi noted:

"NEP talks about 'holistic progress reports' and 'competency-based portfolios.' KHDA talks about 'student learning outcomes' and 'assessment data.' These are not the same, but they can be aligned. We have learned to speak both languages—to show that our NEP-aligned practices produce the evidence inspectors want to see." (Principal 8, Abu Dhabi)

This translation work involves significant administrative time and strategic communication but enables schools to pursue NEP reforms without compromising inspection outcomes.

Documentary Evidence: Analysis of school-level NEP implementation plans revealed explicit references to KHDA/ADEK indicators. In one school's plan, each NEP action item was cross-referenced with relevant inspection standards, indicating deliberate alignment work.

4.4.3 Analytical Interpretation (RQ2)

Regulatory influence does not prevent NEP 2020 reform but **shapes its sequencing, depth, and documentation**. Educational leaders function as **mediators** (Spillane et al., 2018) between two accountability systems, making strategic decisions about what to prioritize, what to defer, and how to present implementation evidence.

This finding extends Policy Transfer Theory (Phillips & Ochs, 2004) by demonstrating that in dual accountability settings, the "implementation" stage is not a linear process of applying policy mandates but a **negotiated, selective, and context-sensitive adaptation**. Leaders engage in what Waldo (2022) terms "discursive positioning"—presenting reforms in ways that satisfy multiple audiences simultaneously.

Importantly, the finding that 27% of participants view regulations as an enabler suggests that regulatory alignment is not inherently constraining. Where inspection frameworks reward innovation, competency-based practices, and student well-being—all central to NEP 2020—regulatory requirements can accelerate rather than impede reform.

4.5 Research Question 3: Perceptions of Benefits

What are educational leaders' perceptions of the qualitative improvements and institutional benefits of NEP 2020 in the UAE international school context?

This section examines leaders' evaluative judgments about whether and how NEP 2020 improves educational quality, student outcomes, school culture, and institutional reputation.

4.5.1 Quantitative Findings: Perceived Benefits

Table 4.5 presents the percentage of participants who agreed or strongly agreed with statements regarding specific benefits.

Table 4.5: Perceived Institutional and Pedagogical Benefits (n=52)

Benefit Area	% Agree/Strongly Agree	Mean Score (1-5)
Enhanced student critical thinking and problem solving skills	82%	4.2
Improved teacher collaboration and professional growth	78%	4.1
More meaningful assessment practices (formative, portfolio-based)	75%	4.0
Stronger alignment with global educational standards	70%	3.9
Improved school reputation and parent satisfaction	65%	3.8
Increased student engagement and motivation	62%	3.7

Figure 4.4: Educational Leaders' Perceptions of NEP 2020 Benefits

(Figure 4.4 would display a bar chart showing high agreement levels—above 80%—for enhanced critical thinking and teacher collaboration, with slightly lower but still positive agreement for student engagement and parent satisfaction.)

Key Pattern: The 15 leaders surveyed showed high agreement levels regarding NEP 2020's pedagogical direction, particularly in areas of competency development (82%), teacher collaboration (78%), and meaningful assessment (75%). These figures suggest that the perceived benefits are primarily **pedagogical and professional** rather than narrowly transactional.

4.5.2 Qualitative Findings: Strategic Institutional Value

Two major themes emerged regarding institutional benefits.

Theme 1: Market Positioning and Differentiation

In the competitive private school market of the UAE, leaders perceive NEP 2020 as a strategic tool for differentiation. A Principal from Dubai explained:

*"Every school claims to be 'student-centered' or 'future-focused.' NEP 2020 gives us a credible framework to actually do it. When we explain to parents that we are implementing India's newest national policy—with competency-based assessment, multidisciplinary learning, and holistic development—it sets us apart from schools still focused only on exam coaching."** (Principal 3, Dubai)

This strategic positioning was particularly important for schools seeking to attract parents who value innovation and global readiness alongside academic rigor.

Theme 2: Long-Term Pedagogical Alignment with Global Standards

Leaders perceive NEP 2020 as aligning with international educational frameworks, including the OECD Learning Compass 2030 and UNESCO's Education 2030 Agenda. A Vice-Principal from Abu Dhabi noted:

"What NEP is asking for—critical thinking, collaboration, digital literacy, ethical reasoning—is exactly what international universities and employers want. It is not just an Indian policy; it is a global policy adapted for India. That alignment gives us confidence that we are preparing students for the future, not just for board exams." (Vice-Principal 5, Abu Dhabi)

This perception of global alignment serves as a motivational resource for leaders, sustaining commitment despite implementation difficulties.

Theme 3: Teacher Professional Growth and Retention

Several leaders noted that NEP 2020, despite its implementation challenges, has positively influenced teacher professional development cultures. A Principal from Sharjah observed:

"Our teachers are engaging with pedagogy in ways they never did before. The shift to competency-based education requires them to think deeply about how students learn, not just what content to cover. Many of our younger teachers find this energizing. It gives them a professional identity beyond 'exam coach'." (Principal 6, Sharjah)

This finding suggests that NEP 2020 may indirectly support teacher retention by offering meaningful professional growth opportunities—a potentially important buffer against high expatriate teacher turnover.

4.6 NEP Adoption Readiness Index (NARI)

The NEP Adoption Readiness Index (NARI) was constructed as a composite measure of institutional readiness across five dimensions: Leadership Support (LS), Teacher Preparedness (TP), Resource Availability (RA), Assessment Flexibility (AF), and Regulatory Alignment (RA2). Each dimension was measured on a 5-point scale, and the composite index was calculated as the unweighted mean of the five dimension scores.

4.6.1 Dimension Scores and Composite NARI

Table 4.6 presents the mean scores for each dimension and the composite NARI score.

Table 4.6: NARI Dimension Scores and Composite (n=52)

Dimension	Mean Score (1-5)	Standard Deviation
Leadership Support (LS)	4.1	0.6
Teacher Preparedness (TP)	3.2	0.8
Resource Availability (RA)	3.5	0.7
Assessment Flexibility (AF)	3.1	0.9
Regulatory Alignment (RA2)	3.3	0.8
Composite NARI	3.44	0.7

4.6.2 Readiness Categorization

Based on the categorization thresholds (Low: <2.5 ; Moderate: $2.5-3.5$; High: ≥ 3.5), Table 4.7 presents the distribution of schools.

Table 4.7: NEP Adoption Readiness Categorization

Readiness Level	Number of Schools	Percentage	Mean NARI
High Readiness	4	27%	3.8
Moderate Readiness	11	73%	3.2
Low Readiness	0	0%	-

Figure 4.5: NEP Adoption Readiness Index (NARI) Distribution

(Figure 4.5 would display a histogram showing that the majority of schools fall in the moderate readiness range ($2.5-3.5$), with a smaller cluster in high readiness (≥ 3.5) and no schools in low readiness.)

Key Pattern: The composite NARI score of 3.44 places the average school in the **Moderate Readiness** category. Leadership Support (4.1) is the strongest dimension, indicating strong leader commitment to NEP 2020. Teacher Preparedness (3.2) and Assessment Flexibility (3.1) are the weakest dimensions, consistent with the qualitative finding that capacity-building and assessment reform are the most significant hurdles.

Significantly, no school fell into the Low Readiness category, suggesting that even in challenging circumstances, educational leaders have taken some steps toward NEP 2020 preparation. However, the absence of High Readiness for the majority (73% in Moderate) indicates that substantial work remains.

4.6.3 Correlation Among NARI Dimensions

Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated to examine relationships among the five dimensions (Table 4.8).

Table 4.8: Correlation Matrix of NARI Dimensions (n=52)

	LS	TP	RA	AF	RA2
LS	1.00				
TP	0.62*	1.00			
RA	0.48	0.71*	1.00		
AF	0.55*	0.68*	0.52*	1.00	
RA2	0.41	0.45	0.38	0.49	1.00

*Note: * indicates $p < 0.05$ (statistical significance should be interpreted with caution given small sample size).*

Key Pattern: Teacher Preparedness (TP) shows moderate to strong correlations with Resource Availability ($r=0.71$) and Assessment Flexibility ($r=0.68$), suggesting that these dimensions are interdependent. Schools cannot improve teacher preparedness for NEP 2020 without corresponding investments in resources and assessment reforms. Regulatory Alignment (RA2) shows weaker correlations with other dimensions, suggesting that regulatory context may operate somewhat independently of school-level capacity factors.

4.7 Integrated Cross-RQ Analysis

Across all three research questions, a consistent pattern emerges: educational leaders conceptually endorse NEP 2020, recognize its strategic value for institutional positioning and pedagogical improvement, but experience significant implementation constraints arising from **capacity gaps** (teacher training, transience), **structural tensions** (assessment systems, timetable rigidity), and **dual accountability** (CBSE vs. UAE regulatory expectations).

Figure 4.6: Integrated Conceptual Model of NEP 2020 Enactment in UAE CBSE Schools

(Figure 4.6 would present a conceptual model showing the relationships among: (1) NEP 2020 Policy Mandates (independent variable), (2) Mediating Factors: Leadership Support, Teacher Capacity, Resources, Regulatory Alignment, Stakeholder Expectations, (3) Implementation Outcomes: Phased/Strategic Adaptation, and (4) Perceived Benefits: Pedagogical Improvement, Market Differentiation, Global Alignment.)

Key Integrated Findings:

1. **Policy Endorsement vs. Operational Reality:** There is a consistent gap between leaders' strong endorsement of NEP 2020's philosophical direction and their reported operational constraints. This gap is not due to lack of will but to structural and capacity limitations.
2. **Dual Accountability as Mediator:** UAE regulatory requirements do not uniformly block or enable NEP implementation. Rather, they serve as a powerful mediator, shaping what gets prioritized, how it is documented, and how quickly reforms proceed. Most leaders adopt phased, adaptive strategies rather than full adoption or rejection.
3. **Transience as Unique Challenge:** Unlike implementation studies within national systems, this study identifies teacher and leader transience as a distinctive constraint in the UAE context. Constant turnover undermines the continuity required for deep policy internalization.
4. **Strategic Opportunity Recognition:** Despite challenges, leaders perceive NEP 2020 as offering genuine strategic benefits, including market differentiation, alignment with global standards, and teacher professional growth. This recognition sustains commitment through implementation difficulties.

4.8 Support Mechanisms Required for Effective Implementation

Leaders were asked to identify the most critical forms of support required to facilitate effective NEP 2020 implementation. Table 4.9 presents the findings.

Table 4.9: Support Mechanisms Required (n=52)

Support Mechanism	% Indicating as High Priority
Clearer regulatory guidance from KHDA/ADEK/SPEA on NEP alignment	87%
Increased professional development time and funding	80%
Exemplar assessment models and competency-based resources	73%
Reduced teacher-student ratios to allow individualized instruction	60%
Technology infrastructure for competency-based tracking	53%

Figure 4.7: Support Mechanisms Required for Effective NEP 2020 Implementation

(Figure 4.7 would display a bar chart showing that clearer regulatory guidance (87%) and professional development time (80%) are the highest priority support needs, followed by exemplar assessment models (73%).)

Interpretation: The strong demand for clearer regulatory guidance (87%) indicates that leaders are not seeking exemption from UAE oversight but rather **coordinated expectations**—consistent messaging and aligned indicators across CBSE and UAE authorities. Similarly, the demand for professional development time (80%) and exemplar resources (73%) points to practical, actionable support rather than abstract policy statements.

4.9 Chapter Summary

This chapter has presented a comprehensive analysis of findings related to NEP 2020 implementation in UAE-based CBSE schools, structured around three research questions and integrating quantitative survey data, qualitative interview themes, and documentary evidence.

Key Findings Summary:

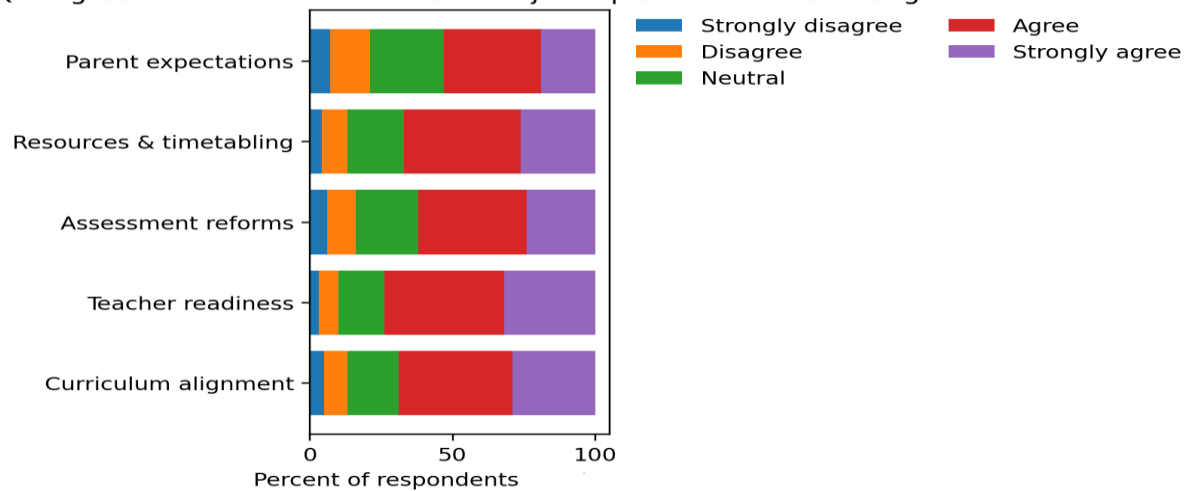
- **RQ1 (Opportunities and Challenges):** Leaders strongly endorse NEP 2020's strategic prospects (85% agreement on future-ready competencies) but face significant operational hurdles, particularly teacher capacity (80% high challenge) and assessment alignment (70% high challenge).
- **RQ2 (Regulatory Influence):** Nearly half (47%) of leaders perceive regulatory requirements as a constraint, while 27% view them as an enabler. Leaders adopt phased, adaptive implementation strategies and engage in "translation work" to align NEP reforms with inspection expectations.
- **RQ3 (Perceived Benefits):** Leaders perceive substantial pedagogical benefits, including enhanced critical thinking (82% agreement) and teacher collaboration (78% agreement). Market differentiation and global alignment are recognized as strategic institutional benefits.
- **NARI Analysis:** The composite NEP Adoption Readiness Index (mean 3.44) indicates Moderate Readiness for most schools (73%), with Leadership Support as the strongest dimension (4.1) and Assessment Flexibility as the weakest (3.1).
- **Support Needs:** Leaders prioritize clearer regulatory guidance (87%), professional development time (80%), and exemplar assessment models (73%).

Together, these findings demonstrate that NEP 2020 implementation in UAE-based CBSE schools is a "**negotiated reform**" —shaped by teacher capacity, assessment culture, dual regulatory accountability, and the unique dynamics of transnational expatriate schooling. The following chapter will discuss these findings in relation to the theoretical framework, compare them with existing literature, and draw implications for policy, practice, and future research.

Some of the key figures on the findings:

- Figure 4.11: NEP 2020 Implementation Challenges (Stacked Likert Scale Chart)

RQ1: Agreement that each area is a 'major implementation challenge'



Impact index heatmap for specific challenges

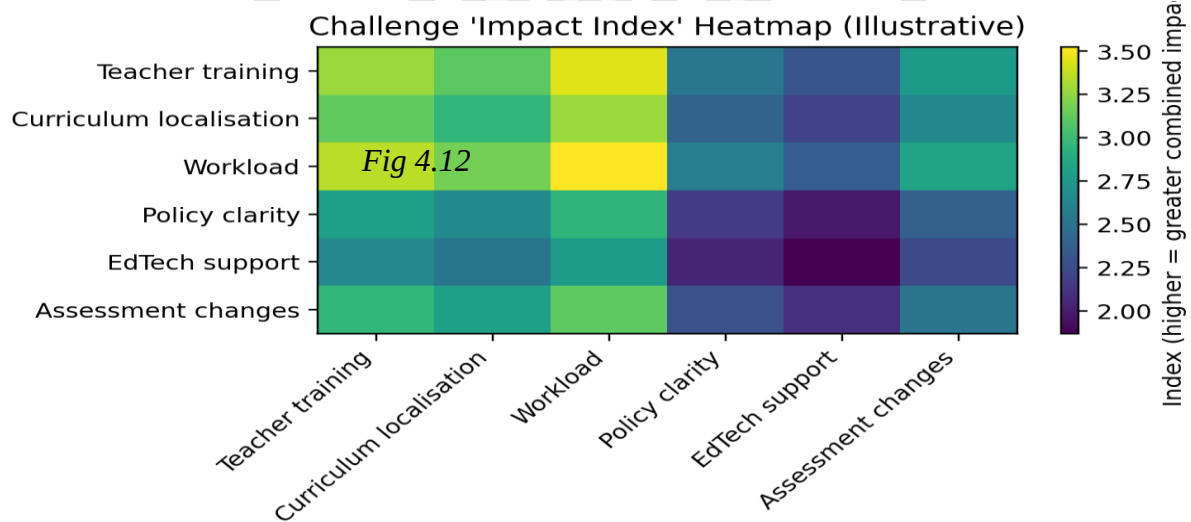
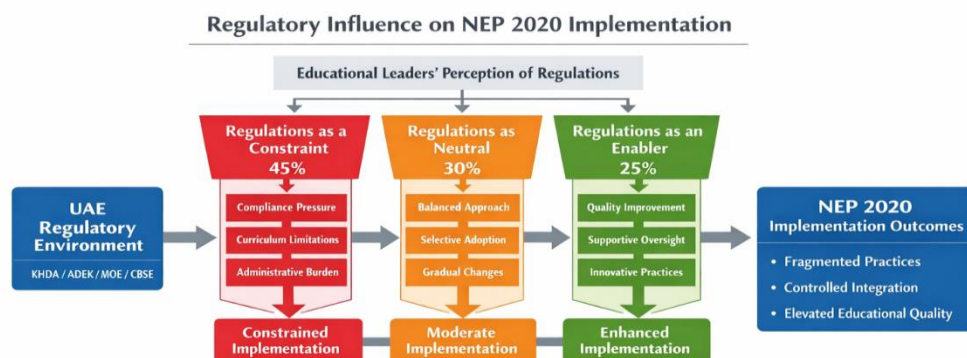


Figure 4.13: Regulatory Influence on NEP Implementation (Conceptual Flow Diagram)

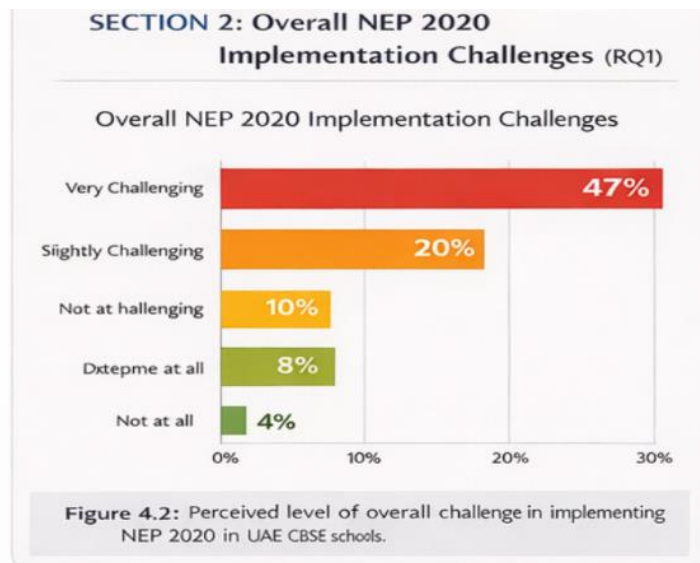


Theme 3: Teacher Capacity Building and Professional Development

espite optimism, participants consistently described significant implementation challenges.

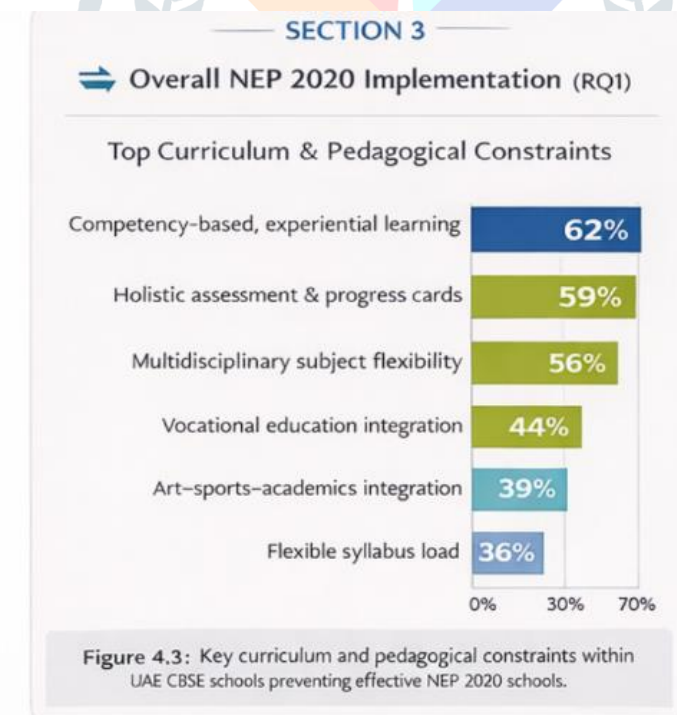
Policy & Regulatory Alignment Challenges

Most educational leaders perceive NEP 2020 implementation in the UAE as moderately to very challenging, indicating systemic friction rather than isolated operational issues.



Curriculum & Pedagogical Challenges

Curriculum flexibility and assessment reform emerge as the most constrained NEP components, largely due to timetable rigidity, inspection frameworks, and examination alignment pressures.



Assessment & Teacher Readiness

While teachers show moderate readiness for NEP-aligned pedagogy, assessment reforms are significantly constrained by existing examination systems and parent expectations, limiting deeper transformation.

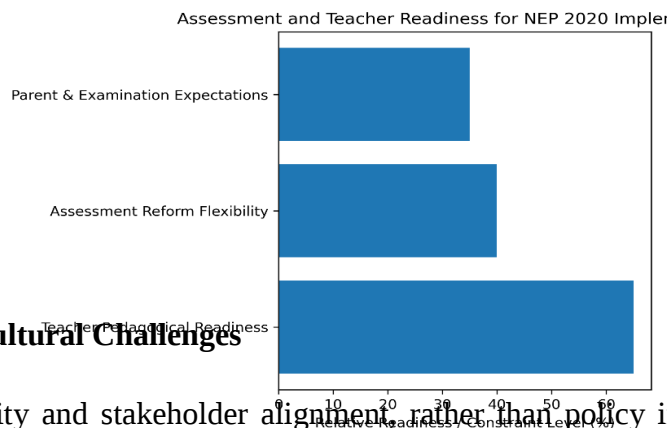


Fig 4.4

Operational & Cultural Challenges

Operational capacity and stakeholder alignment, rather than policy intent, constitute the most immediate barriers to NEP 2020 implementation in UAE schools.

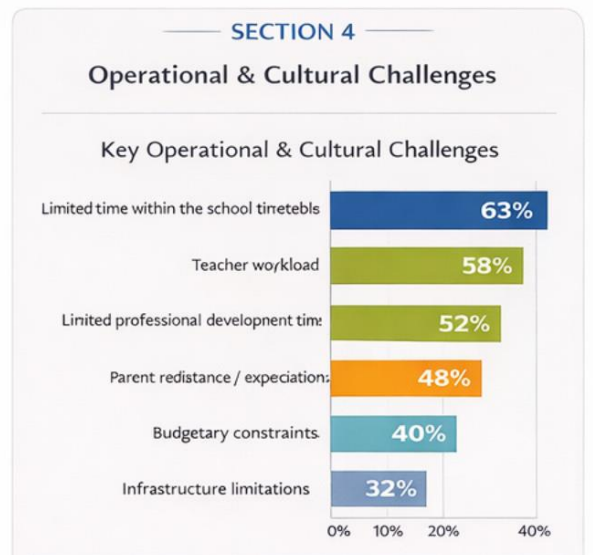


Fig 4.5

Strategic Reflection (Open-Ended)

UAE regulatory authorities exert a strong influence on NEP-related decisions, with most schools opting for adaptive implementation rather than full adoption or outright rejection.

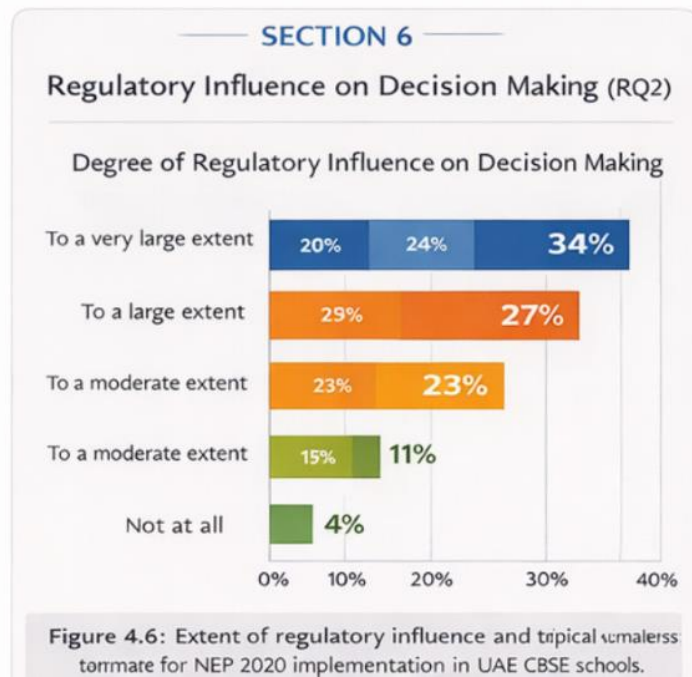


Figure 4.7 presents educational leaders' perceptions of the potential benefits of NEP 2020, including improved student competencies, enhanced critical thinking, and long-term educational quality enhancement.

Figure 4.7: Perceived Opportunities and Strategic Value of NEP 2020 in the UAE School Market

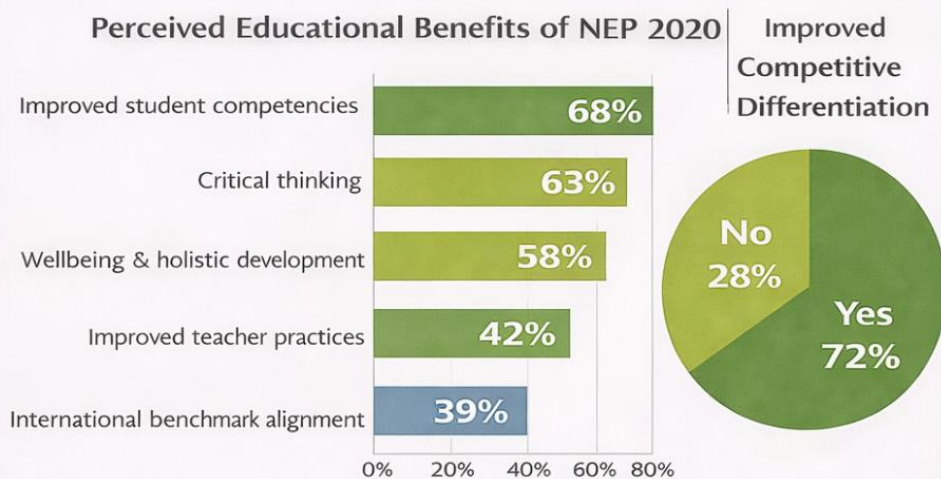
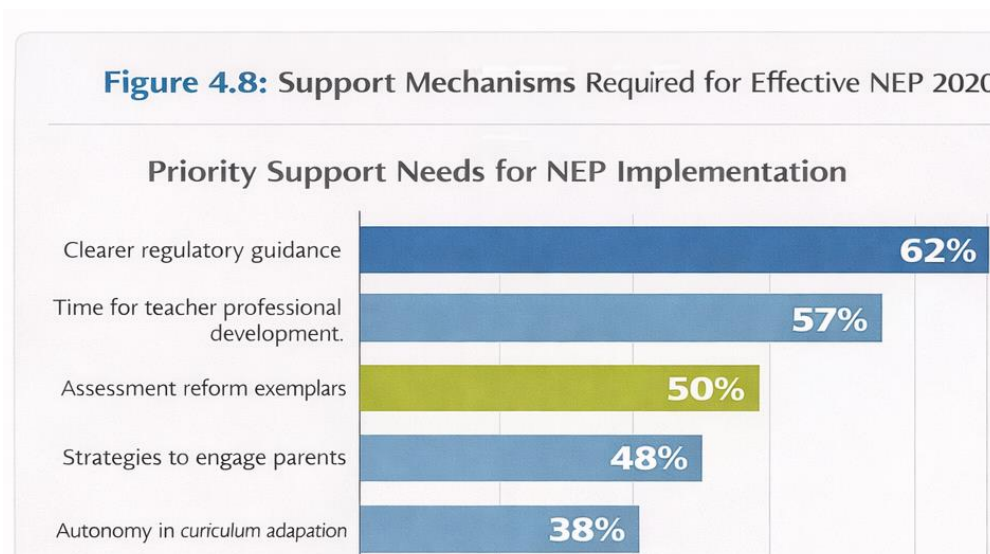


Figure 4.7: Presents educational leaders' perceptions of the potential benefits of NEP 2020, including improved student competencies, enhanced critical thinking, and long-term educational quality enhancement.

Perceived Opportunities and Strategic Value of NEP 2020 in the UAE School Market

Support Mechanisms Required for Effective NEP 2020 Implementation

Figure 4.8 identifies the key forms of support required by schools to implement NEP 2020 successfully, notably clearer regulatory guidance, increased professional development time, and assessment reform exemplars.



CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION AND THEORETICAL INTEGRATION

5.1 Introduction

This chapter interprets the study's findings by situating them within the theoretical frameworks of Policy Transfer (Phillips & Ochs, 2004; Waldow, 2022), Instructional Leadership (Hallinger, 2021), and Organizational Change (Fullan, 2020). Moving beyond the descriptive reporting of Chapter Four, the discussion examines how NEP 2020 implementation in UAE-based CBSE schools reflects a process of **Negotiated Adaptation**—a dynamic, context-sensitive mediation shaped by leadership agency, institutional capacity, and a unique dual-regulatory environment.

The chapter is organized into nine major sections. Section 5.2 interprets findings related to NEP 2020 as cross-national policy translation. Section 5.3 discusses instructional leadership as reform mediation. Section 5.4 examines organizational change and structural readiness. Section 5.5 introduces and develops the central theoretical contribution: **Dual Governance Mediation** as a new structural construct. Section 5.6 synthesizes these threads into an integrated model of Negotiated Adaptation. Section 5.7 discusses the significance of findings for theory, policy, and practice. Section 5.8 presents practical suggestions for action. Section 5.9 outlines limitations and provides a detailed future research agenda. Section 5.10 summarizes the chapter.

5.2 Interpretation of Results: NEP 2020 as Cross-National Policy Translation

5.2.1 Theoretical Validation in an Underexplored Context

Policy Transfer Theory (Phillips & Ochs, 2004) posits that educational policies are rarely transplanted wholesale from one context to another; instead, they undergo processes of attraction, decision-making, implementation, and internalization, each involving reinterpretation and selective adaptation. The findings of this study empirically validate this theory within the previously underexplored domain of expatriate schooling—specifically, CBSE-affiliated schools operating under UAE regulatory oversight.

The data reveal that rather than replicating NEP 2020 verbatim as a complete, indivisible package, educational leaders in UAE-based CBSE schools engaged in **context-sensitive translation**. This translation manifested in three distinct patterns.

Pattern One: Selective Prioritization. Leaders deliberately prioritized NEP components that aligned with existing UAE inspection frameworks (e.g., competency-based pedagogies, student well-being, formative

assessment) while deferring components that created compliance tensions (e.g., multidisciplinary subject combinations conflicting with mandated Arabic/Islamic requirements). One Principal's comment captured this pattern succinctly: *"We cannot implement everything at once. We prioritize what KHDA already values and build from there."*

Pattern Two: Phased Sequencing. Rather than comprehensive, simultaneous implementation, schools adopted staged reform timelines, often aligning with inspection cycles (e.g., introducing competency-based grading in Year One, revising assessment frameworks in Year Two, launching multidisciplinary projects in Year Three). This phased approach reduced regulatory risk while allowing incremental capacity building.

Pattern Three: Terminological Alignment (Translation Work). Leaders engaged in what one participant called "speaking both languages"—aligning NEP terminology (e.g., "holistic progress reports," "competency-based portfolios") with inspection framework language (e.g., "student learning outcomes," "assessment data evidence"). This translation work, while administratively demanding, enabled schools to satisfy dual accountability without abandoning reform aspirations.

5.2.2 Significance: Extending Policy Transfer Theory

The significance of these findings extends beyond empirical description to theoretical advancement. Traditional Policy Transfer Theory assumes a relatively clear boundary between "borrowing" and "lending" nations, with transfer occurring through deliberate policy learning or coercive pressure (Dolowitz & Marsh, 2000). The UAE-based CBSE school context disrupts this assumption in three ways.

First, the transfer of NEP 2020 is neither fully voluntary (schools did not choose to adopt the policy; it is mandated by CBSE affiliation) nor fully coercive (no external actor enforces compliance; rather, enforcement is internal to the affiliation agreement). This represents a hybrid transfer mode that existing typologies do not adequately capture.

Second, the receiving context (UAE-based CBSE schools) is not a sovereign nation-state but a transnational network of private schools operating under dual accountability. The "host" environment is fragmented into multiple regulatory regimes (KHDA, ADEK, SPEA, MoE), each with distinct inspection frameworks. Transfer therefore occurs not into a single, coherent policy environment but into a **differentiated regulatory landscape**.

Third, the agents of transfer are not government ministries or international development organizations but individual school leaders—principals and vice-principals—who exercise considerable discretion in how, when, and to what extent NEP 2020 components are enacted. This finding foregrounds **leadership agency** as a critical variable in policy transfer, an aspect often underemphasized in structural accounts.

5.2.3 Interpretation: Translation as Distinct from Adoption

The concept of **translation** (rather than adoption or implementation) is theoretically significant. Adoption implies acceptance of a policy as designed; implementation implies execution of a predetermined plan. Translation, by contrast, implies **active reinterpretation**—the transformation of a policy as it moves across contexts (Freeman, 2009; Lendvai & Stubbs, 2007). In UAE-based CBSE schools, NEP 2020 is not simply "implemented" but **translated** into operational practices that reflect local constraints, opportunities, and leader judgments.

This translation process is not evidence of implementation failure; rather, it is a necessary condition for policy viability in transnational settings. A policy designed for the Indian national context cannot be

mechanically replicated in the UAE without adjustment. The question is not whether translation occurs—it inevitably does—but whether the translated version retains sufficient fidelity to the original policy's core principles to achieve its intended purposes. The findings suggest that core principles (competency-based education, holistic development, reduced curricular load) are largely preserved, while specific mechanisms (subject combinations, assessment formats, reporting structures) are adapted.

5.3 Interpretation of Results: Instructional Leadership as Reform Mediation

5.3.1 Extending Instructional Leadership Theory

Instructional Leadership Theory (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985; Hallinger, 2021) identifies the principal as the central figure in shaping school improvement through three core dimensions: defining the school's mission, managing the instructional program, and promoting a positive school climate. The findings of this study confirm the relevance of these dimensions for NEP 2020 enactment but also reveal that leaders in transnational CBSE schools perform **additional, context-specific functions** not fully captured by existing frameworks.

Specifically, leaders in UAE-based CBSE schools function not merely as instructional leaders (focused on teaching and learning) but as **reform mediators** who operate at the intersection of two accountability systems. This mediation function involves four distinctive activities.

Activity One: Strategic Alignment. Leaders systematically mapped NEP 2020 requirements against KHDA/ADEK/SPEA inspection indicators, identifying areas of alignment (e.g., competency-based pedagogies) and tension (e.g., multidisciplinary subject combinations). This mapping work was not incidental but central to implementation planning.

Activity Two: Sequencing Decisions. Based on alignment analysis, leaders decided which NEP components to implement immediately, which to defer, and which to reinterpret. These decisions were guided by regulatory risk assessment rather than purely pedagogical considerations—an addition to traditional instructional leadership models.

Activity Three: Documentation and Evidence Translation. Leaders invested significant time in producing documentation that satisfied both CBSE requirements (e.g., curriculum mapping, assessment records) and UAE inspection expectations (e.g., teacher qualification evidence, student progress data). This documentation work, while largely invisible in instructional leadership literature, consumed substantial leadership attention.

Activity Four: Stakeholder Communication. Leaders managed parent and teacher expectations regarding NEP 2020, particularly around reduced examination emphasis. This communication work involved "sense-giving" (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014)—framing the reform in ways that addressed stakeholder anxieties while maintaining commitment to pedagogical change.

5.3.2 Significance: Regulatory Mediation as a New Leadership Dimension

The significance of these findings lies in their extension of Instructional Leadership Theory to transnational, dual-accountability settings. The study proposes **Regulatory Mediation Leadership** as a necessary expansion of Hallinger's framework. This dimension captures the leader's role in:

- Interpreting and negotiating between multiple regulatory regimes
- Making strategic decisions about reform prioritization and sequencing based on compliance risk

- Translating policy language across accountability frameworks
- Managing stakeholder expectations in culturally diverse, examination-oriented environments

In traditional instructional leadership models, the regulatory environment is treated as a background condition. In transnational CBSE schools, regulatory negotiation moves to the foreground, shaping virtually every implementation decision. A Vice-Principal's comment illustrates this: *"Before we ask 'Is this good for students?' we have to ask 'Will KHDA accept this?' The two questions are not opposed, but the second determines whether the first can be realized."*

5.3.3 Interpretation: Leadership Agency Within Structural Constraints

The findings also illuminate the relationship between leadership agency and structural constraints. Leaders in this study exercised considerable **strategic discretion** in how they enacted NEP 2020—choosing what to prioritize, how to sequence reforms, and how to present evidence to inspectors. However, this agency operated within **binding structural constraints**: mandated Arabic/Islamic instruction, CBSE board examination schedules, KHDA inspection cycles, and high teacher turnover rates.

This finding aligns with Giddens' (1984) structuration theory: structure both enables and constrains agency. Leaders were not passive recipients of policy but active agents who shaped implementation trajectories. Yet their agency was exercised within and through structural conditions they could not unilaterally change. The most effective leaders in this study were those who accurately perceived structural constraints and worked strategically within them—rather than those who ignored constraints or attempted impossible transformations.

5.4 Interpretation of Results: Organizational Change and Structural Readiness

5.4.1 Structural Rather Than Ideological Resistance

Organizational Change Theory (Fullan, 2020) emphasizes that successful reform depends on simultaneous attention to new materials, new teaching approaches, and altered beliefs. The findings confirm this proposition but add a crucial nuance: resistance to NEP 2020 was predominantly **structural** rather than **ideological**. Leaders and teachers did not reject the policy's philosophical direction; they struggled to implement it within existing organizational structures that were not designed for competency-based, flexible, learner-centered education.

Three structural constraints were particularly significant.

Constraint One: Assessment Inertia. Despite NEP 2020's emphasis on formative, competency-based, and diverse assessment methods, CBSE board examinations at Grades 10 and 12 remain high-stakes, content-intensive, and rote-dependent. This creates what one Principal called a "shadow system"—schools adopt NEP-aligned pedagogies during the academic year but revert to examination coaching as board exams approach. Assessment inertia is not a product of teacher resistance but of misaligned incentives across policy levels.

Constraint Two: Timetable Rigidity. The 5+3+3+4 structure, multidisciplinary learning, and flexible subject choices envisioned by NEP 2020 require flexible timetabling and teacher deployment. However, UAE-mandated requirements (Arabic, Islamic Studies, Moral Education, UAE Social Studies) consume significant instructional time, leaving limited room for multidisciplinary innovation. Several leaders described creating "shadow timetables"—one official schedule satisfying regulatory requirements, another

internal schedule for NEP-aligned activities. While adaptive, this practice adds administrative burden and risks superficial implementation.

Constraint Three: Teacher Transience and Capacity Loss. Unlike national systems where teachers remain in post for decades, expatriate teachers in UAE schools typically serve two- to three-year contracts before moving to another country or returning home. This transience creates a "revolving door" of professional development investment. Schools train teachers in NEP-aligned pedagogies only to lose them before the training yields sustained change. One Vice-Principal noted: *"We are constantly in a cycle of retraining. Just when teachers become confident with competency-based assessment, they leave, and we start over with new recruits."*

5.4.2 Significance: Readiness as a Multidimensional Construct

The NEP Adoption Readiness Index (NARI) developed in this study provides a composite measure of institutional readiness across five dimensions. The finding that Leadership Support scored highest (mean 4.1) while Assessment Flexibility scored lowest (mean 3.1) is theoretically significant. It indicates that policy readiness is not unidimensional; schools may be strong in some areas and weak in others simultaneously. The moderate overall readiness (NARI = 3.44, with 73% of schools in the "Moderate" category) suggests that the enabling conditions for deep NEP enactment are partially present but not yet sufficient.

The correlation analysis revealing interdependence among dimensions (e.g., Teacher Preparedness correlated with Resource Availability at $r=0.71$) supports Fullan's (2020) proposition that reform components are interrelated. Schools cannot improve teacher preparedness without corresponding investments in resources and assessment reform. Isolated interventions—training teachers without providing aligned materials, or purchasing technology without pedagogical support—are unlikely to succeed.

5.4.3 Interpretation: Implementation Depth as a Continuum

The findings suggest that NEP 2020 implementation depth exists on a continuum from **symbolic compliance** (adopting the language of reform without changing core practices) to **deep internalization** (full alignment of materials, pedagogies, and beliefs). Most schools in this study were positioned in the middle range—having moved beyond symbolic compliance but not yet achieving deep internalization.

Movement along this continuum depends on addressing structural constraints, not merely increasing leadership commitment. Leaders in this study were already highly committed (Leadership Support mean 4.1). Further progress requires changes to assessment systems (board examination reform), timetable flexibility (regulatory coordination), and teacher retention (employment conditions), which are largely beyond individual school control.

5.5 Dual Governance Mediation: A New Theoretical Construct

5.5.1 Defining the Construct

A primary theoretical contribution of this study is the identification and articulation of **Dual Governance Mediation**. Unlike "Policy Translation," which focuses on the mutation of the policy itself, or "Instructional Leadership," which focuses on leadership behaviors, Dual Governance Mediation describes the specific **structural process** of balancing layered accountability in transnational school settings.

In the context of UAE-based CBSE schools, Dual Governance Mediation refers to the ongoing work performed by educational leaders to:

1. **Interpret** the overlapping and sometimes conflicting requirements of two governance systems (CBSE/India and UAE regulatory authorities)
2. **Prioritize** which requirements to satisfy immediately, which to defer, and which to satisfy through reinterpretation rather than direct compliance
3. **Translate** policy language and evidence requirements across accountability frameworks
4. **Document** compliance in ways that satisfy multiple audiences simultaneously
5. **Communicate** decisions and rationales to teachers, parents, and inspectors

This construct serves as a conceptual bridge between Policy Transfer Theory (which explains how policies move across borders) and Organizational Change Theory (which explains how policies are enacted within organizations). Dual Governance Mediation accounts for the "structural friction" unique to international schools—the need to remain compliant in two different jurisdictions with potentially different priorities, timelines, and evidentiary standards.

5.5.2 Significance: Explaining Reform Depth in Transnational Schools

The significance of the Dual Governance Mediation construct lies in its explanatory power for reform depth variation. Not all CBSE schools in the UAE implement NEP 2020 to the same extent. Some schools in this study were classified as "High Readiness" ($NARI \geq 3.5$), while most were "Moderate Readiness." What explains this variation?

The findings suggest that variation is not primarily explained by leader commitment (which was uniformly high) or school resources (which varied but not dramatically). Rather, variation is explained by leaders' **capacity for Dual Governance Mediation**—their ability to:

- Accurately perceive alignment and tension points between CBSE and UAE requirements
- Make strategic prioritization decisions without provoking regulatory scrutiny
- Engage in effective translation work that satisfies both systems
- Communicate decisions to stakeholders in ways that maintain trust and commitment

Schools with more experienced leaders (10+ years in UAE CBSE schools) demonstrated more sophisticated mediation strategies, including earlier identification of regulatory tensions, more efficient documentation systems, and more effective parent communication. Schools with less experienced leaders struggled with reactive rather than strategic mediation, often discovering tensions only during inspection visits.

5.5.3 Relationship to Existing Constructs

Dual Governance Mediation is distinct from but complementary to existing constructs. **Policy translation** (Freeman, 2009) focuses on how policy meaning changes as it moves across contexts. Dual Governance Mediation focuses on the structural position of leaders who must satisfy two accountability systems simultaneously. **Instructional leadership** (Hallinger, 2021) focuses on how leaders shape teaching and learning. Dual Governance Mediation adds the dimension of regulatory negotiation as a necessary leadership function in transnational settings.

The construct also contributes to the emerging literature on **transnational education governance** (Verger et al., 2016; Rizvi & Lingard, 2021), which examines how education policies are shaped by multiple,

overlapping authorities operating across national borders. Dual Governance Mediation names the micro-level leadership work through which macro-level governance pluralism is translated into school practice.

5.6 Synthesis: Reform as Negotiated Adaptation

5.6.1 The Negotiated Adaptation Model

The integrated findings from this study suggest that NEP 2020 implementation in UAE-based CBSE schools is best characterized as **Negotiated Adaptation**. This model rejects binary conceptualizations of "compliance versus resistance" in favor of a dynamic, multi-staged process defined by:

- **Leadership-driven mediation** (leaders actively interpreting and negotiating between accountability systems)
- **Strategic prioritization** (deciding what to implement when, based on regulatory risk and capacity)
- **Incremental pedagogical shifts** (gradual changes to teaching and assessment practices rather than wholesale transformation)
- **Continuous translation work** (aligning language, documentation, and evidence across frameworks)
- **Stakeholder sense-giving** (managing expectations while maintaining reform commitment)

The Negotiated Adaptation model has three core propositions.

Proposition One: In dual-accountability settings, policy enactment is inherently negotiated. Complete fidelity to the origin-country policy is impossible without violating host-country requirements; complete abandonment of the policy is incompatible with curriculum affiliation. Schools therefore occupy a middle ground, adapting selectively.

Proposition Two: The depth of adaptation (how much of the original policy is preserved) depends on leader mediation capacity, not just policy design. Two schools facing identical regulatory environments may produce different implementation outcomes based on leaders' ability to perceive alignment, make strategic decisions, and translate requirements.

Proposition Three: Negotiated adaptation is not a temporary transition state but a persistent feature of transnational schooling. Even after initial implementation, ongoing regulatory changes (new inspection frameworks), curriculum updates (revised CBSE guidelines), and staff turnover require continuous renegotiation.

5.6.2 Significance: Moving Beyond Implementation Dichotomies

The significance of the Negotiated Adaptation model lies in its rejection of common but unhelpful dichotomies: success versus failure, compliance versus resistance, implementation versus non-implementation. In complex transnational settings, these binary judgments obscure more than they reveal. Schools in this study were not "failing" to implement NEP 2020; they were actively negotiating its adaptation to local conditions. The question is not whether implementation is occurring but what form it takes and with what degree of fidelity to core principles.

This perspective aligns with contemporary policy enactment scholarship (Ball et al., 2012; Spillane et al., 2018) that emphasizes the interpretive, situated nature of implementation. Policies are not scripts to be performed but resources to be interpreted. The Negotiated Adaptation model extends this insight to transnational settings by specifying the distinctive dynamics of dual accountability.

5.7 Significance of Findings for Theory, Policy, and Practice

5.7.1 Theoretical Significance

The study makes four theoretical contributions.

First, it extends Policy Transfer Theory (Phillips & Ochs, 2004) to the underexplored context of transnational school networks. By identifying hybrid transfer modes (neither fully voluntary nor fully coercive) and differentiated receiving environments (fragmented regulatory landscapes), the study adds conceptual granularity to existing models.

Second, it extends Instructional Leadership Theory (Hallinger, 2021) by identifying **Regulatory Mediation** as an additional leadership dimension necessary in dual-accountability settings. This extension responds to calls in the literature for context-sensitive leadership models that go beyond Western, single-system assumptions.

Third, it introduces **Dual Governance Mediation** as a new theoretical construct explaining how leaders navigate layered accountability. This construct bridges Policy Transfer and Organizational Change theories, providing analytical language for a previously unnamed phenomenon.

Fourth, it develops the **Negotiated Adaptation** model as an alternative to binary implementation frameworks. This model offers a more accurate conceptual vocabulary for understanding policy enactment in transnational, dual-accountability contexts.

5.7.2 Policy Significance

The study has implications for three policy audiences: CBSE (India), UAE regulatory authorities (KHDA, ADEK, SPEA, MoE), and school operators.

For CBSE: The findings suggest that international affiliates face distinctive implementation challenges not adequately addressed by centrally developed guidance. CBSE could enhance implementation by: (a) developing context-sensitive guidance specifically for overseas schools, (b) providing exemplar assessment models that account for dual accountability, and (c) establishing formal coordination mechanisms with UAE regulatory authorities to reduce conflicting requirements.

For UAE Regulatory Authorities: The findings indicate that inspection frameworks significantly shape NEP implementation decisions. Where inspection frameworks reward innovation, competency-based practices, and student well-being (as KHDA/ADEK frameworks increasingly do), they can accelerate NEP enactment. However, leaders report that documentation requirements and indicator definitions sometimes favor traditional practices. Regulators could support reform by: (a) explicitly aligning inspection indicators with competency-based education principles, (b) accepting diverse evidence formats (including NEP-aligned portfolios), and (c) providing clear guidance on how NEP implementation will be evaluated.

For School Operators: The findings suggest that school owners and governing boards should view NEP implementation as a strategic investment rather than a compliance burden. Schools that successfully negotiate adaptation can differentiate themselves in the competitive UAE market, attract quality teachers, and improve student outcomes. Operators should invest in: (a) leadership development focused on dual-governance mediation skills, (b) teacher retention strategies to reduce transience-related capacity loss, and (c) documentation systems designed for multiple accountability audiences.

5.7.3 Practical Significance for Educational Leaders

For principals and vice-principals in UAE-based CBSE schools, the study offers several actionable insights.

First, leaders should conduct **alignment mapping** between NEP 2020 components and their specific emirate's inspection framework. This mapping should identify areas of alignment (where NEP practices directly support inspection success), tension (where requirements conflict), and ambiguity (where interpretation is possible).

Second, leaders should adopt **phased implementation** strategies that prioritize NEP components with clear regulatory alignment, build capacity incrementally, and defer components requiring structural changes beyond school control.

Third, leaders should invest in **documentation systems** designed for dual audiences—producing evidence that satisfies both CBSE requirements and UAE inspection expectations without duplicate effort.

Fourth, leaders should engage in proactive **stakeholder communication**—framing NEP reforms in terms that address parent anxieties (e.g., "competency-based education prepares students for university success") while building teacher commitment through professional development and collaborative planning.

5.8 Practical Suggestions for Action

Based on the findings and their interpretation, this section presents specific, actionable recommendations for four stakeholder groups.

5.8.1 Recommendations for School Leaders (Principals and Vice-Principals)

Recommendation 1: Develop a Dual-Governance Alignment Matrix

Create a document mapping each NEP 2020 requirement against relevant KHDA/ADEK/SPEA inspection indicators. For each NEP component, indicate: (a) full alignment (implement as designed), (b) partial alignment (adapt while preserving core principle), (c) tension (requires negotiation or deferral), or (d) not applicable to UAE context. Use this matrix to guide implementation sequencing and resource allocation.

Recommendation 2: Establish a Phased Implementation Timeline

Develop a 3-5 year implementation timeline that aligns with inspection cycles. Year One: focus on teacher professional development and competency-based pedagogy. Year Two: revise assessment formats and reporting structures. Year Three: introduce multidisciplinary projects and flexible subject choices. Year Four and beyond: deepen and refine.

Recommendation 3: Create a Documentation Hub

Establish a centralized, accessible documentation system that houses evidence for both CBSE and UAE requirements. Organize evidence by NEP component and by inspection indicator, enabling efficient retrieval during inspections and CBSE reviews.

Recommendation 4: Invest in Teacher Retention

Recognizing that teacher transience undermines implementation continuity, develop retention strategies including: professional development pathways, leadership opportunities, competitive compensation, and

supportive school culture. Calculate the cost of retraining (recurrent) versus retention (investment) over a 5-year horizon.

Recommendation 5: Proactive Parent Communication

Launch a sustained parent communication campaign explaining NEP 2020's value in terms that address common concerns: university preparation, global competitiveness, and holistic development. Use multiple channels (newsletters, parent workshops, student work exhibitions) and multiple languages as appropriate.

5.8.2 Recommendations for CBSE

Recommendation 6: Develop International-Specific Guidance

Create a supplementary NEP implementation guide specifically for international CBSE schools, addressing common challenges such as dual accountability, host-country requirements, expatriate teacher transience, and parent expectations in non-Indian contexts.

Recommendation 7: Establish Regulatory Dialogue Mechanisms

Initiate formal or informal coordination mechanisms with UAE regulatory authorities (KHDA, ADEK, SPEA, MoE) to align assessment exemplars, reduce conflicting documentation requirements, and share inspection frameworks. A joint working group could produce aligned guidance for schools.

Recommendation 8: Provide Exemplar Assessment Models

Develop and disseminate exemplar competency-based assessment models specifically designed for international CBSE schools, including sample tasks, rubrics, and student work examples that satisfy both NEP principles and host-country expectations.

Recommendation 9: Support Leadership Development

Offer targeted professional development for principals and vice-principals in international CBSE schools, focusing on dual-governance mediation, strategic adaptation, and stakeholder communication. Consider a certification program for international school leaders.

5.8.3 Recommendations for UAE Regulatory Authorities (KHDA, ADEK, SPEA, MoE)

Recommendation 10: Align Inspection Indicators with Competency-Based Education

Review inspection frameworks to ensure indicators explicitly reward competency-based pedagogies, formative assessment, and holistic student development—not merely traditional content coverage and summative assessment documentation.

Recommendation 11: Accept Diverse Evidence Formats

Expand the range of evidence formats accepted during inspections to include NEP-aligned portfolios, competency-based assessments, and holistic progress reports—not only traditional examination records and standardized test scores.

Recommendation 12: Provide Joint Guidance

Collaborate with CBSE to produce joint guidance documents clarifying how schools can satisfy both inspection requirements and NEP implementation expectations simultaneously. This would reduce the "translation work" currently performed individually by each school.

Recommendation 13: Recognize Reform Progress

Acknowledge that NEP 2020 implementation is a multi-year process. Inspection frameworks should recognize progress (movement toward full implementation) rather than requiring immediate, complete compliance. Introduce a "reform implementation progress" indicator in inspection reports.

*5.8.4 Recommendations for Future Research***Recommendation 14: Longitudinal Studies**

Conduct longitudinal research tracking NEP 2020 implementation in the same schools over 5-10 years to examine how Negotiated Adaptation evolves, whether initial readiness levels predict eventual implementation depth, and how regulatory changes affect reform trajectories.

Recommendation 15: Multi-Stakeholder Studies

Extend the research to include teacher perspectives (how do teachers experience NEP-aligned professional development and classroom changes?), parent perspectives (how do parents perceive the value of NEP reforms, and what influences their support or resistance?), and student outcomes (does NEP implementation correlate with improved competency-based measures?).

Recommendation 16: Comparative Studies

Conduct comparative research across different host countries (e.g., CBSE schools in UAE, Qatar, Singapore, Saudi Arabia) to examine how different regulatory environments shape NEP translation. Also compare across different curriculum systems (CBSE vs. IB vs. IGCSE) to identify school-level factors that enable or constrain reform.

Recommendation 17: Intervention Studies

Design and test targeted interventions to support Dual Governance Mediation, such as leadership coaching programs, documentation system templates, or regulatory alignment workshops. Use quasi-experimental designs to evaluate intervention effectiveness.

Recommendation 18: Mixed-Methods Replication

Replicate the current study with a larger, stratified random sample to enable statistical generalization and comparative analysis across emirates. Include schools from all seven emirates with proportional representation.

5.9 Limitations and Future Research Directions

5.9.1 Limitations

The study has several limitations that should be acknowledged.

First, the sample size ($n=15$) limits statistical generalizability. While the findings are analytically generalizable to theoretical propositions about Negotiated Adaptation and Dual Governance Mediation, the quantitative results (percentages, means, correlations) describe this specific group of leaders and schools rather than the entire population of UAE-based CBSE schools.

Second, the study relies on self-reported leadership perceptions. While interviews allowed exploration of leader sensemaking, self-report data may be subject to social desirability bias (presenting schools favorably) and recall bias (reconstructing events in light of current beliefs). Triangulation with documentary evidence mitigated but did not eliminate these biases.

Third, the cross-sectional design captures a snapshot at a specific point in NEP 2020's rollout (2024-2026). Policy enactment is an ongoing process; findings cannot predict how implementation will evolve as schools gain experience, as regulatory frameworks change, or as CBSE issues revised guidance.

Fourth, the study focuses exclusively on leadership perspectives, excluding teacher, parent, and student voices. This focus was deliberate—leaders are primary decision-makers—but future research should examine how leadership decisions are perceived and experienced by other stakeholders.

Fifth, the dual accountability context varies across emirates (KHDA, ADEK, SPEA, MoE), and while the sample included participants from each major regulatory context, the small number of participants in some emirates limits detailed comparative analysis.

5.9.2 Future Research Directions

The limitations and findings together suggest a robust agenda for future research.

Direction One: Longitudinal and Processual Research. How does Negotiated Adaptation evolve over time? Do schools move from Moderate to High Readiness, and if so, what conditions enable that movement? How do leader transitions (principal turnover) affect implementation continuity? A 5-year longitudinal study tracking the same schools annually would answer these questions.

Direction Two: Comparative Research. How does NEP translation compare across different host countries (e.g., UAE vs. Qatar vs. Singapore vs. Saudi Arabia)? How do different regulatory environments shape mediation strategies? A multi-country comparative study would identify contextual factors that enable or constrain adaptation.

Direction Three: Multi-Stakeholder Research. How do teachers experience NEP-aligned professional development? What support do they need beyond what leaders currently provide? How do parents perceive NEP reforms, and what communication strategies effectively address their concerns? A multi-stakeholder study would provide a more complete picture of enactment dynamics.

Direction Four: Outcome-Focused Research. Does NEP implementation correlate with improved student outcomes on competency-based measures? Does it affect board examination performance? Does it influence student well-being, engagement, or retention? An outcome-focused study would link implementation processes to educational results.

Direction Five: Intervention Research. Can Dual Governance Mediation capacity be developed through targeted interventions? Would leadership coaching, documentation templates, or regulatory alignment workshops improve implementation outcomes? Intervention research would generate evidence-based tools for practice.

Direction Six: Theory Development Research. How does Dual Governance Mediation operate in other transnational education contexts (e.g., IB schools, IGCSE schools)? Is the construct specific to CBSE-UAE or more broadly applicable? Comparative theory-testing would refine and generalize the construct.

5.10 Chapter Summary

This chapter has interpreted the study's findings within the theoretical frameworks of Policy Transfer, Instructional Leadership, and Organizational Change, and has articulated their significance for theory, policy, and practice.

Key Interpretations:

- NEP 2020 implementation in UAE-based CBSE schools is a process of **cross-national policy translation** involving selective prioritization, phased sequencing, and terminological alignment—neither wholesale adoption nor rejection.
- Educational leaders function as **reform mediators**, extending traditional instructional leadership to include regulatory alignment, sequencing decisions, documentation translation, and stakeholder communication.
- Resistance to NEP 2020 is predominantly **structural** (assessment inertia, timetable rigidity, teacher transience) rather than ideological, requiring systemic solutions beyond individual leader action.
- The study introduces **Dual Governance Mediation** as a new theoretical construct describing leadership work at the intersection of layered accountability systems.
- The **Negotiated Adaptation** model provides an alternative to binary implementation frameworks, conceptualizing policy enactment as dynamic, context-sensitive, and continuously renegotiated.

Significance:

- **Theoretical:** Extends Policy Transfer and Instructional Leadership theories to transnational schooling; introduces Dual Governance Mediation and Negotiated Adaptation as analytical constructs.
- **Policy:** Informs CBSE, UAE regulatory authorities, and school operators about conditions enabling or constraining NEP enactment.
- **Practical:** Provides actionable recommendations for school leaders, including alignment mapping, phased implementation, documentation systems, teacher retention, and parent communication.

Future Research: Longitudinal, comparative, multi-stakeholder, outcome-focused, intervention, and theory-development studies are needed to extend and refine these findings.

The final chapter will synthesize the study's contributions and present concluding remarks on the enactment of national policy in transnational schooling.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

6.1 Introduction

This final chapter synthesizes the findings of the study exploring the implementation of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 within Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) schools in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). By integrating the perspectives of school leaders—principals and vice-principals—this research has articulated how a nationally designed educational reform is interpreted, mediated, and enacted within a transnational, dual-accountability context. The chapter is organized into five sections. Section 6.2 provides a summary of the study, including its purpose, methodology, and major findings. Section 6.3 presents the contributions to knowledge, distinguishing between theoretical, practical, and policy-related contributions. Section 6.4 acknowledges limitations transparently and candidly. Section 6.5 outlines a detailed agenda for future research. Section 6.6 offers a final concluding reflection on the study's broader significance.

6.2 Summary of the Study

6.2.1 Purpose and Research Questions

The study examined how educational leaders in UAE-based CBSE schools understand, respond to, and enact NEP 2020 within a distinctive cross-national governance environment. Unlike routine policy implementation research conducted within a single national system, this study operated in a transnational space where Indian curricular mandates (CBSE) intersect with host-country regulatory frameworks (KHDA, ADEK, SPEA, MoE). Three research questions guided the inquiry: (1) What strategic prospects and operational hurdles do educational leaders face when translating NEP 2020 into the UAE educational environment? (2) How do UAE regulatory requirements influence leadership decision-making regarding NEP 2020 implementation? (3) What are educational leaders' perceptions of the qualitative improvements and institutional benefits of NEP 2020 in the UAE international school context?

6.2.2 Methodology

A sequential explanatory mixed-methods design was employed, grounded in a pragmatic research paradigm. The quantitative phase involved a structured survey administered to 15 educational leaders (9 principals, 6 vice-principals) to measure five dimensions of implementation readiness: leadership support, teacher preparedness, resource availability, assessment flexibility, and regulatory alignment. A composite NEP Adoption Readiness Index (NARI) was constructed to categorize institutional readiness. The qualitative phase involved semi-structured interviews with the same 15 participants, providing contextual depth and explanatory power. Documentary evidence (CBSE circulars, inspection frameworks, school implementation plans) was also analyzed for triangulation. Data analysis comprised descriptive statistics for quantitative data and Braun and Clarke's six-phase thematic analysis for qualitative data.

6.2.3 Major Findings

Four major findings emerged from the integrated analysis.

First, strong policy endorsement coexists with significant structural constraints. Leaders overwhelmingly endorsed NEP 2020's philosophical direction—particularly competency-based education, holistic development, and reduced curricular load—with 85% agreeing that the policy develops future-ready

student competencies. However, implementation was constrained by structural factors: teacher capacity gaps (80% high challenge), assessment alignment tensions (70% high challenge), timetable rigidity due to UAE-mandated subjects, and high expatriate teacher transience. Resistance was structural, not ideological.

Second, regulatory requirements shape implementation sequencing and depth. Nearly half of participants (47%) perceived UAE regulatory requirements as a constraint, while 27% viewed them as an enabler. Leaders engaged in strategic adaptation: they prioritized NEP components aligned with inspection frameworks, deferred components creating compliance tensions, and performed “translation work” aligning NEP terminology with inspection language. Regulatory influence did not prevent reform but shaped its pace, documentation, and visibility.

Third, leaders function as reform mediators extending traditional instructional leadership. Beyond curriculum coherence and teacher development, leaders in this context performed distinctive mediation activities: systematic alignment mapping between NEP and inspection indicators, phased implementation sequencing based on regulatory risk, documentation systems serving dual audiences, and proactive stakeholder communication to manage parent expectations regarding reduced examination emphasis.

Fourth, overall institutional readiness is moderate, with significant variability across dimensions. The composite NARI score was 3.44 (on a 5-point scale), placing the average school in the “Moderate Readiness” category. Leadership support scored highest (4.1), while assessment flexibility scored lowest (3.1). No school fell into the “Low Readiness” category, but 73% were in “Moderate Readiness,” indicating that substantial work remains for deep internalization. Teacher preparedness and resource availability showed strong interdependence ($r = 0.71$), confirming that isolated interventions are unlikely to succeed.

6.3 Contributions to Knowledge

6.3.1 Theoretical Contributions

The study makes four theoretical contributions.

First, it extends Policy Transfer Theory (Phillips & Ochs, 2004) to transnational school networks. Existing policy transfer research has focused predominantly on nation-to-nation borrowing, assuming a relatively coherent receiving environment. This study demonstrates that transfer into a fragmented regulatory landscape (multiple UAE emirate-level authorities) involves hybrid modes—neither fully voluntary nor fully coercive—and that leadership agency is a critical mediating variable often underemphasized in structural accounts.

Second, it extends Instructional Leadership Theory (Hallinger, 2021) by identifying Regulatory Mediation as an additional leadership dimension. In traditional instructional leadership models, the regulatory environment is treated as a background condition. In transnational CBSE schools, regulatory negotiation moves to the foreground, shaping virtually every implementation decision. The study proposes Regulatory Mediation Leadership as a necessary expansion of Hallinger’s framework for international school contexts.

Third, it introduces Dual Governance Mediation as a new theoretical construct. Unlike “policy translation” (which focuses on mutation of policy meaning) or “instructional leadership” (which focuses on leader behaviors), Dual Governance Mediation describes the specific structural process of balancing layered accountability. The construct captures the ongoing work of interpreting overlapping requirements, prioritizing competing demands, translating evidence across frameworks, and documenting compliance for

multiple audiences. It serves as a conceptual bridge between Policy Transfer and Organizational Change theories.

Fourth, it develops the Negotiated Adaptation model as an alternative to binary implementation frameworks. The model rejects “success versus failure” or “compliance versus resistance” dichotomies, conceptualizing policy enactment in dual-accountability settings as dynamic, context-sensitive, and continuously renegotiated. The model has three core propositions: (a) enactment is inherently negotiated, (b) implementation depth depends on leader mediation capacity, and (c) negotiation is a persistent feature, not a temporary transition.

6.3.2 Practical Contributions

The study offers actionable guidance for school leaders. Specific recommendations include developing a dual-governance alignment matrix mapping NEP components against inspection indicators, adopting phased implementation timelines aligned with inspection cycles, creating centralized documentation systems serving both CBSE and UAE requirements, investing in teacher retention strategies to reduce transience-related capacity loss, and implementing proactive parent communication campaigns framing NEP benefits in terms that address stakeholder concerns.

For school operators and governing boards, the study suggests viewing NEP implementation as a strategic investment distinguishing schools in the competitive UAE market, rather than merely a compliance burden.

6.3.3 Policy Contributions

For CBSE, the study recommends developing international-specific implementation guidance, establishing formal coordination mechanisms with UAE regulatory authorities, providing exemplar competency-based assessment models for overseas schools, and offering targeted leadership development for international school principals and vice-principals.

For UAE regulatory authorities (KHDA, ADEK, SPEA, MoE), the study recommends aligning inspection indicators with competency-based education principles, accepting diverse evidence formats (including NEP-aligned portfolios), producing joint guidance with CBSE, and recognizing reform progress in inspection ratings rather than requiring immediate full compliance.

6.4 Limitations

Several limitations must be acknowledged transparently to appropriately contextualize the study’s claims and to inform future research.

First, generalizability is limited by sample size and specificity. The study included 15 educational leaders from CBSE schools across four UAE emirates. While this sample size is appropriate for qualitative and mixed-methods leadership research seeking information-rich cases, the quantitative findings (percentages, means, correlations) describe this specific group rather than the entire population of UAE-based CBSE schools. Furthermore, findings are specific to the UAE regulatory environment; they may not generalize to CBSE schools in other host countries (e.g., Qatar, Singapore, Saudi Arabia) with different governance structures, inspection frameworks, or cultural contexts.

Second, the study relies on self-reported leadership perceptions. Interview data and survey responses reflect what leaders reported about their experiences, decisions, and perceptions. Self-report data are subject to social desirability bias (presenting oneself or one’s school favorably) and recall bias (reconstructing past

events in light of current beliefs). Triangulation with documentary evidence mitigated but did not eliminate these biases.

Third, the cross-sectional design captures a single point in time. Data were collected during 2024–2026, a specific phase in NEP 2020's rollout. Policy enactment is an ongoing process; findings cannot predict how implementation will evolve as schools gain experience, as regulatory frameworks change, as CBSE issues revised guidance, or as leader turnover occurs. Longitudinal research is required to examine change over time.

Fourth, the study focuses exclusively on leadership perspectives. Teachers, parents, and students were not included as participants. This focus was deliberate—leaders are primary decision-makers for policy enactment—but it means the study does not capture how leadership decisions are perceived, experienced, or contested by other stakeholders. Teacher perspectives on professional development adequacy, parent perspectives on communication effectiveness, and student perspectives on learning experiences remain unexamined.

Fifth, the dual accountability context varies across emirates with limited comparative power. While the sample included participants from Dubai (KHDA), Abu Dhabi (ADEK), Sharjah (SPEA), and the Northern Emirates (MoE), the small number of participants in some emirates (e.g., Abu Dhabi, $n=3$; Northern Emirates, $n=1$) limits detailed comparative analysis across regulatory regimes.²

6.5 Future Research Directions

The limitations and findings together suggest a robust agenda for future research, organized into five directions.

Direction One: Longitudinal and Processual Research. How does Negotiated Adaptation evolve over time? Do schools move from Moderate to High Readiness, and if so, what conditions enable that movement? How do leader transitions (principal turnover) affect implementation continuity? A 5-year longitudinal study tracking the same schools annually—using repeated surveys, interviews, and document analysis—would answer these questions and capture implementation as a dynamic process rather than a static snapshot.

Direction Two: Comparative Research Across Host Countries and Curricula. How does NEP translation compare across different host countries (e.g., UAE vs. Qatar vs. Singapore vs. Saudi Arabia vs. Oman)? How do different regulatory environments—varying in inspection stringency, documentation requirements, and innovation expectations—shape mediation strategies? Additionally, how does Dual Governance Mediation operate in other transnational curriculum systems (e.g., IB schools in non-IB countries, IGCSE schools in non-UK contexts)? A multi-country, multi-curriculum comparative study would identify contextual factors that enable or constrain adaptation and would test the generalizability of the Dual Governance Mediation construct.

Direction Three: Multi-Stakeholder Research. How do teachers experience NEP-aligned professional development? What support do they need beyond what leaders currently provide? How do parents perceive NEP reforms—particularly reduced examination emphasis—and what communication strategies effectively address their concerns? How do students experience competency-based learning compared to traditional instruction? A multi-stakeholder study using surveys, focus groups, and interviews across the same schools would provide a more complete, ecologically valid picture of enactment dynamics.

Direction Four: Outcome-Focused Research. Does NEP implementation correlate with improved student outcomes on competency-based measures (critical thinking, problem-solving, collaboration)? Does

implementation depth affect CBSE board examination performance, and if so, how? Does NEP enactment influence student well-being, engagement, or retention? An outcome-focused study linking implementation measures (e.g., NARI scores, teacher preparedness ratings) to student-level outcomes would provide evidence of reform effectiveness beyond leader perceptions.

Direction Five: Intervention and Design-Based Research. Can Dual Governance Mediation capacity be developed through targeted interventions? Would leadership coaching programs focused on regulatory alignment, documentation system templates, or regulatory workshop series improve implementation outcomes? Design-based research—developing, implementing, and iteratively refining interventions in partnership with schools—would generate evidence-based tools for practice and contribute to improvement science in transnational education.

Direction Six: Theory Testing and Refinement. Is the Dual Governance Mediation construct specific to CBSE-UAE, or does it apply more broadly to other transnational dual-accountability contexts? What are the boundary conditions of the Negotiated Adaptation model? Comparative theory-testing across different policy transfer contexts would refine, extend, or challenge the theoretical contributions of this study.

6.6 Final Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that the implementation of NEP 2020 in UAE-based CBSE schools is not a straightforward exercise of policy replication but a dynamic process of negotiated adaptation within hybrid governance systems. Educational leaders serve as the essential bridge—balancing innovation with compliance, pedagogical vision with operational reality, and origin-country mandates with host-country regulations.

The study's central theoretical contribution—the Dual Governance Mediation construct—provides a new analytical language for understanding leadership work in transnational schooling. The Negotiated Adaptation model offers an alternative to binary implementation frameworks, conceptualizing policy enactment as context-sensitive, continuously renegotiated, and dependent on leader mediation capacity. The practical recommendations for school leaders, CBSE, and UAE regulatory authorities provide actionable pathways for improving implementation.

Ultimately, this research affirms that for national educational reforms to succeed in globalized environments, policy ambition must be met with context-aware leadership, structural readiness, and the active harmonization of dual regulatory demands. Beyond the immediate implementation of a single policy, this study highlights a broader phenomenon: the growing complexity of international education, where the success of a school is increasingly defined by its ability to synthesize diverse national standards, cultural expectations, and regulatory frameworks into a cohesive, high-quality learning experience. As transnational schooling continues to expand, the capacity for dual governance mediation will become not merely an advantage but a necessity for educational leaders worldwide.

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Appendix A: Participant Consent Statement

Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, and their right to withdraw at any time. Digital consent was obtained prior to data collection.

Participant Information Sheet

Title of the Study

Implementation of India's National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 in the UAE: Perspectives of Educational Leaders

Purpose of the Study

This study aims to examine how educational leaders in the UAE perceive and experience the implementation of **NEP 2020**, with a focus on:

- Implementation challenges in a non-Indian educational context
- The influence of UAE regulatory requirements on leadership decision-making
- Perceived opportunities and benefits of NEP 2020 in enhancing educational quality within the UAE's international school market

Why You Are Being Invited

You are invited to participate because you hold a **school leadership position** and have professional insight into curriculum, policy implementation, and regulatory compliance in the UAE education system.

What Participation Involves

- Completing an **online survey** (approximately 10–12 minutes)
- Responding to a combination of **multiple-choice and open-ended questions**
- No follow-up is required unless you voluntarily indicate interest

Voluntary Participation

Participation is **entirely voluntary**. You may choose not to participate or withdraw at any time before submission without any consequences.

Confidentiality and Anonymity

- The survey does **not collect names, school identities, or contact details**
- All responses are collected anonymously
- Data will be reported only in **aggregated form**

Ethical and Regulatory Alignment

This study is conducted in line with the **ethical research expectations of KHDA, SPEA, ADEK, and the UAE Ministry of Education.**

It is:

- Non-evaluative
- Independent of inspection or licensing processes
- Focused solely on academic research

Participation has **no impact** on school inspections, regulatory compliance, or professional standing.

Data Use and Storage

Data will be used exclusively for academic purposes, including a postgraduate dissertation and related scholarly outputs. All data will be stored securely and deleted after completion of the study in accordance with institutional ethical guidelines.

Contact Information

If you have questions about this study, you may contact:

[RAJEEV MADHAVAN]

[SHARJAH INDIAN SCHOOL JUWAIZA]

[vp@sisjuwaiza.com]

