

Theme 3: Reforming Teacher Education

NEP 2020: From Policy to Praxis

Theme 3: Reforming Teacher Education and Institutional Capacity Focus

Consolidated Extended Abstracts



1. From Policy Vision to Classroom Reality: Stakeholder Perspectives on the Implementation Challenges of Contemporary Educational Reforms By Chandrang Pathak, Jumishree S. Pathak and Prerana Shelat (Indian Institute of Teacher Education)

Extended

Abstract:

Context and Policy Linkage

Educational reforms worldwide increasingly emphasize flexibility, a learner-centric approach, and institutional accountability to respond to rapidly changing socio-economic and technological contexts. In India, the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 represents a landmark shift aimed at transforming the education system through multidisciplinary learning, flexible curricular structures, competency-based education, and strengthened institutional governance (NEP, 2020). While the policy articulates an ambitious and progressive vision, its success ultimately depends on effective implementation at the institutional level.

A growing body of scholarship highlights that large-scale policy reforms often encounter significant challenges during execution due to administrative capacity constraints, lack of clarity in guidelines, uneven resource distribution, and resistance to change among stakeholders (Fullan, 2006; OECD, 2020). Understanding how educational institutions interpret, negotiate, and operationalize reform mandates is therefore critical for assessing the real impact of policy interventions. This study situates itself within this policy-practice continuum, examining how educational leaders experience and perceive the implementation of contemporary educational reforms inspired by NEP 2020, how they are implementing the policy, and the challenges they are facing during its implementation of NEP 2020. By foregrounding stakeholder voices from higher education institutions (HEIs), the study contributes empirical evidence on the institutional realities shaping reform implementation.

Research Questions

The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. How do institutional stakeholders perceive the objectives and envisioned outcomes of contemporary educational reforms?
2. What key challenges do educational institutions face during the implementation of these reforms?
3. How do administrative, infrastructural, and human resource factors influence policy

implementation at the institutional level?

4. What insights do stakeholders offer for strengthening the alignment between policy design and classroom-level practice?

Methodology and Data Sources

This study adopted a qualitative research approach to capture in-depth perspectives on educational reform implementation, challenges and solution. This study is embedded in the descriptive survey research design. The population of the study comprised 261 educational institutions across the state of Gujarat, representing a diverse range of universities (Central, State and Institute of National Importance) and higher education institutions.

A multistage sampling technique was employed to ensure regional representation and contextual diversity. In the first stage, the state of Gujarat was geographically divided into five regions: East, West, North, South, and Central Gujarat. In the second stage, ten institutions were selected from each region, resulting in a total sample of fifty higher education institutions. This is approximately 20 percent of the total population.

Data were collected from key institutional authorities:

Directors of Internal Quality Assurance Cells (IQAC), Registrars, and Vice-Chancellors of the respective universities.

These respondents were selected due to their strategic roles in policy interpretation, institutional governance, and reform implementation.

Primary data were gathered through semi-structured interviews, allowing respondents to articulate experiences, challenges, and perceptions in their own words. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis, following an inductive approach where themes emerged directly from the data rather than being pre-imposed. This method is particularly suited for exploring complex social phenomena and identifying patterned meanings across qualitative datasets (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analytical process involved familiarization with the data, generation of initial codes, categorization of similar codes, and synthesis into overarching themes that reflected shared institutional experiences.

Key Findings / Results

The thematic analysis revealed several interrelated challenges that shape the implementation of contemporary educational reforms.

Policy and Structural Ambiguity emerged as a dominant theme. While stakeholders acknowledged the progressive intent of reforms, many reported a lack of clarity in operational guidelines, timelines, and implementation pathways. This ambiguity led to inconsistent interpretation across institutions and uncertainty in execution.

A second major theme concerned administrative and institutional capacity constraints. Respondents highlighted shortages of trained academic and administrative staff, high dependence on temporary faculty appointments, and limited institutional readiness to manage complex reforms such as flexible curricula, credit systems, integrated teacher education programme and multidisciplinary offerings. These constraints often resulted in increased workload and procedural delays.

Curricular and pedagogical transition challenges were also prominently reported. Institutions struggled to move from traditional programme-based structures to credit-based, learner-centric models. Stakeholders expressed concerns about inadequate faculty preparedness for interdisciplinary teaching, research-oriented undergraduate education, and competency-based assessment practices.

The theme of digital and infrastructural limitations underscored disparities in technological readiness across institutions. While digitalization was recognized as essential for reform implementation, inconsistent access to digital infrastructure and limited digital literacy among staff and students hindered effective adoption.

Finally, mindset and change resistance emerged as a critical human factor. Participants noted that successful reform implementation requires not only structural changes but also a cultural shift among educators and administrators. Resistance to new systems, coupled with insufficient training and orientation, slowed institutional transformation.

Suggestions From the Respondent

Several themes emerged from the data in which respondents emphasised the need for clear and context-specific implementation guidelines to reduce ambiguity in executing educational reforms like multiple entry-multiple exit, registration on the academic bank of credit portal etc. They strongly recommended decentralization of decision-making, providing greater academic and administrative autonomy to institutions so reforms can be adapted to local needs. Strengthening human resource capacity through permanent recruitment of qualified teaching and non-teaching staff was highlighted as critical for sustaining reform initiatives. Participants also stressed the importance of continuous professional development and

structured training programmes (specified to a particular task) to improve faculty readiness and promote a positive reform-oriented mindset. Investment in digital and physical infrastructure, including learning management systems and research facilities, was viewed as essential for effective implementation. Additionally, respondents advocated for stronger academic-industry linkages to enhance employability and research relevance. Finally, regular awareness programs and stakeholder consultations were suggested to bridge the gap between policy intent and classroom-level practice.

Policy Implications and Relevance

The findings underscore the importance of addressing the implementation gap between policy vision and institutional reality. First, there is a pressing need for clearer operational guidelines, phased implementation strategies, and contextual flexibility to support diverse institutional capacities. Second, capacity building must be prioritized through sustained investment in faculty recruitment, professional development, and administrative training aligned with reform objectives. Strengthening institutional autonomy and decentralized decision-making can further enhance responsiveness to local contexts. Third, digital infrastructure and technological support systems require strategic expansion to ensure equitable reform implementation across regions. Finally, fostering a culture of reform through continuous stakeholder engagement, training, and communication is essential for long-term sustainability.

By documenting stakeholder perspectives, this study provides actionable insights for policymakers, regulators, and institutional leaders seeking to strengthen the effectiveness of educational reforms. The findings contribute to evidence-based policy learning and align closely with NEP 2020's goals of quality, equity, and systemic transformation.

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2. NEP 2020 in Practice: Design and Systems Led Learnings from School and Teacher System Interventions in the Kosi Region of Bihar By Kshitiz Anand and Vatsala (Happy Horizons)

Extended Abstract:

India's National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 represents one of the most ambitious education reforms undertaken globally in recent decades. It articulates a vision of systemic transformation centred on foundational literacy and numeracy (FLN), holistic and experiential learning, teacher professional development, institutional autonomy, and equity-driven outcomes (Ministry of Education, 2020). While the policy provides conceptual coherence and a unifying national framework, there remains a critical gap in empirically grounded research that documents how NEP 2020 is interpreted, operationalised, and experienced in historically under-resourced regions. This paper addresses that gap by examining the translation of NEP 2020 from policy intent to on-ground practice in the Kosi region of Bihar—one of India's most economically marginalised and administratively constrained geographies.

The paper draws on over a decade of practice-based engagement across public, nonprofit, and low-cost private education systems in Bihar, anchored in the work of Happy Horizons Trust and The Happy Kids. These initiatives span three interconnected domains that directly map onto NEP 2020 priorities: (1) foundational literacy and numeracy interventions in government schools, (2) teacher professional development initiatives in collaboration with District Institute of Education and Training (DIETs), and (3) the design, establishment, and operation of a chain of affordable private schools serving first-generation learners. Rather than presenting a single programme evaluation, the paper synthesises a collection of trials, iterations, and learnings accumulated across multiple years and institutional contexts, offering a longitudinal and system-aware perspective on NEP implementation in a low-capacity setting.

Conceptual Framing: Design Thinking and Systems Thinking

The analysis is framed through two complementary lenses: Design Thinking and Systems Thinking. Design Thinking informs the micro-level approach to intervention design, emphasising human-centred problem framing, contextual empathy, iterative prototyping, rapid feedback loops, and learning from failure (Brown, 2009). This lens is particularly

relevant in settings where policy prescriptions must be continuously adapted to local realities such as teacher availability, student migration, linguistic diversity, and socio-economic precarity.

Systems Thinking provides the macro-level analytical framework, positioning education not as a linear delivery mechanism but as a complex adaptive system shaped by interdependencies between policy design, institutional capacity, governance structures, incentives, and socio-cultural norms (Meadows, 2008). Drawing on systems approaches to public sector reform (OECD, 2017), the paper treats NEP 2020 as an enabling architecture whose outcomes emerge through dynamic interactions rather than deterministic implementation. Together, these lenses allow the study to move beyond binary success–failure narratives and instead examine why certain reforms take root, adapt, or stall in marginalised contexts.

Methodological Approach and Positionality

Methodologically, the paper adopts a qualitative-dominant, practice-embedded mixed-methods approach. Data sources include programme documentation, learning outcome trends, teacher training curricula and artefacts, institutional design records, field notes, and reflective practitioner analysis accumulated through sustained engagement in the field. The author’s positionality as a designer–educator–institution builder embedded within implementation contexts is a deliberate methodological choice. This insider–practitioner stance enables access to tacit knowledge, informal workarounds, and system behaviours that are often invisible in external evaluations, while also necessitating reflexivity to critically interrogate assumptions and limitations.

The study prioritises analytical generalisation over statistical generalisation, aiming to surface transferable insights into the conditions, constraints, and mechanisms that shape NEP implementation rather than isolate causal effects.

Section 1: Foundational Literacy and Numeracy in Government Schools

The first section examines FLN interventions implemented in government schools in the Kosi region. NEP 2020 positions FLN as the foundational building block for all subsequent learning, with an explicit focus on early grades (Ministry of Education, 2020). Field evidence from Bihar suggests that while curriculum frameworks and structured learning goals are necessary, they are insufficient in isolation. Learning outcomes were found to be strongly mediated by systemic enablers such as teacher continuity, classroom stability, school

leadership, academic mentoring, and community trust.

Design-led interventions focused on simplifying instructional routines, developing contextually relevant learning materials, and establishing structured feedback loops with teachers demonstrated early gains in literacy and numeracy where enabling conditions were present. However, systems-level analysis revealed persistent constraints—including frequent teacher transfers, administrative overload, multigrade classrooms, and weak accountability mechanisms—that diluted or reversed gains over time. These findings highlight a key tension within NEP 2020: the policy’s curricular clarity often outpaces the system’s absorptive capacity in marginalised regions.

Section 2: Teacher Professional Development and DIET Engagement

The second section analyses teacher professional development initiatives undertaken in collaboration with DIETs, which NEP 2020 identifies as critical nodes for continuous teacher learning. The policy assumes that DIETs possess the institutional capacity to design and deliver high-quality, practice-oriented professional development. Evidence from the Kosi region, however, reveals structural limitations including faculty shortages, limited exposure to contemporary pedagogy, and reliance on cascade-based training models that prioritise compliance over learning.

Using Design Thinking principles, the interventions co-created modular, practice-oriented training formats, incorporated classroom-based mentoring, and emphasised reflective practice. These approaches resulted in higher engagement and short-term pedagogical adoption. However, Systems Thinking analysis revealed that such innovations struggled to sustain or scale without complementary changes in incentives, governance structures, and institutional accountability. These findings align with broader public sector reform literature, which cautions against expecting local innovation to compensate for systemic misalignment (Meadows, 2008; OECD, 2017).

Section 3: Affordable Private Schools as System Experiments

The third section explores the establishment of affordable private schools as experimental system interventions. While NEP 2020 prioritises strengthening public education, parental demand in regions such as the Kosi Region reflects pragmatic concerns around reliability, continuity, and aspiration. These schools were intentionally designed as learning organisations, embedding teacher development, community engagement, and iterative curriculum adaptation. From a systems perspective, these schools functioned as tightly

coupled micro-systems that enabled rapid design iteration, clearer accountability, and stronger feedback loops. At the same time, they surfaced ethical and policy tensions around equity, access, regulation, and long-term sustainability. Rather than positioning private schools as substitutes for public education, the paper treats them as diagnostic sites that illuminate both the possibilities of design coherence and the structural constraints of large public systems.

Interrogating NEP 2020 Assumptions

Across these domains, the paper interrogates three core assumptions embedded in NEP 2020: (1) that policy coherence ensures implementation fidelity; (2) that institutional capacity exists uniformly across regions; and (3) that transformation can be primarily driven through top-down reform. Evidence from Bihar suggests instead that NEP outcomes are contingent on local sense-making, non-state actors acting as system integrators, and continuous design iteration informed by ground-level feedback.

Conclusion and Policy Learning Implications

The paper concludes by reframing NEP 2020 implementation as a design and systems challenge rather than a compliance exercise. It argues for policy learning architectures that legitimise practice-based evidence, support adaptive capacity at district and institutional levels, and explicitly recognise regional asymmetries in readiness. By grounding national policy discourse in the lived realities of one of India's most marginalised regions, this study contributes empirically grounded insights into how NEP 2020 can evolve through evidence-informed, context-sensitive, and system-aware innovation.

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3. A study on Academic Need and Perceptions of Teachers as Researcher across 10 Indian States By Dr. N.Ramkumar and Ms. H.D. Malathi (Prayoga Institute of Education Research)

Extended Abstract:

Context & Policy Linkage (to NEP 2020)

The National Education Policy emphasizes the need for teachers to be effective and to have regular opportunities for self-improvement, making Continuous Professional Development (CPD) essential. The real challenge lies in creating professional opportunities for teachers at scale on a continuous basis, so that both individual and systemic capacities are strengthened to realize the policy's vision for 21st-century education.

The policy emphasizes the need for critical thinking, inquiry-driven pedagogy, and the holistic development of teachers. This emphasis must be embedded in teachers' everyday practice, where professional development is integrated into their daily routines and pedagogies, ultimately enhancing student learning outcomes. Such an approach requires a fundamental shift from viewing teachers as mere consumers of knowledge to recognizing them as creators of knowledge. One possible way to achieve this is by envisioning teachers as researchers, thereby affirming their primary role as creators of Teacher Professional Knowledge (TPK). Elliot J. (2024) defines TPK as 'the specialized, context-dependent knowledge teachers build through experience, reflection, and engagement with students, curriculum, pedagogy, and stakeholders.

The Prayoga Institute of Education Research is proposing a Teacher Fellowship Programme (TFP), a rigorous, nine-month, evidence-based model designed to transform science teachers (Grades 6–9) into reflective practitioners who value and enrich their own Teacher Professional Knowledge (TPK). By aligning with the NEP's goal of revitalizing public institutions such as SCERTs and DIETs, the TFP adopts a deputation model to build institutional capacity while empowering individual teachers as creators of knowledge. This programme bridges the gap between Stenhouse's legacy of teacher research and the practical realities of Indian classrooms.

As a prelude to the TFP, a needs assessment study of government and private school teachers is being planned to explore the following questions." The study is driven by the need to understand the ground-level realities of implementing the ""teacher as researcher"" model within the diverse Indian context.

Statement of the Problem: A study on Academic Need and Perceptions of Teachers as Researcher across 10 Indian States.

Research Question(s)

- What are the academic needs, perceptions, challenges and institutional support requirements of teachers/administrators across diverse contexts in relation to their role as Teachers as a Researcher?

Objectives

1. To identify the academic needs of teachers and administrators regarding their role as researchers.
2. To understand the perceptions of how teachers and administrators across diverse contexts view the concept of teacher as a Researcher
3. To provide a detailed account of the challenges and barriers that prevent teacher administrators from engaging in research practices.
4. To offer evidence-based suggestions on the type of academic and institutional support necessary to strengthen teacher lead research programmes in schools.

Methodology and Data Sources

Theoretical Grounding: The methodology is informed by the theories of Fullan (2016) regarding learning systems, Guskey (2002) on the model of teacher change, and Cochran-Smith & Lytle (2009) on "Inquiry as Stance" The study adopts a qualitative research approach to capture rich, contextual insights through dialogue and interaction.

Sampling Strategy: A stratified purposive sampling method was employed to select ten states, with two states representing each of the five major regions: North, South, East, West, and North-East.

Participants: The data pool includes 308 participants, comprising 115 Government teachers, 104 Private school teachers, 52 Government Headmasters (HMs), and 37 Private HMs.

Data Collection Tool: The primary tool used is Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) conducted online. These sessions are recorded and documented to preserve the "emic" (insider) perspective of the practitioners.

Data Analysis (Four-Stage Process):

Preparation: Transcription and organization of online interviews into individual state-wise reports.

Categorization: Organizing data by school type (Private vs. Government) and thematic areas such as Challenges, academic needs, perceptions, and institutional support.

Content Coding: Using a conceptual framework to code data based on Beliefs, Assumptions, Actions, and Practices

Synthesis and Interpretation: Utilizing MAXQDA software to combine state-level codes and identify cross-state patterns, similarities, and variations.

Key Findings/Results

The interim findings from the 10-state study highlight a significant "latent desire" for research among teachers, coupled with substantial structural obstacles.

The "Desire-Action" Gap: While 179 out of 308 teachers consider their innovative work as a form of research, only 16 had actually completed a formal action research project at their school. This indicates a massive untapped potential for inquiry that lacks conceptual validation and structure.

Perceptions of Research: Teachers view research as a professional obligation ("a must") for self-improvement. Administrators, conversely, view it as a systematic mechanism for continuous school improvement and quality control.

Critical Barriers: The primary challenge identified is time constraint resulting from heavy workloads and non-teaching duties. Administrators noted that a lack of substitute teachers makes maintaining classes during research activities "difficult".

Sustainable change in teaching practices (the final goal of CPD) only occurs when teachers see positive student results from new actions, which then reshapes their underlying beliefs and assumptions.

Impact of Mentoring: Feedback from stakeholders, including the Prayoga Ethics Committee, emphasized that mentoring and teacher Network are essential for sustaining reflective dialogue and preventing the isolation of inquiry-oriented teachers.

Role of Teacher Practitioner Knowledge (TPK): The study highlights the legitimacy of TPK—professional ways of knowing that are unique to the classroom context—as a vital theory of

knowledge that should underpin teacher education. (essential from the point of designing teacher education programmes.

Institutional Influence: The findings suggest that school culture and leadership are decisive factors. Administrators often view research through the lens of institutional support rather than as a driver for classroom-level pedagogical innovation.

Policy Implications & Relevance to NEP 2020

The results of this need assessment study have profound implications for the implementation of NEP 2020 and the broader goal of systems transformation.

Revitalizing Support Institutions: For NEP 2020's vision to succeed, SCERTs and DIETs must move beyond traditional training and lead a "change management process". They should be developed into hubs that support the Inquiry as Stance model, where research is embedded in the teacher's professional identity.

Redesigning CPD: Professional development must move away from "one-size-fits-all" workshops toward models like the Teacher Fellowship Programme. Effective CPD must be content-focused, collaborative, and of sufficient duration to allow teachers to see the student results necessary to shift their beliefs.

Establishing Professional Standards: The development of National Professional Standards for Teachers (NPST) by 2022 should incorporate "research and inquiry" as a core competency for all stages of teaching (Foundational to Secondary).

Governance and Autonomy: To foster a research culture, governance must move toward the, granting teachers the autonomy to experiment and innovate without the burden of excessive administrative tasks.

Scaling Innovation with Equity: By identifying regional variations in teacher needs, policymakers can create Action Research Centre (ARC) in DIETs where research-informed practices are tailored to the local linguistic and cultural context, ensuring that the benefits of teacher-led inquiry reach the most disadvantaged students.

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4. Understanding Implementation Challenges in an FLN-Focused School Leadership RCT Program in India By Airodi Tejas and Gautam Anand (Global School Leaders)

Extended Abstract:

Context and policy linkage

National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 accords “highest priority” for Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN), which it sees as “an urgent and necessary prerequisite for learning” to address the high-levels of learning poverty in the country. In addition to some key measures such as teacher training, developing age-appropriate curricular resources, systematic tracking of student achievement, NEP 2020 also recommends Continuous Professional Development (CPD) of school principals, and build their leadership and management skills, content and pedagogical practices in order to support teaching and learning in their schools.

The government has also issued the National Initiative for Proficiency in Reading with Understanding and Numeracy (NIPUN) Bharat guidelines 2021 to support the implementation of NEP 2020. The guidelines outline the role of school leaders as “pedagogical leaders” in addition to their role as administrative head of schools, and their role in mentoring their teachers on FLN-related teaching and learning practices . These guidelines also call for partnerships with Civil Society Organizations and Non-Governmental Organizations to aid in the capacity building efforts of school leaders, in addition through the existing National Initiative for School Heads’ and Teachers’ Holistic Advancement (NISHTA) training programme organized by the government.

Emerging research has consistently highlighted the importance of leadership in driving student success (Leaver et al., 2019; Adelman & Lemos, 2021). Effective school leadership can be pivotal in enhancing student outcomes, primarily by shaping teaching practices, fostering teamwork among teachers, and boosting teacher satisfaction. Yet limited evidence exists on how to strengthen the effectiveness of school leaders in improving student outcomes, especially in low- and middle-income contexts like India.

Research design, methodology, and data sources

This paper discusses a research study, which evaluated a large-scale school leadership training program in public residential schools targeting students from marginalized

communities in Telangana, India, between 2021-2024. The program focused on foundational literacy and numeracy (FLN), as well as active learning strategies, school culture, and student safety. As part of the program, principals and vice-principals participated in a mix of in-person and virtual workshops, while a smaller group of them also received one-to-one in-person and virtual coaching sessions.

A randomized controlled trial (RCT) design was utilized with two treatment groups for the impact evaluation. A total of 384 residential schools under the Telangana Social Welfare Residential Educational Institutions Society (Social Welfare) and Telangana Tribal Welfare Residential Educational Institutions Society (Tribal Welfare) participated in the program. Treatment 1 schools (150) received training workshops, Treatment 2 schools (99) received coaching in addition to training workshops, while 135 schools were assigned to the Control group.

This research aimed to understand the effectiveness of a school leadership training program in improving school management & student learning outcomes, and the added impact of personalized coaching.

As part of research activities, all sample school principals, teachers and students were surveyed at baseline and after two years of implementation, and student assessments were also administered in all the schools during these time points. The evidence we use in this chapter is mainly drawn from the 2 rounds of qualitative interviews that were conducted with - 12 school leaders and 4 Regional Coordination Officers (RCOs) in the first round from Control, Treatment 1, Treatment 2 groups, and 4 school leaders from Treatment 2 and 2 department officials in the second round, as well as the process monitoring data that was collected during the program.

Key findings

The program was designed to be implemented for three years (2022-2025). However, large-scale transfers and major changes in government structure, leadership, and priorities disrupted much of the third year implementation. We touch upon the mechanisms through which school leaders influence program implementation, including classroom observation, teacher mentoring, logistical facilitation, and follow-up support, briefly. The report then mainly focuses its discussion on systemic and contextual barriers that affect implementation fidelity of experimental research like RCTs.

The key findings that will be discussed in detail will include:

- Competing administrative responsibilities affect school leaders' uptake of instructional leadership programs.
- Frequent turnover of school leaders curtails effective implementation of instructional leadership programs.
- Hands-on support through coaching, frequent monitoring, and ready-to-use resources are critical levers for better uptake of instructional leadership practices among school leaders.
- Meaningful integration of technology is useful for higher uptake of instructional practices among school leaders.

Policy implications and recommendations

In conclusion, we argue that professional development of school leaders offers a compelling route for addressing student learning poverty. But leadership interventions must recognise the realities of low-resource settings: heavy administrative demands, resource constraints, frequent transfers and competing reform agendas. Without addressing these, even well-designed leadership programmes may struggle to take root.

For researchers, the paper underscores the need for further work on leadership in low-resource contexts: longitudinal studies tracking how leadership practices evolve over time; experimental or quasi-experimental designs evaluating leadership professional development; deeper qualitative inquiry into how leaders negotiate systemic constraints and existing socio-cultural norms; and exploration of technology's role in enhancing instructional leadership in challenging contexts.

For practitioners, policymakers and donors seeking to strengthen education systems, we recommend that: invest not only in teacher training and remedial programmes but also in school leadership professional development. We should create opportunities for school leaders and middle-leaders to support their teachers, monitor student practice, make data-driven decisions, and adapt to the contextual needs and challenges.

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