LEARNING WHAT MATTERS IN INDIA

SHIFTING MINDSETS: TRANSFORMING EDUCATION SYSTEMS THAT ENABLE EVERY YOUNG PERSON TO THRIVE

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ACRONYMS

GOI	Government of India
MHRD	Ministry of Human Resource Development
MOE	Ministry of Education
NEP	National Education Policy
UDISE+	Unified District Information System for Education Plus
SEL	Socioemotional Learning

ABOUT DREAM A DREAM

Dream a Dream is a nonprofit organization in India working to transform the experience of education for children and young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. Since 1999, the organization has worked to mainstream life skills and socioemotional learning (SEL) as critical components in helping children overcome adversity and learn to thrive. Dream a Dream aims to shift the purpose of education toward the idea of thriving for every child. The organization supports education systems through programs implemented directly with schools, curriculum and pedagogical innovation, development of holistic assessment frameworks, and efforts to shift public and policy narratives about the purpose of education. Dream a Dream currently works across seven Indian states, reaching approximately 3.6 million children through strategic partnerships with state governments and collaborations with civil society organizations and funders.

Dream a Dream is a member of the Network for Education Systems Transformation (NEST). The principal leads of this report are members of the organization's Research and Impact team, who partnered with the Center for Universal Education at the Brookings Institution as part of the NEST India study.

ABOUT THIS SERIES

How well are education systems creating opportunities for children and young people to learn what matters?

Education systems worldwide face mounting pressure to prepare children and young people not just for academic success, but for meaningful participation in an increasingly complex world (UNESCO 2023). Growing evidence suggests that to navigate the challenges and opportunities of the 21st century, children and young people need a broad set of skills including but not limited to literacy, numeracy, critical thinking, collaboration, creativity, SEL, and civic engagement (Dweck, Walton and Cohen 2014; Martinez 2022; Radó 2020).

The Network for Education Systems Transformation (NEST), a global impact network[1] co-led by the Center for Universal Education (CUE) at the Brookings Institution and ten civil society organizations across Africa, Latin America, the Middle East, and South Asia, seeks to understand how education systems can transform to prioritize a "breadth of skills"—an integrated set of academic, socioemotional, and transversal competencies that enable all children and young people to thrive (Care, Anderson, and Kim 2016; UNESCO n.d.).

Central to our work is a shared exploratory question: How well are education systems creating opportunities for children and young people to learn what matters? This question acknowledges that, while concepts like "education systems," "opportunities," and "what matters" may differ across contexts, what binds the network is our collective commitment to understanding how education systems can transform to prioritize the development of a breadth of skills in all children and young people. Rather than prescribing universal definitions, NEST embraces locally grounded interpretations that honor the historical, cultural, political, and socioeconomic realities of each setting.

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1   Impact networks are complex living systems, made of interacting people, organizations, and ecosystems. In contrast to traditional organizations with linear processes and standard operating procedures, networks are dynamic, interconnected, and variable. For details about the model of impact networks, see Ehrlichman (2021).

FRAMING OUR INQUIRY: THE FOUR Ps AND THREE Cs AS WORKING FRAMEWORKS

Informed by prior research from CUE at the Brookings Institution, NEST draws on two interconnected frameworks that guide our exploration of education systems transformation toward skills development. The 4P framework identifies four high-level domains of change in systems transformation: purpose, pedagogy, positioning, and power (Winthrop and Sengeh 2022; Winthrop, Morris, and Qargha 2023). The 3C framework proposes three catalytic conditions believed to enable and sustain the transformation process: commitment, capacity, and cohesion (CUE 2022; Olateju et al. forthcoming). This study finds greater alignment with the 4Ps and uses it as the key framework for analyzing the findings.

We approach these frameworks not as prescriptive models, but as working theories that require interrogation, adaptation, and potential expansion based on observations in diverse local contexts. Our methodology is deliberately abductive, that is, moving systematically between observation and theoretical inference while remaining open to alternative explanations and framework modifications. This approach reflects NEST's commitment to collaborative inquiry that is iterative, values local knowledge and expertise, and contributes to broader understanding of education systems transformation. We recognize that meaningful change cannot be externally imposed, but must emerge from genuine engagement with local realities, assets, and constraints.
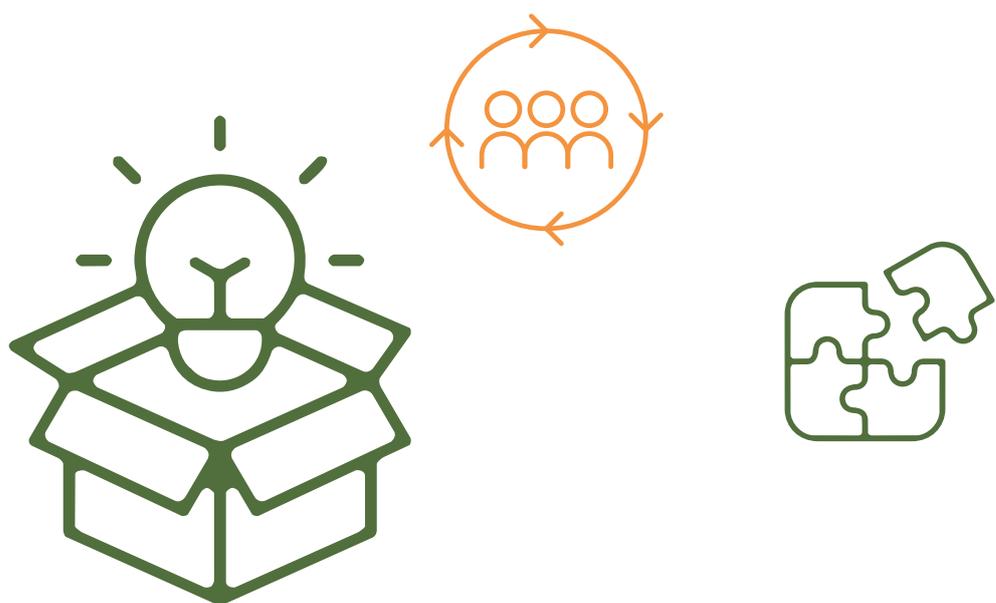
ABOUT THIS REPORT

The following country-level findings represent an early stage of inquiry in NEST's ongoing exploration of education systems transformation for skills development. Exploratory in nature, the insights emerging from India's unique context are an initial step toward a shared understanding of India's education landscape. While findings of this research may not be directly transferable to other settings, we believe that the patterns, tensions, and possibilities identified in this report can inform broader conversations about how education systems worldwide might better support all children and young people in developing the skills they need to thrive. As NEST continues its collaborative work across ten countries, subsequent studies aim to deepen these insights and further refine our understanding of what enables sustainable education systems transformation toward a breadth of skills. As such, the following report should not be read as a final statement, but as part of an ongoing, iterative process of learning and discovery that contributes to an emerging field.

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Transforming an education system requires more than structural reform or new policy directives. It also requires attention to the mindsets and cultural forces that shape how actors interpret reforms, make decisions, and enact change. This exploratory study focused on the Indian context and highlights that stakeholder mindsets, understood as attitudes, dispositions, and assumptions (Kania et al. 2018), can play a central role in how the vision of the National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020) is interpreted. The study draws on qualitative interviews with ten national and state-level policy-influencing actors directly engaged in policy design, curriculum reform, and high-level program implementation, including policymakers, bureaucrats, academicians, and NGO leaders.

The findings therefore reflect the perspectives of actors who operate primarily at the system design and policy interpretation level, rather than classroom practitioners or students. The interviews indicated that key actors believe education systems transformation is influenced not only by structures, but also by underlying beliefs about academic success, diversity, authority, and reform. In their accounts, these mindsets appeared to interact with institutional arrangements, which can shape how the purpose of education is defined, how policy is interpreted, and how priorities are enacted.

Using the 4P framework, this report identifies the following four areas where participants perceive that mindsets and structures intersect,

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potentially influencing the realization of the NEP 2020 vision and its broader goal of enabling all children and young people to thrive.

1.1 Reimagining the purpose of education

Participants reported that many influential actors continue to equate success primarily with academic performance and employability. They perceived this emphasis as limiting the breadth of educational aims envisioned in NEP 2020, including well-being, SEL, citizenship, and thriving. The study does not establish direct causal evidence that such mindsets restrict system outcomes. Instead, respondents reflected that such framings shape discourse, expectations, and policy narratives about what counts as educational success.

1.2 Advancing equity and inclusion through pedagogy

Participants suggested that although policy documents emphasize inclusive pedagogies, prevailing assumptions about diversity may influence how inclusion is understood. Some respondents expressed concern that diversity is often approached with the goal of sameness and assimilation rather than as differences requiring specific pedagogical responses.

The study does not assess teachers' mindsets of teaching practices. Instead, it reports participants' perceptions that underlying beliefs about learners can shape how inclusion is conceptualized at the policy level, with implications for whether all children are supported to thrive.

1.3 Positioning actors to move from fragmented to coherent implementation

Respondents described reform efforts as frequently fragmented across curricula, teacher education, assessment, and accountability structures. They attributed this fragmentation partly to institutional arrangements and partly to prevailing mindsets geared toward short-term delivery and compliance. Their reflections suggest that orientations toward quick solutions may contribute to fragmented implementation. The study does not claim to measure fragmentation or its causes but reports how influential actors interpret these dynamics and how they see such fragmentation as limiting progress toward system conditions in which all young people can thrive.

Several participants described education governance as hierarchical and centralized.

1.4 Restructuring power, authority, and governance structures

Several participants described education governance as hierarchical and centralized. They reported that such norms can shape how authority is exercised and how agency is experienced across the system. The study does not demonstrate that these structures objectively constrain agency. Rather, it captured participants' accounts of how hierarchical cultures are perceived as influencing levels of trust, decisionmaking, and voice among teachers, school leaders, communities, and students, with implications for student agency and thriving.

Taken together, the insights from this study demonstrate that education systems transformation can be both structural and psychological. Policies and frameworks provide direction, but lasting change also requires a shift in how educational actors understand their roles, interpret equity, engage with learners, and collaborate across the system. The study, therefore, proposes an expanded articulation of the 4Ps that explicitly incorporates mindsets as an essential component of systems transformation and introduces a draft rubric as a conversation starter for engaging in a mindset-informed approach to education systems transformation. The rubric is designed to help actors surface prevailing mindsets, begin to diagnose system-level misalignments, and ultimately design more coherent strategies that support the thriving of every young person.

For Dream a Dream, "thriving" is understood as a continuous process of maximizing one's full and unique potential through empathetic and compassionate relationships in an equitable and inclusive education system.[2,3] This conceptualization not only rethinks the purpose of education within and beyond academic attainment, but also underscores the role of system-wide commitment, alignment, and action in achieving this vision (Sengeh and Winthrop 2022, 5).

2. CONTEXT AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK: THE ROLE OF MINDSETS IN EDUCATION SYSTEMS TRANSFORMATION

Context

In India, two interrelated structural realities shape opportunities for education systems transformation. The first is a long-standing culture of high-stakes examinations, in which board and entrance tests operate as decisive gateways to higher education and employment opportunities (ASER Centre 2023; Banerjee 2020; Shah 2020; Singh and Berg 2024). This assessment culture is intertwined with the second structural reality: intense labor market competition and aspirations for upward social mobility through educational credentials (Kumar et al. 2024; Majumder 2010; Tilak 2021; Vaid 2016). Within this context, performance assessment functions as a proxy for learning, despite its limits in reflecting the development of broad competencies. Multiple studies have shown that examinations tend to measure recall-based competencies rather than deeper conceptual understanding, problem solving, or socioemotional capabilities (ASER 2023; MHRD 2020; Nawani and Goswami 2020; UNESCO MGIEP 2022).

Second, while studies show that young people benefit from relationally supportive and safe learning environments that nurture belonging, agency, and emotional security; these types of environments are especially consequential for engagement, well-being, and learning outcomes (Cantor 2021; Gunathilake et al. 2024; OECD 2019; OECD 2021).

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2   Fostering the unique capabilities of all students for their academic and non-academic development comes up as a foundational principle in the NEP 2020 (MHRD, GOI 2020, 5). The role of teachers and parents is recognized as key to this holistic development.
3   According to Cantor (2021), "thriving" is a dynamic process of whole-child development, spanning across physical, cognitive and emotional dimensions, that enables a young person to manage and overcome challenges of any kind of adversity.

For students from socioeconomically marginalized communities (who are disproportionately represented in government schools and low-resource settings), schools often serve not only as sites of instruction, but also as crucial spaces of stability, protection, and identity formation in the face of structural disadvantage (Ghosh, Chakraborty and Basu 2022; Jha and Jhingran 2005; PROBE Team 1999; Shinde Khandekar 2018; Taneja-Johansson et al. 2021). These developmental needs are well-documented and highlight the centrality of relationship-rich environments to children's capacity to engage, persist, and thrive. However, education systems often prioritize measurable outcomes, while young people require holistic, relationship-rich environments to realize their full potential and thrive (UNESCO 2021; World Bank 2020). Without realignment to these developmental realities, reforms risk reinforcing inequities rather than transforming systems.

In India, the NEP 2020 represents the most ambitious policy reform in recent decades to address this misalignment. NEP 2020 proposes an integrated restructuring of school education. This includes the 5+3+3+4 curricular and pedagogical structure; a national mission to achieve universal foundational literacy and numeracy by Grade 3; competency-based curricula, assessment reform, and reduced content load; and a strong emphasis on experiential, play-based, and inquiry-driven learning. The policy advances multilingual education centered on mother tongue or regional language in the early years, reforms teacher education and professional development, and introduces flexible pathways and multidisciplinary options at the secondary stage. Collectively, these measures signal an intended shift toward a more equitable, inclusive, and holistic system that prioritizes children and young people from historically marginalized and underrepresented groups (MHRD 2020, 4).

However, realizing this vision requires more than policy pronouncements. It demands what scholars refer to as "second-order change" (Poutiatine 2010) or shifts that go beyond structural reforms to address the underlying mindsets which sustain existing practices (Duffy 2009; Waddock 2020).

Conceptual framework

Mindsets are powerful but often invisible drivers of individual action, institutional culture, and wider social structures (FrameWorks Institute 2020). Within education systems transformation scholarship, shifts in deeply held beliefs and assumptions are recognized as essential but not singular levers for sustainable and meaningful change (FrameWorks Institute 2020; Waddock 2020; Woltering et al. 2019). Guided by the 4 Ps of education systems transformation, the study examined how stakeholder mindsets interact with the NEP 2020 policy vision and the structural conditions of the Indian education system.

In education, mindsets have been widely studied vis-a-vis pedagogy, teacher expectations, and student learning (Dweck 2006; Harris et al. 2005; Qargha and Dyl 2024; Yeager et al. 2019). However, rather than focusing

on the relationship between mindsets and pedagogical practices, this study explored how individual mindsets interacted with institutional norms and systemic pressures to shape the possibilities and constraints of education systems transformation. We adopted Duffy's (2009) definition of mindsets as attitudes or dispositions informed by deeper beliefs and values, understanding them as cognitive frames that guide how actors interpret their roles, the purpose of education, and the meaning of reform.

This study draws on established typologies of mindsets in the education and systems literature (see Table 1 below) to interpret how beliefs shape stakeholders' engagement with policy.

These typologies inform our analytical framework, allowing us to trace how different mindsets shape actors' interpretations of NEP 2020, guide their engagement with reforms, and interact with existing institutional structures.

TABLE 1: TYPOLOGIES OF MINDSETS

TYPOLOGY OF MINDSET	EXPLANATION
DEFICIT MINDSET	Characterizes students and communities, particularly those from marginalized backgrounds, as lacking capability, motivation, or cultural capital (Valencia 2010).
RESTRICTIVE OR COMPLIANCE-ORIENTED MINDSETS	Characterized by risk aversion, deference to authority, and an emphasis on rule-following and performance in high-stakes examinations (Acharya 2020).
OUTCOME- AND MOBILITY-ORIENTED MINDSETS	Characterizes schooling primarily as a route to socioeconomic advancement, and as shaping aspirations and institutional practices around credential attainment (Tilak 2021).
TRANSFORMATIVE MINDSETS	Marked by reflexive practice, relational engagement, and openness to rethinking existing norms and experimenting with new approaches (Waddock 2020; Woltering et al. 2019).

Source: Authors' review of existing literature.

3. METHODOLOGY

NEST, in collaboration with CUE at the Brookings Institution, undertook a network-wide study to explore a co-created research question: How well are educational systems creating opportunities for children and young people to learn what matters? Guided by Dream a Dream's vision of enabling the thriving of all young people, this country-specific inquiry focused on the underlying mindsets of education stakeholders, which, together with structural conditions, can act as enablers of or constraints to the education systems transformation. In India, this overarching question was explored through two sub-questions:

1. How do key educational actors perceive mindsets to support or constrain education system transformation as envisioned in the NEP 2020?

2. How does the interaction between stakeholder mindsets and structural systems influence purpose, pedagogy, positioning, and power as the dimensions of system transformation?

From March to April 2025, this study adopted qualitative exploratory research methods with a sample of ten education actors who had a direct influence on national or state policy processes. The participants were selected using purposive sampling based on their strategic involvement in policy framing, curriculum design, teacher education reforms, and leadership within national or state initiatives. (See Annex 3 for anonymized profiles.)

Semi-structured interview protocols were developed using an iterative process and validated[4] through pilot interviews to ensure clarity and relevance.[5]

Interpretations of mindsets

Mindsets are not directly observable psychological states. Interpretations of mindsets were therefore determined through systematic thematic analysis of the interview transcripts utilizing the typology detailed in Table 1. This involved examining recurrent narrative patterns, value statements, explanations of success and failure, and descriptions of policy and practice. Thus, the subthemes around mindsets presented in the findings represent analytical interpretations of participants' expressed orientations and perspectives. Where participants described the mindsets of other actors, these accounts are treated as perceptions reported by the interviewees, not as direct empirical evidence of those actors' beliefs.

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4   The study design was informed by critical and decolonial scholarship that recognizes multiple ways of knowing and challenges the dominance of Western paradigms of evidence. Scholars such as Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2012) and Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2014) emphasize the value of contextual, relational, and community-grounded knowledge. In line with this, the research team recognized that informal conversations, past engagements, and contextual familiarity helped identify emerging patterns, question assumptions, and deepen the understanding of policy intentions.

5   In-depth interviews were conducted with all participants in English or Hindi based on participant preference and audio-recorded with informed consent.

Data analysis

To fully understand how mindsets influence implementation, it is essential to engage directly with teachers and students, since they encounter policy not as abstract ideas but as lived realities in teaching, learning, and assessment.

Two researchers independently coded the data and compared their interpretations to minimize individual bias. Codes related to beliefs, assumptions, and framing were grouped into broader themes using constant comparison techniques. Interpretations were included only when they appeared in multiple interviews. Throughout the process, the research team engaged in reflexive practices. Although teachers' and students' voices were not directly included, the team acknowledged that prior engagement with these groups in other projects may influence the analytical lenses. Therefore, careful attention was given to ensure that the conclusions remained grounded in the data collected for this study.

All transcripts underwent double review processes to ensure data accuracy, authenticity, and participant confidentiality. Adopting an in-depth thematic analysis approach, all interviews were systematically analyzed and supplemented by analysis of national policy documents to assess existing gaps in equity and inclusion implementation in India's education system.

Limitations

The ten participants were purposefully chosen due to their high level of influence in the policy process. They were primarily involved in policy formulation, national and state-level advisory roles, program design, and system-level decisionmaking, rather than in day-to-day classroom implementation. While this provides

insight into how senior system actors understand and frame the purpose of reforms, the small sample size and positioning of participants within the system mean that the findings are not generalizable and should be interpreted as exploratory. Focusing on actors located mainly in policy design and high-level administration provides only a partial view of how mindsets operate within the system. It does not capture the perspectives of primary implementers of education policy, including teachers, school leaders, teacher educators, district officers, and students whose daily practices ultimately determine how reforms are experienced in classrooms.

To fully understand how mindsets influence implementation, it is essential to engage directly with teachers and students, since they encounter policy not as abstract ideas but as lived realities in teaching, learning, and assessment. Future research should prioritize in-depth, multi-level inquiry that includes these actors in order to trace how mindsets interact across levels of the system and how policy intentions are interpreted, negotiated, or resisted in practice.

A note on researcher reflexivity

Undertaking this study required deep and critical engagement with the complex and multilayered concept of mindsets, particularly within the field of education policy. While the following analysis does not directly draw on the informal interactions and learnings that accompanied this work, it is important to acknowledge that the

interpretations have been shaped by extensive dialogues, experiences, and positionality as researchers embedded within an organization committed to reimagining education systems.

Furthermore, our conceptualization of mindsets was not value-neutral. As a team invested in facilitating transformation and student thriving, we may have been more attuned to signals of resistance or openness to change within policy narratives. This interpretive stance is both a strength and a limitation, as it allows for richer insights into how power, control, and purpose are communicated in policy, but also risks over-interpreting certain silences or framing choices.

We do not present this study as an objective truth about policy mindsets, but as a grounded and evolving interpretation. As such, this work should be seen as exploratory and best understood as part of a broader ecosystem of dialogue and investigation.

4. FINDINGS

The findings from the ten exploratory interviews revealed four critical patterns where mindsets intersect with purpose, pedagogy, positioning, and power to influence education systems transformation. These patterns operated simultaneously, creating complex dynamics that have the potential to enable or constrain progress toward equitable, inclusive, and holistic education as imagined in the NEP 2020. Overall, findings of this study demonstrate the importance of a mindset-informed approach to education systems transformation, which recognizes the interaction of actors' mindsets and structural conditions in the ecosystem.

Overall, findings of this study demonstrate the importance of a mindset-informed approach to education systems transformation.

4.1 Purpose: Reimagining the purpose of education beyond narrow academic outcomes

Despite the NEP 2020 focus on holistic development, deficit and restrictive mindsets around success and young people's potential are reinforced by system practices.

Although NEP 2020 articulates a broad and holistic purpose for schooling, analysis of research participants' narratives suggested that a narrow understanding of educational success continues to shape decisions across the system. Interviewees often described student success in relation to socioeconomic mobility and credentials. Underscoring this assumed linear progression, an

> Several participants suggested that when students fail to meet these benchmarks, responsibility is often placed on the individual in the form of presumed deficits in effort, discipline, or ability.

academic explained that "the parameter of a successful person in our country is evaluated based on their [salary] package." Such perspectives reinforce long-standing critiques of credential-driven schooling in India (Nawani and Goswami 2020; Singh and Berg 2024). These dynamics can also be seen in the entrenched hierarchies that promote certain educational pathways over others. A policymaker characterized these hierarchies as, "a kind of 'caste system of education': Science, Engineering, Medical on top … somewhere in the middle is Commerce. And then Humanities … ."

While success was largely framed by participants in socioeconomic and academic terms, several participants suggested that when students fail to meet these benchmarks, responsibility is often placed on the individual in the form of presumed deficits in effort, discipline, or ability. This logic mirrors Valencia's (1997) "deficit model," which obscures structural barriers and attributes student difficulties primarily to personal failings.

Participants linked mindsets about success to assessment practices. They reported that narrow conceptions of success are reinforced through accountability measures and pressures to produce demonstrable, quantifiable outcomes. One policymaker reflected, "We're so much about tangible, tangible goals … the government … parents … we [bureaucrats] ourselves want to show … enrollment is increasing, attendance is increasing, more students are getting passed in 10th and 12th [grades]." Participants also shared that exam-based testing continues to function as a mechanism for social and economic selection, particularly in contexts

where employment opportunities are limited (Nawani and Goswami 2020). As a result, participants identified a persistent, structural misalignment between policy aspirations and institutional behavior: policies call for holistic development, while systemic incentives continue to reward academic achievement-focused practices.

Together, these mindsets and structures seemed to reinforce each other, influencing how student potential and the purpose of education are understood, with socioeconomic realities also surfaced in the discourse. An ex-policy advisor explained, "Every child starts out with the potential to thrive. But very quickly, most of them reach a point where they start having certain notions about themselves … that they are not capable, or that 'I'm from a poor family' or … 'I'm from [a] backward region' … these notions, which are essentially drilled into them." Furthermore, media and public discourse may reinforce dominant narratives of success. One participant noted, "the system is such that it is believed that if you are a poor child, you are not going to do well. That's why after a board exam … a news item will say 'Rikshawala's [Rickshaw puller's] daughter did well. Because she's not supposed to do well, so it becomes a news item.'" Such narratives, though celebratory, may inadvertently reinforce systemic expectations about who can succeed and under what circumstances.

At the same time, several participants expressed commitment to broader, more transformative mindsets around student success and thriving. A policy advisor reflected on education's civic

purpose, saying, "Education also has to do with values. They are going to build this nation, right? They should be not just empathetic but have a sense of duty to the community. They have to be people who value family and know how to make friends and have right communication skills." Similarly, an ex-bureaucrat pointed to the need for holistic development as envisioned in NEP 2020, mentioning "social emotional skills, physical development as well, and some aesthetic and cultural development." This perspective revealed the desire of some stakeholders to work toward shifting narratives of success to align with the NEP 2020's holistic vision.

4.2 Pedagogy: Addressing equity and inclusion through contextually responsive pedagogical practices

Despite the equity-and-inclusion focus of the NEP 2020, existing mindsets and system structures can reduce diversity to uniformity and reinforce systemic inequities through one-size-fits-all pedagogical practices. Additionally, the NEP 2020 articulates a pedagogical vision that moves away from rote instruction toward inclusive, experiential, flexible, and competency-based learning environments. It emphasizes play-based learning in the early years, learner-centered pedagogy across stages of schooling, the integration of socioemotional development, and assessment approaches that support formative

feedback rather than narrow, high-stakes selection (MHRD 2020). The policy encourages contextualization of curriculum to local cultures, languages, and lived realities, explicitly recognizing India's social and linguistic diversity as a resource for learning. In principle, the NEP 2020 envisions pedagogy that is relational, inclusive, and responsive to varied learner needs.

Participants in this study generally endorsed the NEP 2020's pedagogical vision but also reflected on how existing mindsets and institution cultures may constrain its translation into everyday practice. In their accounts, two types of mindsets appeared particularly salient. The first was deficit-oriented beliefs, which participants perceived and described as a mindset that implicitly associates diversity with lack and sees learners from marginalized communities as less capable or prepared.

The second mindset participants referred to was a compliance-based orientation to learning shaped by examination pressure and accountability demands, where rule-following and coverage of prescribed content take precedence over adaptation to learner needs. These reflections should not be read as direct measurements of teacher or administrator beliefs. Rather, they provide initial insights into how policy-influencing actors understand the psychological and institutional conditions surrounding pedagogical reform.

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stressed that addressing diversity requires sensitivity to context rather than uniform solutions. One ex-policy advisor expressed this view clearly, stating that "the first aspect of addressing diversity is to accept each child as they are. The problem arises when we start imposing benchmarks, standards, frameworks, and more, and say, 'you are not okay, according to this expectation.' Inequality is created like that. It is not a natural thing. It is created that way." This perspective illustrates how some respondents conceptualize the link between pedagogy and equity. From their perspective, when uniform expectations are applied without adequate attention to learners' different starting points, diversity can come to be framed as a deficit, which they believe may constrain the implementation of the NEP 2020's inclusive pedagogical vision.

No participants in the study attributed tendencies toward uniformity to the NEP 2020. Instead, they recognized that the NEP 2020 explicitly advocates flexibility, contextualization, and inclusive pedagogy. As a state-level policymaker explained, "In terms of inclusion, whatever efforts are made at the national level, [the state] contextualizes them … there is no caste-based difference … . " Analysis of participant interviews suggested that longstanding administrative traditions, examination pressure, bureaucratic accountability structures, and resource constraints are some of the factors that may discourage uniform implementation cultures even when policy documents allow space for adaptation. This creates a tension between the pedagogical aspirations of the NEP 2020 and the institutional environments in which educators work.

A few participants reflected on the case of foundational literacy and numeracy reforms. They acknowledged that structured, age-appropriate approaches can support rapid gains in basic skills, while also noting that sustained change requires more profound systemic shifts, including stronger teacher preparation, ongoing pedagogical support, and attention to the relational aspects of learning. One teacher education scholar observed that addressing foundational literacy and numeracy cannot rely on "antibiotic approach" quick fixes but requires patience and long-term investments across the system.

Taken together, participants' accounts suggest that the pedagogical ambitions of the NEP 2020 are unlikely to be realized through structural reform alone. Existing beliefs about diversity, capability, authority, and accountability interact with institutional arrangements and can shape how pedagogy is enacted in practice. Achieving alignment between policy and classroom experience, therefore, requires not only reform of curriculum, assessment, and teacher education, but also deliberate engagement with the mindsets through which actors interpret diversity and inclusion.

4.3 Positioning: Moving from fragmented to coherent implementation strategies in the education system

Participants emphasized that coherence is not only structural but also psychological. In their accounts, "positioning" referred both to where actors in general are located in the system and to the mindsets through which they interpret their roles, agency, and responsibilities. While participants generally affirmed the vision of the NEP 2020 that prioritizes child-centered pedagogy and holistic development, some of them reflected that actors continue to be positioned primarily for short-term delivery and compliance rather than for long-term transformation.

While the interviewees did not directly attribute this orientation to the NEP 2020 itself, examination pressures, administrative routines, and accountability regimes that prioritize immediate, measurable outputs emerged as ongoing challenges. Participants perceived that these environments may foster mindsets oriented toward quick solutions, risk avoidance, and procedural compliance, which can make it difficult to invest in the slower, relational, and iterative work of systems transformation.

An ex-policy advisor explained the interconnected nature of change across different levels of the system, saying, "If I want something to

change in terms of a classroom process, I also know what should change in training, and then I also have to know, for that to change in training, what has to change within a system. It is not that practice is not located at only one point. It is what happens in manifestation of a larger system." The same advisor used the metaphor of looking for a lost key under a streetlight because that is where the light is, even when the key was lost elsewhere, to describe how reforms sometimes focus attention on administratively convenient or visible levers rather than underlying causes. This perceived orientation toward quick fixes reflects what our framework identifies as misalignment between the complex, long-term nature of education systems transformation and how actors are positioned to enact reforms.

Participants also reflected on the relationship between schooling and broader social change. A policy expert commented: "When we talk about changing the education system or educational provision, at the same time, society is not changing at the same pace. So, the teachers and students, all educators, whoever is there, come from that society itself. Moreover, it is said that a school is the nature of society." From participants' perspectives, attempts to reform pedagogy, inclusion, or equity within schools inevitably intersect with wider social attitudes related to caste, class, gender, and location. This reflects the participants' view that structural positioning and meaning-making are interconnected.

Some participants also reflected on dignity and interaction in classrooms. A senior NGO representative shared,

> If I want something to change in terms of a classroom process, I also know what should change in training, and then I also have to know, for that to change in training, what has to change within a system.

> The NEP 2020 articulates a vision of decentralized governance, increased institutional autonomy, and enhanced teacher agency, emphasizing the importance of school collaboration and participatory decisionmaking.

"The whole issue of dignity in learning, I would say, which addresses gender, but also caste, but also just the way that a teacher–student interaction happens. Because in many cases, especially if you go to rural areas, you still see a situation where the teacher almost talks down to the students." We present this participant's perception not as system-wide evidence of practice, but as a potential indicator for everyday interactions to influence how power and positioning are experienced by learners.

Interviewees further commented on how teachers themselves are positioned within institutional hierarchies. As one policymaker remarked, "If a parent is paying a huge fee, then suddenly the teacher is made to feel that she has to deliver, deliver, deliver all the time." Participants suggested that expectations tied to fee-paying contexts or public scrutiny may shape how teachers experience autonomy and pressure. Respondents consistently linked structural positioning with perceived agency, status, and scope for innovation.

Taken together, participants' narratives suggest that movement from fragmented to coherent implementation is not only a technical coordination task. They viewed coherence as closely connected to how actors understand where they stand in the system, the degree of agency they believe they hold, and the purposes they attribute to their work. From this perspective, achieving coherence involves both structural alignment across curriculum, assessment, teacher education, and governance, as well as reflective engagement with the mindsets through which actors interpret their roles and possibilities for action.

4.4 Power: Restructuring hierarchical governance structures

Hierarchical mindsets can shape relationships and governance structures within the education system at multiple levels, reinforcing systems of control and feelings of mistrust.

The NEP 2020 articulates a vision of decentralized governance, increased institutional autonomy, and enhanced teacher agency, emphasizing the importance of school collaboration and participatory decisionmaking (MHRD 2020, 52-58). In principle, this represents a move away from highly centralized control toward more locally responsive forms of governance. Across interviews, respondents described power in the education system as shaped not only by formal structures, but also by mindsets regarding authority, trust, competence, and responsibility. Participants suggested that beliefs about who is capable of exercising judgement and whose knowledge is legitimate can influence how power is distributed in practice. We present these as participants' insights into how governance reform is experienced and narrated by policy-influencing actors.

One teacher education scholar reflected on what they perceived as deficit-based narratives about teachers and children, stating, "[Existing mindsets that must change] Teachers are work-shirkers … women teachers do not give their best … children don't want to learn … this perspective or mindset that

> **The NEP 2020 itself suggests that assessments should shift from high-stakes selection and punitive comparison to holistic, competency-based evaluation that supports learning.**

everything is wrong with school. This has to be really challenged. So, rather than becoming a supporting policy, they [policies] become correctional and penalizing policy provisions." This perspective reveals how deficit-based mindsets about teachers and students may become embedded in policy design and implementation structures. Such hierarchies may produce power dynamics of control, mistrust, and limited autonomy, which can undermine commitment and cohesion in both policy design and implementation.

Several interviewees spoke about decisionmaking authority in the system. An ex-bureaucrat observed that "the understanding of real classrooms is not there, higher in the education system … So often that is not taken into account when you decide something."

Not only does this sentiment capture a recurring theme in the interviews that policy design often feels distant from classroom realities, but it also echoes existing literature on decentralization in Indian education; despite formal reforms, the extent to which local actors are able to meaningfully influence decisionmaking varies across contexts (Faguet and Pal 2023; Kameshwara 2022; Verma et al., 2017).

Leadership continuity was another concern raised by participants. One ex-bureaucrat commented, "At the state level, the leadership keeps changing … people who lead programs … come with their own thoughts or no experience in education. And they change what is happening." While the statement is not analyzed to draw a causal relationship between hierarchical structures and administrative turnover, it highlights how participants believe a certain

perceived instability to be affecting coherence of reform over time.

Accountability practices were frequently discussed as a site where power is experienced. An ex-bureaucrat reflected, "There is a governance kind of approach on everything, which is 'Let us get all the data on what children are learning, etc., and then centrally decide which schools are good, which are not good.' Centralized assessments are an example of this." While not an evaluative conclusion about current national practice, this statement indicates how some participants interpret the relationship between monitoring, data use, and control. The NEP 2020 itself suggests that assessments should shift from high-stakes selection and punitive comparison to holistic, competency-based evaluation that supports learning (MHRD 2020).

Participants also spoke about how empowerment can feel disruptive within hierarchical settings. One ex-policy advisor reflected: "as those in positions of power realized that success means destabilizing our position … teachers get empowered, they start asking questions … Children are encouraged to think for themselves. It is very inconvenient." This illustrates that changing how empowerment is perceived requires shifts not only in structures, but also in beliefs about authority and voice. Scholars of systems change similarly note that structural reforms often require accompanying shifts in underlying assumptions and mental models if they are to be sustained in practice (Duffy 2009; Waddock 2020).

Taken together, these perspectives reveal a central tension running

through participants' accounts. Although the NEP 2020 calls for empowered teachers, participatory school cultures, and learner agency, participants in the study perceived that long-standing administrative norms and beliefs about authority may continue to privilege control and compliance. While not generalizable to the whole system or able to indicate causality, the limited data suggests fostering genuine agency requires more than technical reforms. It requires shifting the underlying mindsets that inform how purpose, pedagogy, positioning, and power are understood. In this sense, meaningful structural reform depends on cultivating belief systems that support more democratic, dialogic, and participatory forms of interaction so that power can be shared.

5. IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings from this exploratory study suggest that education systems transformation in India requires more than new policies, revised curricula, or expanded programs. The interviews revealed that although the NEP 2020 articulates a future-facing and equity-oriented vision, its realization depends on whether the system can cultivate the mindsets, capacities, and governance structures that enable coherence and sustained action.

This study's findings have a number of implications. First, for India to fully achieve its policy vision, the transformational lens must prioritize a shared purpose of education addressing both structural and psychological dimensions. Policies can create enabling structures but cannot shift beliefs unless systems intentionally cultivate mindsets grounded in trust, empathy, and shared responsibility. Second, the task of transformation should be collective.

Policies can create enabling structures but cannot shift beliefs unless systems intentionally cultivate mindsets grounded in trust, empathy, and shared responsibility.

Teachers, leaders, policymakers, parents, and communities all contribute to patterns that sustain or disrupt inequity and their positioning within the ecosystem requires nuance and intentionality. Furthermore, systems must invest in relational infrastructure. Trust, collaboration, and shared learning are not peripheral to reform; they are central to whether or not reform endures. Finally, the findings imply that transformation is iterative and requires continuous reflection on how systems currently exist and evolve, which new capacities are required, and how mindsets shift in response to changing societal needs.

The 4P framework offers a holistic lens for contemplating how educational systems can move toward an inclusive and equitable future envisioned by the NEP 2020. The framework illuminates both the possibilities and challenges

of transformation, emphasizing that meaningful change emerges when purpose, practice, relational structures, and governance cultures are aligned with deep, sustained commitments to equity. As systems across India and beyond navigate the complexities of educational reform, this integrated framework provides a foundation for designing strategies, examining progress, and cultivating mindsets that allow all children and young people to thrive.

The following table (Table 2) provides a rubric based on the 4P framework that provides important dimensions for conversation starters among education ecosystem actors to discuss the alignment of purpose, pedagogy, positioning and power for education systems transformation. As an area of future work and co-creation, these dimensions will be translated into performance metrics. (Please see Annexes 1 and 2 for detailed rubrics with dimensions).

TABLE 2: EDUCATION SYSTEM TRANSFORMATION RUBRIC

COMPONENTS	DIMENSIONS
THE 4PS: THESE FOUR COMPONENTS—PURPOSE, PEDAGOGY, POSITIONING AND POWER—REPRESENT THE PILLARS OF EDUCATION SYSTEM TRANSFORMATION.	
PURPOSE The overarching vision and rationale for education that the system strives to achieve.	**Vision and goals:** Centering education around learner well-being, holistic development, and future-readiness; moving beyond a narrow focus on academic achievement. **Equity and inclusion:** Systems and classrooms that accommodate diverse learners, particularly those from marginalized or disadvantaged backgrounds. **Stakeholder engagement:** Involvement of teachers, families, students, and communities in leading, defining and endorsing the purpose. **Mindsets and Meaning-Making:** The ways in which success, learning, and human potential are understood and defined, moving beyond narrow academic outcomes to thriving.
PEDAGOGY The core of teaching and learning (i.e., curriculum content, instructional methods, assessments etc.)	**Learning experiences:** Creating engaging and relevant real-world learning opportunities that foster curiosity, creativity, and critical thinking. **Instruction and assessment:** Inclusive, adaptive, and formative instructional and assessment strategies that support diverse learners. **Educator capacity:** Enabling teachers to adopt inclusive,learner-centered pedagogical practices through ongoing professional learning and collaborative experiences. **Student agency:** Enabling students' voices, choices, and ownership in their learning journey to build autonomy, confidence, and purpose. **Pedagogical mindsets:** Mindsets that believe in the potential of children and young people with trust and empathy, are open to unlearning traditional hierarchies, and reflect on educator's role as a facilitator.
POSITIONING The orientation of the education ecosystem toward the common vision and teaching-learning approaches.	**Policy coherence:** Ensuring that school-level practices reflect and reinforce the broader purpose and pedagogy. **Resource equity:** Addressing disparities in funding, facilities, and opportunities, especially for underserved or marginalized communities. **School environment:** Fostering inclusive, safe, supportive, and culturally responsive learning spaces to ensure the well-being of all students. **Community partnerships:** Engagement structures that connect families, local organizations and schools to collaborate on the shared vision. **Relational mindsets:** Relationships and mindsets that prioritize trust, empathy, and reciprocity across the system.

COMPONENTS	DIMENSIONS
POWER The governance, leadership, and decisionmaking structures within education systems.	**Decisionmaking and voice:** Mechanisms that ensure inclusive participation in decisionmaking, especially from students, teachers, and communities. **Leadership diversity:** Diverse and representative leadership at all levels of the system to reflect the community's needs and aspirations. **Accountability and transparency:** Transparent, fair, and participatory structures for evaluating system performance and fostering trust. **Collaboration culture:** Norms and processes that promote collective responsibility, mutual respect, and shared learning across stakeholders. **Facilitative mindsets:** Shifting from control to co-agency, and from hierarchies to collaboration.

Source: Authors' analysis of the 4Ps.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR A MINDSET-INFORMED APPROACH TOWARD SYSTEM TRANSFORMATION

As the findings illustrate, participants' accounts point to a set of recurring assumptions and interpretive patterns that shape how educational actors make sense of, enact, and sometimes constrain the vision of equitable, inclusive, and holistic education articulated in the NEP 2020. These patterns are embedded not only in individual beliefs but also in institutional practices related to assessment, pedagogy, governance, and accountability. The recommendations below translate these insights into actionable directions for system actors to strengthen structural reforms from a mindset-informed lens and support the thriving of all children and young people.

1. REIMAGINING EDUCATIONAL SUCCESS TO ALIGN SYSTEM INCENTIVES WITH HOLISTIC DEVELOPMENT AND THRIVING

Despite the NEP 2020's emphasis on holistic education, narrow definitions of success centered on credentials and employability continue to shape assessment, accountability, and public narratives. This misalignment limits attention to broader developmental, civic, and relational aims and reinforces deficit-based interpretations of student potential.

1. Policy and system actions:

Embed holistic indicators of student development including SEL, well-being, and civic engagement within assessment and accountability frameworks.

Realign system incentives so institutional performance is not judged primarily by exam results, enrollment figures, or credential attainment.

Enable sustained dialogue among educational actors to examine how narratives of success shape expectations and educational pathways, particularly for learners from marginalized backgrounds.

2. ENABLE EQUITY AND INCLUSION BY STRENGTHENING CONTEXTUALLY RESPONSIVE PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICE

Although the NEP 2020 promotes inclusive and learner-centered pedagogy, institutional cultures may favor uniformity, compliance, and examination-oriented practice. Deficit-oriented assumptions about diversity and rigid benchmarks constrain educators' ability to respond to varied learner contexts.

2. Policy and system actions:

Develop context-sensitive teacher preparation programs that include sustained focus on recognizing and responding to diverse student needs, supported by mentoring and ongoing professional learning opportunities.

Strengthen mentoring, coaching, and peer-learning structures that support pedagogical adaptation to local social, cultural, linguistic, and regional contexts.

Foster professional dialogue that enables educators to reflect on how assumptions about capability and background shape teaching practices.

3. POSITION SYSTEM ACTORS TO SUPPORT COHERENT, LONG-TERM IMPLEMENTATION OVER SHORT-TERM COMPLIANCE

Fragmentation in reform implementation is reinforced by accountability structures that prioritise short-term, measurable outputs. Such positioning limits educators' and leaders' capacity to engage in the relational and iterative work required for sustained systems transformation.

3. Policy and system actions:

Develop coordination mechanisms that connect policy, curriculum design, assessments, teacher education, and professional development as interconnected elements of reform.

Support professional learning that builds capacity for systemic thinking across classroom, institutional, and governance contexts.

Establish cross-level dialogue platforms to support shared understanding of reform goals and implementation challenges.

4. RESTRUCTURE GOVERNANCE TO FOSTER TRUST, SHARED AUTHORITY, AND MEANINGFUL PARTICIPATION

Hierarchical administrative norms and deficit-based beliefs about teachers and students can influence governance practices that prioritize control-oriented accountability over autonomy and agency. These dynamics could

undermine trust, commitment, and coherence in reform implementation.

4. Policy and system actions:

Pilot and institutionalize collaborative governance models that include teachers, school leaders, and students in decisionmaking.

Build leadership capacity for trust-based, dialogic, and participatory approaches, particularly at district and school levels.

Strengthen policy design and review processes by grounding decisionmaking in classroom and school-level realities.

Foster horizontal dialogue across system levels, empower teachers and school leaders through autonomy, recognition, and shared accountability, and include the voices of young people in policy processes.

Conclusion

This exploratory study suggests that strengthening aspects of education system transformation may benefit from approaches that recognize how underlying attitudes and beliefs interact with institutional structures. Rather than treating mindsets and structures as separate domains, we explore how a mindset-informed approach—one that recognizes the bidirectional influence between mindsets and systemic elements like policies, practices, resource allocation, power dynamics, and stakeholder relationships— can support sustained system transformation. While the study's findings require validation through broader research, they point toward promising directions for supporting the NEP 2020's implementation goals. By examining conceptualizations of the purpose of education, pedagogical approaches, power dynamics in governance structures, and positioning of various education actors within the ecosystem, it is possible to identify leverage points for fostering more equitable and inclusive educational environments where all young people can realize their potential and thrive.

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ANNEX 1: EDUCATION SYSTEM TRANSFORMATION: THE 4PS RUBRIC

This rubric evaluates education system transformation across four pillars—Purpose, Pedagogy, Positioning, and Power—that enable all young people to thrive, i.e., expand to their fullest potential through empathetic and compassionate relationships in an equitable and inclusive education system. Here, "Purpose" refers to the shared vision and goals of education, "Pedagogy" to the core teaching–learning processes, "Positioning" to how system structures and resources align with that purpose, and "Power" to having agency and a voice in decisionmaking. Each driver is defined and broken down into key dimensions with four levels (Emerging–Transformative). The rubric is designed for use by policymakers, educators, school leaders, NGOs, and researchers among other actors as a diagnostic and planning tool. It emphasizes equity, inclusion, and whole-child (i.e. cognitive, SEL, and ethical) development at every step.

1. Purpose is the overarching vision and rationale for education It encompasses the desired learning outcomes, values, and social goals (academic success, well-being, civic engagement, etc.) that the system strives to achieve. A transformative purpose centers on holistic, whole-child development and explicitly addresses equity by, for example, ensuring that all students, regardless of background or ability, can realize their potential. In practice this means co-creating and widely sharing a bold vision ("thriving," compassion, global citizenship, etc.) so that every policy and practice can align with it.

Vision and goals: Centering education around learner well-being, holistic development, and future-readiness; moving beyond narrow focus on academic achievement.

Equity and inclusion: Systems and classrooms that accommodate diverse learners, particularly those from marginalized or disadvantaged backgrounds.

Stakeholder engagement: Involvement of teachers, families, students, and communities in leading, defining, and endorsing the purpose.

Mindsets and meaning-making: Ways in which success, learning, and human potential are understood and defined; shifting understanding and definitions away from academic outcomes to focus on thriving.

2. Pedagogy encompasses curriculum content, instructional methods, assessment, and school culture. A transformative pedagogy moves beyond lectures and rote memorization to student-centered, experiential, and collaborative learning. It integrates academic knowledge with socio-emotional skills and ethical values, and uses culturally responsive, trauma-informed strategies so all learners can access the curriculum. This driver emphasizes continuous teacher development and enables educators to tailor learning to each child's needs.

Learning experiences: Creating engaging, relevant, and real-world learning opportunities that foster curiosity, creativity, and critical thinking.

Instruction and assessment: Inclusive, adaptive, and formative instructional and assessment strategies that support diverse learners.

Educator capacity: Enabling teachers to adopt inclusive, learner-centered pedagogical practices through ongoing professional learning and collaborative experiences.

Student agency: Enabling students' voice, choice and ownership in their learning journey to build autonomy, confidence, and purpose.

Pedagogical mindsets: Mindsets that believe in the potential of children and young people with trust and empathy, openness to unlearn traditional hierarchies, and reflect on educator's role as a facilitator.

3. Positioning (or "alignment") refers to how well all components of the education ecosystem are oriented toward the shared vision and teaching–learning approaches. It includes policy design, funding mechanisms, administrative structures, infrastructure, and community partnerships. A transformational approach positions resources, authority, and programs in ways that remove barriers for learners and give all children the support they need to thrive (e.g., inclusive schools, equitable funding formulas, and supportive health/nutrition services). It also means distributing leadership and clarifying roles so that educators, parents, and communities can effectively contribute to education.

Policy coherence: Ensuring that school-level practices reflect and reinforce the broader purpose and pedagogy.

Resource equity: Addressing disparities in funding, facilities, and opportunities, especially for underserved or marginalized communities.

School environment: Fostering inclusive, safe, supportive, and culturally responsive learning spaces to ensure well-being of all students.

Community partnerships: Engagement structures that connect families, local organizations, and schools to collaborate on the shared vision.

Relational mindsets: Relationships and mindsets that prioritize trust, empathy, and reciprocity across the system.

4. Power in an education system involves the distribution of decisionmaking authority, leadership, and accountability among actors (government officials, teachers, parents, students, communities, NGOs, etc.). Transformational change requires "sharing power," which means expanding who is involved in setting priorities and running schools. An equitable system checks concentrations of power and builds structures for meaningful participation. This includes student leadership and civic voice in schools, teacher leadership in pedagogy reform, community input into policy, and transparent governance.

Leadership diversity: Diverse and representative leadership at all levels of the system to reflect the community's needs and aspirations.

Accountability and transparency: Transparent, fair, and participatory structures for evaluating system performance and fostering trust.

Collaboration culture: Norms and processes that promote collective responsibility, mutual respect, and shared learning across stakeholders.

Facilitative mindsets: Shifting from control to co-agency, and from hierarchies to collaboration.

ANNEX 2: ABOUT THE PARTICIPANTS

The study employed a qualitative research design focused on capturing the perspectives of key educational actors—specifically policymakers, policy/program advisors, academicians, and NGO representatives—who play a direct role in shaping educational policy at state and/or national level. Using purposive sampling, ten participants were selected based on the strategic relevance of their roles and depth of their influence within the Indian education ecosystem. The inclusion criteria emphasized:

1) Involvement in policy framing, curriculum design, and teacher education reforms

2) Experience in designing and implementing programs and schemes at either state or national levels

3) Leadership in contextualizing national education policies for state-specific needs through teacher training and system development

4) Engagement in national committees and collectives that guide educational priorities and reforms

The contributions of these participants offer a nuanced understanding of the systemic enablers and challenges for educational transformation.

S. NO.	PARTICIPANT LABEL	ROLE DESCRIPTION
1	Policy advisor	Offers expert counsel on education reform and economic development to senior officials and politicians within key ministries.
2	Senior NGO representative	Engages in Indian and international forums on education reform and serves as a key member on all major GOI committees driving systemic policy change.
3	Ex-bureaucrat (now an NGO lead and National collective convenor)	Aids in leading multi-lingual as well as foundational literacy and numeracy initiatives with the government at national and state levels.
4	Academician	Heads the university for teacher education in the state and is the key person driving all state and national level initiatives to improve systemic challenges in school and higher education.
5	State resource person	Responsible for contextualizing national policies for the state education system via teacher trainings and curriculum development.
6	Policymaker	Senior official at the State Education Department; responsible for interventions related to curriculum development, teacher recruitment, and trainings.
7	Teacher education scholar	Senior academic in teacher education department at the MOE level
8	School education policy expert	Senior expert in school education policy at a national education policy institute
9	Ex-policy advisor	Former educational quality improvement advisor
10	Policy consultant	A senior-level consultant at the MOE

ANNEX 3: GLOSSARY OF CONCEPTS, PROGRAMS, AND TERMS

Samagra Shikhsha	Samagra Shiksha, launched in the 2018–19 Union Budget, is an integrated program designed to adopt a holistic approach to school education from pre-primary to Class 12. It subsumes the earlier schemes (Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan, and Teacher Education), bringing a unified focus on quality, inclusion, and equity. The scheme aims to improve learning outcomes, bridge social and gender gaps, ensure minimum standards, promote vocational education, support implementation of the Right to Education Act, and strengthen teacher education institutions. *More about Samagra Shikhsa:* https://samagra.education.gov.in/about.html
UDISE+	The Unified District Information System for Education Plus (UDISE+) is an advanced, real-time online platform launched by the Ministry of Education, Government of India to enhance the quality and reliability of school education data. Building on the original UDISE system, UDISE+ integrates data from over 1.5 million schools, 8.5 million teachers, and 250 million students across India. *More about UDISE+:* https://udiseplus.gov.in/#/en/page/about
National Curricular Framework, 2023	The National Curricular Framework 2023 (NCF 2023) is India's first-ever integrated curriculum framework for children aged 3–18. It is a direct outcome of the 5+3+3+4 curricular and pedagogical structure introduced by the NEP 2020 for school education. The framework focuses on holistic, competency-based learning across all stages of education. *Access the NCF:* https://dsel.education.gov.in/sites/default/files/guidelines/ncf_2023.pdf

Holistic Progress Card	The Holistic Progress Card is a multidimensional assessment tool that evaluates a student's progress in cognitive, emotional, social, and psychomotor domains. It focuses on competency-based, formative assessment, approaching growth based on self-evaluation, and peer and parental feedback.
Thriving	"Thriving" refers to a continuous process of an individual maximizing their full and unique potential through empathetic and compassionate relationships in an equitable and inclusive education system.
Dignity	Honoring one's dignity refers to trusting one's ability to contribute and act to the maximum for their potential. It is beyond a superficial sense of respect. A system that upholds the dignity of young people ensures that they feel seen, heard, and acknowledged.
Equity	Equity is the acknowledgement that individuals are at different milestones in their growth to maximize their full potential. An equitable system provides a safe space to everyone, ensures that no one is left behind, and that gives every individual the opportunities they require in their journey..
Inclusion	Inclusion refers to acknowledging and celebrating every individual's unique potential, authentic self, and intersectional identities. Differences and diversities are valued in an inclusive system.

ANNEX 4: INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. What drives your passion for working within the education system?

Probe: What motivated you? What excites you most about driving change in education?

2. What as per you are the most pressing challenges facing the Indian education system?

Probe: Ecosystems, theories, mindsets, equity, disparities, inclusion
Note: Encourage respondents to provide a broader perspective that extends beyond their specific geographical context.

3. In the context of Indian classrooms, what specific practices need to change to better cater to diverse learning needs and promote holistic learning?

Probe: Classroom practices, inclusive and equitable education, assessment/exam, school ecosystem.
Note: Diversity would capture varying backgrounds, contexts, special needs, challenges, and learning needs. Holistic learning is beyond academics, and includes physical, emotional, and social development.

4. How do policies, programs, teacher training, and learning theories influence the educational ecosystem? How should they evolve to serve diverse student populations better?

Note: Can also break this question to two parts—policy and program—and teacher trainings and learning theories. Policy would capture NEP 2020, Right to Education Act; programs such as Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, Samagra Shiksha, NGO programs, ongoing interventions.

5. How would you define success in education?

Follow-up: How does your vision of success extend beyond traditional academic outcomes?

6. From your perspective, what key factors enable young people to thrive and unlock their full potential, both within and outside the classroom?

Probe: Ecosystems, support, access to opportunities.

7. What prevalent mindsets or perspectives among education stakeholders— such as teachers, parents, and policymakers—do you believe hinder progress in the education system? How might these be shifted?

Follow-up: What needs to be done to create a mindset shift in reimagining the purpose of education that enables all young people to thrive?

8. How can pedagogy in India evolve to foster holistic development among students?

Probe: Policy reforms, strategic inputs, move from rote learning.

9. How can we make the Indian education system more holistic, inclusive, and equitable for all students, especially those from different socioeconomic backgrounds?

10. What are the best ways to improve and sustain these changes in the long term?

Probe: Pedagogy, mindset shift, redefined success, teacher training, assessments, school ecosystem.

Anything that is missed that you would want to share with us.