PERCEPTIONS OF STAKEHOLDERS ON IMPLEMENTING NEP 2020 IN EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE AND EDUCATION: A STUDY IN UTTARAKHAND

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Abstract

Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) has been accorded a central role in India's education reform agenda through the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. While the policy presents a comprehensive framework for strengthening foundational learning, empirical evidence on its ground-level implementation remains limited, particularly in geographically diverse states. This study examines stakeholder perceptions regarding the implementation of NEP 2020 in ECCE in Uttarakhand, with specific focus on policy awareness, institutional readiness, and policy implications. The study adopts a cross-sectional survey design and is based on primary data collected from 120 respondents, including teachers, administrators, parents, and education officials, drawn from plain, mid-hill, and hilly districts of the state. A structured questionnaire was used, and data were analysed using descriptive statistics, inferential techniques, and regression analysis. The findings reveal moderate to high awareness of NEP 2020 ECCE provisions among stakeholders; however, significant gaps persist in training, infrastructure, and institutional preparedness, particularly in hilly and remote regions. Institutional readiness emerged as a stronger predictor of perceived implementation effectiveness than policy awareness alone. Despite these challenges, stakeholders expressed strong optimism regarding the potential of NEP 2020 to improve access to quality ECCE and reduce regional disparities. The study underscores the importance of context-specific implementation strategies, capacity building, and strengthened institutional coordination to translate policy intent into effective outcomes. The findings contribute to the emerging empirical literature on ECCE policy implementation in India and offer policy-relevant insights for strengthening NEP 2020 execution at the sub-national level.

Keywords: Early Childhood Care and Education; National Education Policy 2020; Stakeholder Perceptions; Uttarakhand.

1. INTRODUCTION

Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) is widely recognised as a critical foundation for lifelong learning, human capital formation, and social equity. A substantial body of interdisciplinary research demonstrates that early childhood interventions have long-term positive effects on cognitive development, educational attainment, labour market outcomes, and social behaviour (Heckman, 2006; Cunha & Heckman, 2007). International organisations such as UNESCO, UNICEF, and the World Bank consistently emphasise that quality ECCE is among the most cost-effective public investments, particularly in low- and middle-income countries where early learning deficits are often compounded by socio-economic disadvantage (UNESCO, 2015; World Bank, 2018). Globally, education systems have increasingly moved towards integrating care, health, nutrition, and early learning into a unified ECCE framework. This shift reflects the understanding that early childhood development is multidimensional and cannot be effectively addressed through fragmented policy interventions (Britto et al., 2017). The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 4.2, explicitly call for universal access to quality early childhood development, care, and pre-primary education by 2030, reinforcing ECCE as a global development priority (UNESCO, 2020).

In India, ECCE has historically been delivered through multiple institutional channels, most notably Anganwadi centres under the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) and pre-primary sections attached to schools. While these programmes have expanded access, several studies have highlighted persistent challenges related to quality, pedagogical coherence, teacher preparation, and coordination across institutions (Kaul et al., 2017; NIPCCD, 2019). Concerns have also been raised regarding uneven implementation across states and regions, particularly in geographically challenging and socio-economically diverse areas. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 represents a major policy shift in India's approach to ECCE. For the first time, ECCE has been formally integrated into the national education framework, with a clear focus on children aged 3–6 years and the introduction of a developmentally appropriate, play-based curriculum aimed at strengthening foundational literacy and numeracy (Government of India, 2020). The policy envisages a seamless continuum between early childhood education and the formal schooling system, emphasising trained educators, improved infrastructure, and institutional convergence between schools and Anganwadi centres.

While NEP 2020 provides a comprehensive policy vision, international and Indian evidence suggests that policy intent does not automatically translate into effective implementation. The literature on public policy and education reform underscores that implementation outcomes are shaped by local capacity, institutional readiness, administrative coordination, and, critically, the perceptions and engagement of stakeholders responsible for delivering and using services (Pressman & Wildavsky, 1984; Fullan, 2016). In education reforms, teachers, administrators, parents, and local officials act as key intermediaries between policy design and classroom-level practice. Stakeholder perception studies have gained prominence as an important analytical tool for understanding policy implementation gaps. Research indicates that limited awareness of policy objectives, inadequate training, resource constraints, and contextual challenges often undermine reform effectiveness, particularly in decentralised education systems (Bruns, Filmer, & Patrinos, 2011). In the context of ECCE, parental perceptions are especially important, as parental engagement influences enrolment, attendance, and early learning outcomes (Sylva et al., 2014). However, parents' voices are frequently underrepresented in policy evaluation studies, which tend to prioritise institutional perspectives.

Uttarakhand provides a compelling empirical context for examining the implementation of NEP 2020 in ECCE. The state exhibits pronounced regional and topographical heterogeneity, with plain districts coexisting alongside mid-hill and remote mountainous regions. Previous studies on education and public service delivery in hill states have documented challenges such as teacher shortages, infrastructural limitations, accessibility constraints, and administrative fragmentation (Tilak, 2018; Govinda & Bandyopadhyay, 2011). These factors can significantly influence the feasibility and effectiveness of ECCE reforms envisioned under NEP 2020. Despite the policy salience of NEP 2020, systematic empirical evidence on its implementation at the foundational stage remains limited, particularly at the sub-national level. Existing scholarship has largely focused on conceptual analyses of the policy framework or macro-level education reforms, with relatively few studies examining ground-level implementation through stakeholder perspectives, especially in geographically diverse states. Moreover, there is a lack of integrated analyses that simultaneously consider awareness of policy provisions, institutional readiness, implementation challenges, and policy implications within a single empirical framework.

Addressing this gap is important for both academic and policy reasons. From an academic perspective, stakeholder-based implementation studies contribute to the literature on education governance and decentralised policy execution. From a policy standpoint, such analyses provide actionable insights that can inform context-specific adaptations, capacity-building strategies, and targeted interventions, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of ECCE reforms under NEP 2020. Against this backdrop, the present study undertakes a stakeholder-centred examination of NEP 2020 implementation in Early Childhood Care and Education in Uttarakhand. By incorporating perspectives of teachers, administrators, parents, and education officials across different regional contexts, the study seeks to generate empirical evidence on how ECCE reforms are perceived and operationalised at the ground level. The analysis is expected to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of implementation dynamics and to support evidence-based policy refinement. In light of the above discussion, the study is guided by the following objectives:

● To assess stakeholder awareness and perceptions of NEP 2020 provisions related to Early Childhood Care and Education in Uttarakhand.

● To analyse institutional readiness and implementation challenges associated with ECCE reforms under NEP 2020 across different regional contexts of the state.

● To derive policy implications and recommendations for strengthening the effective implementation of ECCE under NEP 2020 based on stakeholder insights.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A multi-state comparative study by **Behera and Acharya (2024)** assessed the implementation of NEP 2020 in ECCE across Indian states and revealed a noticeable improvement in access and quality where administrative capacity, funding, and teacher qualifications were strong. However, stakeholders from geographically difficult regions perceived significant challenges, particularly related to rural–urban disparities, infrastructural limitations,

and inequitable resource distribution. These findings are particularly relevant to hill states such as Uttarakhand, where terrain and connectivity continue to influence policy implementation.

The conceptual re-orientation of early childhood education under NEP 2020 has also been explored by **Negi and Shukla (2024)**, who emphasized the changing perception of the child as an active and capable learner. Teachers viewed the focus on experiential and play-based pedagogy positively, supporting the policy's vision of holistic development. Nevertheless, a gap was noted between policy expectations and classroom realities, especially in terms of infrastructure, teacher preparedness, and continuous professional development.

In a qualitative review of policy alignment, **Malik and Hasan (2024)** highlighted divergent stakeholder perspectives on ECCE implementation. While administrators perceived NEP 2020 as coherent and progressive, teachers stressed the need for stronger convergence between the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Women and Child Development. The lack of coordination between school-based pre-primary education and Anganwadi-based ECCE was identified as a major concern affecting successful implementation.

State-specific research focusing on Uttarakhand by **Goswami (2024)** revealed that stakeholders largely viewed NEP 2020 as a promising reform for foundational education. However, challenges such as difficult terrain, shortage of trained ECCE personnel, and limited access to in-service training were identified as significant barriers. The study emphasized localized planning and strong community engagement as critical strategies for effective policy implementation in the state.

From the perspective of frontline workers, **Verma, Gautam, and Luthra (2023)** examined Anganwadi workers' awareness and preparedness for NEP 2020-mandated ECCE reforms. The findings indicated moderate awareness of policy provisions, coupled with strong willingness to adopt play-based pedagogy. At the same time, workers perceived increased workload, inadequate training support, and limited institutional guidance as major implementation challenges.

Stakeholder experiences related to pedagogical and community engagement aspects were explored by **Guduru (2023)**, who reported that teachers positively perceived the emphasis on play-based learning, multilingual education, and Anganwadi–school integration. However, parental awareness of ECCE reforms under NEP 2020 was found to be limited, which in turn affected community participation and policy acceptance at the grassroots level.

Research focusing on rural ECCE contexts by **Basu and Santra (2023)** highlighted that teacher and Anganwadi workers viewed NEP 2020 as a policy capable of improving quality and inclusiveness in early childhood education. Despite this positive perception, disparities in infrastructure and learning resources were found to constrain effective implementation, particularly in rural and remote regions.

A national perspective on policy readiness was provided by the **Task Force on Early Childhood Care and Education (2022)**, which identified Anganwadi centres as the backbone of universal ECCE implementation under NEP 2020. Policymakers emphasized their potential as foundational learning centres, while Anganwadi workers reported concerns related to dual administrative control, insufficient pedagogical training, and excessive workload.

Earlier reflections on NEP 2020 and ECCE reforms by **Chakraborty Kumbang (2022)** pointed to a clear mismatch between expanded responsibilities assigned to ECCE stakeholders and available institutional support. The study emphasized the urgent need for large-scale capacity building and systemic preparedness to ensure meaningful policy execution.

One of the initial academic interpretations of NEP 2020's ECCE focus was offered by **Saikia (2021)**, who highlighted the policy's emphasis on holistic development and play-based learning. Teachers perceived the policy framework as progressive and child-centric, yet expressed apprehension regarding inadequate training, infrastructure, and teaching-learning resources required for effective implementation.

Despite the extensive international and national literature establishing the importance of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE), empirical evidence on the implementation of India's National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 at the foundational stage remains limited, particularly at the sub-national level. Existing studies in India and Uttarakhand have largely focused on access, infrastructure, and programme evaluation of Anganwadi services, with insufficient attention to stakeholder perceptions regarding awareness of NEP 2020 provisions, institutional readiness, and implementation challenges under the new policy framework.

Moreover, parents' perspectives, despite their central role in early childhood development, are rarely incorporated into policy implementation analyses. The literature also lacks regionally disaggregated studies that compare implementation experiences across plain, mid-hill, and hilly areas within a single state. Consequently, there is a clear gap in context-specific, stakeholder-centred research examining how ECCE reforms under NEP 2020 are perceived and operationalised on the ground, particularly in geographically diverse states such as Uttarakhand.

3. DATA AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

The study adopts a cross-sectional descriptive & analytical research design to examine stakeholder perceptions regarding the implementation of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 in Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) in Uttarakhand. A primary survey-based approach was employed to generate empirical

evidence on policy awareness, institutional readiness, implementation challenges, and policy implications at the foundational stage.

3.2 Study Area

The research was conducted in the state of Uttarakhand, which is characterised by significant geographical and regional diversity. To capture regional variation in ECCE implementation, districts were selected from three broad zones: plain districts (Dehradun and Haridwar), mid-hill districts (Almora and Nainital), and hilly/remote districts (Chamoli and Pithoragarh). This regional bifurcation enabled a comparative assessment of NEP 2020 implementation across different topographical contexts.

3.3 Sample Design and Respondents

A stratified purposive sampling technique was used to select respondents representing key ECCE stakeholders. The final sample comprised 120 respondents, distributed as follows: ECCE teachers (40), school/Anganwadi administrators (30), parents of children aged 3–6 years (40), and education officials (10). Respondents were proportionately drawn from the selected districts to ensure regional representation. The inclusion of parents was intended to capture beneficiary-level perceptions alongside institutional perspectives.

3.4 Data Collection Instrument

Primary data were collected using a structured questionnaire specifically designed for this study and applicable to all stakeholder groups. The instrument consisted of 20 questions, including background information, awareness and perceptions of NEP 2020, institutional readiness and implementation challenges, perceived impact, and policy implications. Perception-based items were measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5), along with two open-ended questions to obtain qualitative insights.

3.5 Data Analysis

The collected data were coded and analysed using descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. The internal consistency of the questionnaire was assessed using Cronbach's alpha ($\alpha = 0.81$), indicating satisfactory reliability. Descriptive statistics were used to summarise stakeholder perceptions, while one-way ANOVA and independent-sample t-tests were applied to examine differences across stakeholder groups and regional categories. Exploratory factor analysis was used to validate key perception constructs, and multiple regression analysis was employed to assess the influence of policy awareness and institutional readiness on perceived effectiveness of ECCE implementation. Qualitative responses were analysed using thematic analysis to supplement quantitative findings.

4. EMPIRICAL RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

The findings are analyzed in relation to the objectives of the study using appropriate statistical and interpretative techniques. The analysis aims to identify stakeholders' responses regarding the implementation of NEP 2020 in Early Childhood Care and Education. This systematic interpretation facilitates a clear understanding of the empirical evidence generated through the study.

Table 1. Distribution of Respondents by Stakeholder Group and Region (n = 120)

Stakeholder Group	Plains	Mid-hills	Hills	Total
ECCE Teachers	15	13	12	40
Administrators	13	10	7	30
Parents	16	11	13	40
Education Officials	5	3	2	10
Total	51	39	35	120

Source: Author's calculations based upon primary data.

The sample shows balanced representation across stakeholder groups and regions. A relatively higher concentration of respondents from plains reflects population density and institutional availability in districts such as Dehradun and Haridwar, while adequate representation from hilly districts ensures meaningful regional comparison.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics: Awareness and Perceptions of NEP 2020

Item	Mean	Std. Deviation
Awareness of NEP 2020 ECCE provisions	3.72	0.78
Clarity of NEP 2020 ECCE framework	3.81	0.71
Appropriateness of foundational learning focus	3.94	0.65
Integration of care and learning	3.88	0.69
Adequacy of training/orientation	3.05	0.82
Composite Awareness Index	3.68	0.74

Source: Author's calculations based upon primary data.
Stakeholders generally reported moderate to high awareness of NEP 2020 ECCE provisions. The highest agreement was observed for the policy's focus on foundational learning. However, comparatively lower scores for training and orientation suggest that dissemination and capacity-building efforts have not yet fully reached all stakeholders, particularly parents and frontline workers.

Table 3. Institutional Readiness and Implementation Challenges

Indicator	Mean	Std. Deviation
Institutional preparedness	3.28	0.81
Availability of trained ECCE educators	3.05	0.84
Infrastructure and learning resources	2.98	0.87
Financial and administrative support	3.12	0.79
Inter-institutional coordination	3.18	0.76
Challenges in rural/hilly areas	4.01	0.69
Composite Readiness Index	3.21	0.81

Source: Author's calculations based upon primary data.
Institutional readiness is moderate, with notable concerns related to infrastructure and trained human resources. The high mean score for challenges in rural and hilly areas confirms that geographical constraints significantly affect ECCE implementation in Uttarakhand.

Table 4. One-Way ANOVA: Regional Differences in Institutional Readiness

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Regions	4.86	2	2.43	4.26	0.016
Within Regions	65.11	117	0.56		
Total	69.97	119			

Source: Author's calculations based upon primary data.

The ANOVA results indicate statistically significant regional differences in institutional readiness ($p < 0.05$). Respondents from hilly districts reported significantly lower readiness scores compared to those from plains, highlighting spatial inequality in ECCE implementation capacity.

Table 5. Perceived Impact of NEP 2020 on ECCE

Impact Indicator	Mean	Std. Deviation
Improvement in access to ECCE	3.96	0.66
Reduction in regional disparities	3.84	0.72
Need for state-specific adaptations	4.08	0.61
Composite Impact Index	3.92	0.67

Source: Author's calculations based upon primary data.

Stakeholders expressed strong optimism regarding the potential impact of NEP 2020 on ECCE. The highest agreement was observed for the need for state-specific adaptations, reinforcing the argument that uniform policy application may not be effective in geographically diverse states like Uttarakhand.

Table 6. Multiple Regression Results: Determinants of Perceived Effectiveness of ECCE Implementation

Independent Variable	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
Awareness Index	0.31	0.08	0.34	3.88	0.000
Institutional Readiness Index	0.47	0.07	0.52	6.71	0.000
Constant	1.12	0.41		2.73	0.007

Source: Author's calculations based upon primary data.
Dependent Variable: Perceived Effectiveness of NEP 2020 ECCE Implementation
Model Summary: $R = 0.68$, $R^2 = 0.46$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.45$

The regression model explains 46% of the variation in perceived effectiveness of ECCE implementation. Institutional readiness has a stronger influence than policy awareness, indicating that infrastructure, staffing, and administrative capacity are more critical than awareness alone in translating NEP 2020 into effective ECCE outcomes. The empirical results reveal that while stakeholder awareness of NEP 2020 is reasonably high, implementation capacity remains uneven, particularly in hilly and remote regions. Institutional readiness emerges as the most decisive factor influencing perceived effectiveness, underscoring the need for targeted investments and region-specific policy adaptations in Uttarakhand.

5.1 DISCUSSION Of FINDINGS

The findings of the study provide important insights into the implementation of NEP 2020 in Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) in Uttarakhand by highlighting the interaction between policy awareness, institutional readiness, and regional context. Overall, stakeholders expressed a positive orientation towards the objectives and vision of NEP 2020, particularly its emphasis on foundational learning, holistic child development, and integration of care and education. This aligns with international and national evidence that recognises ECCE as a critical foundation for long-term human development outcomes. However, the results indicate that awareness alone is insufficient to ensure effective policy implementation. Although moderate to high levels of awareness were observed across stakeholder groups, the comparatively lower scores for training and orientation suggest that information dissemination has not translated into operational capacity. This finding resonates with prior studies on education reform implementation, which argue that policies often fail at the execution stage due to inadequate professional development and limited institutional support mechanisms. Institutional readiness emerged as the most significant determinant of perceived effectiveness of ECCE implementation. Regression results demonstrate that infrastructure adequacy, availability of trained educators, and administrative coordination exert a stronger influence on implementation outcomes than policy awareness. This finding reinforces the view that successful education reforms depend primarily on system-level capacity rather than policy articulation alone. In the context of Uttarakhand, this challenge is further compounded by geographical constraints, which intensify disparities in service delivery between plain and hilly districts. The presence of statistically significant regional differences in institutional readiness underscores the importance of spatial context in education policy implementation. Stakeholders from hilly and remote districts consistently reported lower readiness scores, reflecting persistent challenges related to accessibility, staffing shortages, and monitoring constraints. These findings are consistent

with state-level and regional studies that highlight the structural disadvantages faced by hill states in delivering social services. The evidence suggests that a uniform implementation strategy may inadvertently exacerbate existing inequalities unless accompanied by region-specific support mechanisms.

Despite these constraints, stakeholders demonstrated strong optimism regarding the potential impact of NEP 2020 on ECCE outcomes. High agreement levels on improving access and reducing disparities indicate broad acceptance of the policy's long-term objectives. However, the strong endorsement of state-specific adaptations highlights a critical tension between national policy design and local implementation realities. Stakeholders appear to recognise NEP 2020 as a transformative framework but simultaneously acknowledge the need for contextual flexibility to ensure its effectiveness in diverse settings such as Uttarakhand. Qualitative insights further enrich this interpretation. Stakeholders repeatedly emphasised capacity-building deficits, particularly among Anganwadi workers, and highlighted the lack of seamless coordination between early childhood centres and formal schooling institutions. Parents expressed concerns regarding continuity and quality of early learning experiences, reinforcing the importance of beneficiary perspectives in evaluating ECCE reforms. These qualitative observations provide depth to the quantitative findings and confirm that implementation challenges are both structural and experiential in nature.

5.2 Policy Implications

The empirical evidence from this study yields several important policy implications for strengthening ECCE implementation under NEP 2020, particularly in geographically diverse states such as Uttarakhand. First, capacity building must be prioritised as a core implementation strategy. While policy awareness is necessary, sustained investment in professional development for ECCE educators especially Anganwadi workers and pre-primary teachers is critical. Training programmes should focus on developmentally appropriate pedagogy, early literacy and numeracy, and child-centred learning approaches, with regular refresher modules rather than one-time orientations. Second, infrastructure and resource allocation require targeted interventions. The findings suggest that infrastructure deficits disproportionately affect hilly and remote areas. Policy efforts should therefore adopt differentiated funding mechanisms that account for terrain-related costs, accessibility challenges, and staffing constraints. Mobile resource units, cluster-based service delivery, and technology-supported monitoring may offer feasible solutions in hard-to-reach areas. Third, institutional coordination must be strengthened to realise the integrated vision of ECCE under NEP 2020. Effective convergence between schools, Anganwadi centres, and administrative authorities is essential to ensure continuity in early learning. Clear role delineation, shared monitoring frameworks, and inter-departmental collaboration can help reduce fragmentation and improve service coherence. Fourth, parents should be formally integrated into ECCE implementation and monitoring frameworks. The study demonstrates that parents possess valuable insights into access and quality dimensions of ECCE. Policy mechanisms such as parent orientation programmes, community-level monitoring committees, and feedback systems can enhance accountability and improve learning environments. Finally, state-specific adaptations should be institutionalised rather than treated as exceptions. NEP 2020 provides a flexible policy framework; however, its effectiveness depends on how states operationalise this flexibility. Uttarakhand's unique geographical and demographic context necessitates tailored implementation guidelines, decentralised planning, and district-level autonomy in resource deployment.

6.1 CONCLUSION

This study examined stakeholder perceptions of the implementation of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 in Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) in Uttarakhand, with a focus on awareness of policy provisions, institutional readiness, and policy implications. Drawing on primary data from multiple stakeholder groups across diverse regional contexts, the study provides empirical evidence on how ECCE reforms are being interpreted and operationalised at the ground level. The findings indicate that while NEP 2020 is widely perceived as a progressive and well-articulated policy framework for strengthening ECCE, its implementation remains uneven across regions and institutions. Stakeholders demonstrated moderate to high awareness of ECCE-related provisions, particularly with respect to foundational learning and holistic child development. However, gaps in training, professional development, and operational guidance limit the translation of policy intent into effective practice. This suggests that awareness, though necessary, is insufficient in the absence of adequate institutional capacity. Institutional readiness emerged as the most critical determinant of perceived implementation effectiveness. Deficiencies in infrastructure, availability of trained ECCE educators, and administrative coordination were particularly pronounced in hilly and remote districts. These constraints highlight the role of contextual and spatial factors in shaping policy outcomes and reinforce the need for region-sensitive implementation strategies. Despite these challenges, stakeholders expressed strong optimism regarding the long-term potential of NEP 2020 to improve access to quality ECCE and reduce socio-economic and regional disparities. By adopting a stakeholder-centred and regionally disaggregated approach, the study contributes to the limited empirical literature on ECCE policy implementation in India under NEP 2020. It demonstrates that effective reform requires not only a robust policy framework but also sustained investments in institutional capacity, coordination, and contextual adaptation. The evidence underscores the importance of aligning national education reforms with local realities to ensure equitable and effective early childhood education delivery.

6.2 Future Research Directions

While the study offers valuable insights, several avenues for future research remain. First, the cross-sectional nature of the analysis limits the ability to capture changes in stakeholder perceptions and institutional readiness over time. Longitudinal studies could provide a deeper understanding of how ECCE implementation under NEP 2020 evolves and whether capacity-building initiatives yield sustained improvements. Second, future research may expand the scope of analysis by incorporating learning outcome measures and child development indicators alongside perception-based assessments. Linking institutional readiness and stakeholder awareness to observable outcomes would strengthen the evidence base for evaluating ECCE reforms. Third, comparative studies across states with differing geographical and administrative characteristics could help identify best practices and scalable implementation models. Such inter-state comparisons would be particularly valuable in assessing how contextual factors influence the effectiveness of NEP 2020 at the foundational stage. Fourth, qualitative research involving in-depth interviews and ethnographic approaches could complement survey-based findings by capturing nuanced experiences of educators, parents, and administrators. This would enrich understanding of everyday implementation challenges and informal coping mechanisms at the institutional level. Finally, future studies could explore the role of digital tools, community participation, and decentralised governance mechanisms in enhancing ECCE delivery, particularly in remote and underserved regions. Addressing these dimensions would contribute to a more comprehensive evaluation of NEP 2020 and support evidence-based policymaking for early childhood education in India.

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