

Ten Years of the National Education Policy in Bangladesh: Examining the Policy Directions and Implementation Gaps

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Abstract

This paper reports a qualitative study that was carried out to examine the conspicuous gaps between the policy directions in the national education policy (NEP-2010) of Bangladesh and their implementations. Data were collected through document analysis, classroom observations, and interviews and thematically analysed with the qualitative data analysis software NVivo 11 Proto uncover the major gaps. The key findings showed that different gaps exist as far as the policy directions in the NEP-2010 and their implementations are concerned, especially in the areas of structural changes in primary and secondary education, educational administration restructuring, quality education, teachers' professional development, dignity of teachers, and classroom teaching practices. The paper also highlights the implications of these gaps for the education sector in Bangladesh.

Introduction

Policy formulation is a significant step to bring essential changes and manage them in a particular sector. The national education policy (NEP-2010) in Bangladesh was formulated to ensure education for all the citizens of the country and bring qualitative changes in the education sector. The policy targeted a major overhaul of the education system. All issues related to education were supposed to be addressed considering this policy : “This education policy will work as a basis for an education system suitable for the delivery of education which will be pro-people, easily available, uniform, universal, well planned, science oriented and of high standard according to the constitutional directives and it will also work as a strategy to counter all problems” (MOE 8).

The policy, in general, envisioned an education system that would reflect the spirit of the liberation war of the country, aspirations of the people, focus on scientific education, and pave the way for the overall development of Bangladesh.

Education is an important issue for any country. It can facilitate the overall development of a nation through poverty alleviation (MOE5).The first education commission of Bangladesh headed by Dr. Qudrat-e-Khuda came up with pragmatic policies for building the education system of a newborn country, but its recommendations could not be implemented because of the brutal military coup in 1975. For formulating the current NEP-2010, the government of People's Republic of Bangladesh formed a committee on 06.04.2009 where National Professor late Kabir Chowdhury and distinguished economist Dr. Qazi Kholiquzzaman Ahmad

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worked as the chair and co-chair respectively. Ministry of Education (MOE) coordinated the whole process. Final draft of the policy incorporated opinions from teachers, learners, parents, educationists, politicians, and other stakeholders (4). At present, different stakeholders in Bangladesh are talking about the restructuring of the NEP-2010 as it was formulated ten years ago. Considering this development, the present study examined the gaps between the major policy initiatives in the NEP-2010 and their implementations.

Mogale and Modipane argued that it is difficult to implement policies in the education sector. In South Africa, the government introduced the progression policy for reducing the number of learners who drop out, but different aspects of the policy were not implemented properly. So, the progressed learners negatively affected the overall national results of Grade 12 in 2015 and 2016 (1). Mbewe et al. in their study also found that the private secondary schools in Malawi could not implement the national special needs education policy guidelines properly for two reasons: 1) stakeholders' poor knowledge of the guidelines, and 2) limited resources (96). Moreover, Benson in his study claimed that though the Jordanian laws upheld inclusive education, the education policies did not provide enough details on how to implement inclusiveness in education. The findings showed that limited resources and teachers' negative attitude toward students requiring special helps also impeded the implementation of inclusive education (115).

Additionally, Hardman and A-Rahman investigated whether teachers at the primary level in Malaysia were following the CLT approach in their classrooms as directed in the new curriculum. They found that teachers failed to teach classes following CLT as learners were not engaged in collaborative language tasks to develop their target language (TL) skills, and there were no "real opportunities for creating meaningful and purposeful interaction" (260, 272). In another study, Tri and Moskovsky found that though different national policies stipulated to use only English for classroom teaching-learning in Vietnam, teachers and learners also used Vietnamese in the classrooms for different purposes considering different contextual factors (14).

Moreover, Ahmad et al. studied the causes of poor implementation of the educational policies in Pakistan and found that, inter alia, political instability, lack of training and monitoring, inadequate budget, discontinuity in policies, and corruption affected policy implementations. They suggested that enhanced budget for the education sector and the involvement of policy makers and implementers in the policy design, application and assessment phases might reduce the gaps between policy planning and implementations (240). Similarly, Ashraf et al. in their study reported that the national education policy in Pakistan could not produce the desired results as the policy makers did not consider the complex regional differences in Pakistan (1-14).

In Bangladesh, Hamid and Honan reported that the CLP approach was not properly followed in the primary level English language classrooms as learner-centred classroom practices were ignored (139). Rouf and Mohamed in a study on curricula directions and classroom practices also found non-alignment between them because of teacher-centred pedagogy, less emphasis on learners' TL skills development, teaching English as a knowledge-based subject, inadequate TL practices, ineffective

use of ICT, and teachers' poor oral proficiency (47-52). The studies reviewed above investigated various aspects of educational policy directions and their implementations in different contexts. However, to the best of my knowledge, very few studies have been conducted on the gaps between the national education policy directions and their implementations in Bangladesh. So, the present study was carried out based on the following research question (RQ):

RQ: What are the main policy directions in the NEP-2010, and what about their implementations?

Overall, the present paper is organised in five parts. The first section specifies the scope of the study and presents a succinct literature review. The second part gives details about the research design. The third and fourth parts present the findings and discussion, respectively. The paper ends summarising the key findings and discussing their implications.

Research Design

Approach and Rigour of the Study

The present study was carried out following the constructivist research paradigm and a multiple case study approach. Many researchers use the case study approach to comprehend a particular issue by depth (Yazan 134). The qualitative design of the present study facilitated obtaining 'deep data' on the NEP-2010 directions and their implementations. The main challenge for a qualitative researcher is to maintain the rigour or trustworthiness of a study (Baškarada 2). The rigour of the present study was ensured by maintaining a case study data base, collecting data from different sources using various methods, using self-reflection to avoid bias and staying at the selected schools for a long time (Baškarada 10; Berger 224).

Participants

For collecting data on policy implementations, six secondary level English language (EL) teachers were selected from four schools following the purposive sampling technique for classroom observations and in-person interviews. The purposive sampling technique helped to select participants who could provide rich data on the examined issues. Researchers claimed that four to ten cases usually yield enough data for a case study (Stake 1-342). The EL teachers were told about the objective of the study and assured that their personal details would never be disclosed. To ensure their anonymity, alpha numeric labels (T1-T6) have been used in the paper (Ambler 278). The demographic details of the teachers are given in Table 1.

Teachers	Age (Years)	Gender	Teaching (Years)	Experience
T1	47	Female	21	
T2	40	Female	7	
T3	42	Male	21	
T4	50	Male	22	
T5	58	Female	34	
T6	51	Male	20	

Table 1: The Participating Teachers' Demographics

For ensuring data triangulation and the reliability of the findings, additional data were collected from four head teachers (HTs), three teacher trainers (TTs) and one curriculum expert (CE) through interviews. All these informants were well informed about the ground realities at the educational institutions in Bangladesh.

Data Collection Tools and Methods

A semi-structured school and classroom observation guide and a semi-structured interview checklist were developed for direct non-participant classroom observations and face-to-face interviews with the teachers and other informants. The items in the school and classroom observation guide and interview checklist were based on a thorough analysis of the NEP-2010.

The relevant data for this study were collected through three methods: 1) document analysis; 2) school and classroom observations; and 3) face-to-face interviews (Merriam 71-118). Merriam commented that most often documents are not created for research purposes unlike observation and interview protocols, and they cannot be easily manipulated (104). At the very beginning of the data collection phase, the NEP-2010 was analysed in its entirety to find out the major policy directions. After primarily analysing the data from school and classroom observations and interviews with the EL teachers, interviews were conducted with the HTs, TTs, and the CE.

Data Management and Analysis

School and classroom observation data were recorded using the observation guide and later those data were digitised through scanning. All the interview data were recorded using a professional voice recorder, and subsequently transcribed verbatim. The qualitative data analysis software NVivo11 Pro was used for data analysis using the thematic analysis as a framework as recommended by Braun and Clarke (77-101). Throughout the data analysis phase, an iterative approach was followed to get a holistic picture of the emerging themes.

Findings

The major findings of the study are presented in this section with representative excerpts from the national education policy-2010 and participants.

Restructuring Primary and Secondary Education, and Emphasising Science and Technical Education

One of the key policy recommendations was related to structural changes of the country's education system. The policy proposed to extend primary and secondary education to classes 1-8 and 9-12 respectively. Moreover, primary education was highlighted as the key segment to ensure education for all the citizens of the country and produce skilled human resources for the country: "Primary education is the basis of building up a skilled citizenry and the path to include the whole population within the education system" (MOE11). However, the fact is that primary and secondary education has not been restructured according to the recommendation of the policy.

The existing traditional structure of secondary education in Bangladesh is presented in Figure 1.

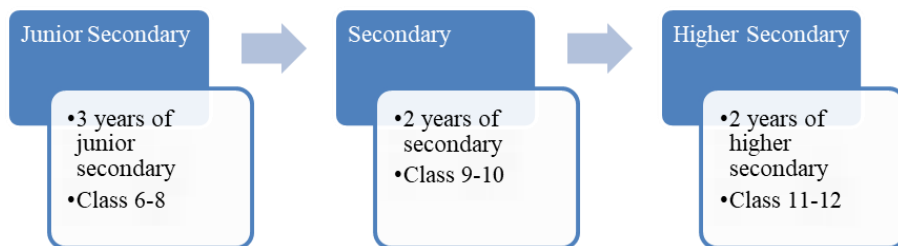


Fig.1: The Existing Structure of Secondary Education in Bangladesh

Moreover, the policy expected that science education would expedite the advancement of the country by developing skilled professionals and unfolding the mystery of natural world. However, despite this policy focus on science education, the reality is that most of the students in Bangladesh dislike to study science. The policy also emphasised vocational and technical education, but students are more interested in general education.

Efficient Administration for Educational Management

The NEP-2010 envisioned a dynamic educational administration at all levels of education so that educational administrators could effectively implement the NEP-2010 and ensure quality of education: “Ensuring quality education through successful implementation of the National Education Policy and qualitative excellence of the education system depends largely on educational administration responsible for its management” (MOE 71). The policy suggested forming the national education commission which will be an independent body to coordinate among all agencies including the MOE that work on education in Bangladesh. It also advocated formation of a non-government teachers’ selection commission for recruiting quality teachers for non-government primary schools, madrasas, secondary schools, and colleges. For overseeing the quality of education at the secondary level, the policy asked to create the post of Chief Education Inspector. To date, no initiative has been taken for forming the national education commission, commission for selecting teachers for non-public educational institutions, and creating the post of Chief Education Inspector. Even the authority concerned has failed to enact a synchronised education law as advised in the education policy: “Steps will be undertaken in the light of this Education Policy and taking into account all laws regulations and policies, directives related to education to formulate a newly coordinated Education law and to ensure its proper implementation” (71).

Ensuring Quality Education

Enhancing the quality of education was the main concern of the policy. Therefore, according to the policy, efficient management, qualified teachers, and essential infrastructure must be ensured for all educational institutions. It set a target that by 2018 the teacher-student ratio would be 1:30 at the secondary schools (SS). Teachers should have pertinent educational background in subjects they teach at SS. However,

the teacher and student ratio is high as most classrooms at SS are now crowded with more than 60 students on an average. In addition, many SS teachers do not have educational background in the subjects they teach. Similarly, most of the EL teachers do not have any relevant degree in English as shown in Table 2.

Teachers	Educational Qualifications	Fields of Study	Notes
T1	BA (Pass)*	General (No specialisation)	* A 2 years' general degree
T2	MA	Islamic Studies	
T3	BA (Pass)	General (No specialisation)	
T4	BA (Pass)	General (No specialisation)	
T5	MA, BA(Pass)	Political Science	
T6	MA, BA(Pass)	Economics	

Table 2: Participating Teachers' Educational Qualifications and Fields of Study

Those graduates who have the relevant degrees in English are not interested in teaching. The CE argued that teaching as a profession is not that much 'charming' to the job seekers: "If I am a magistrate, I have more power. If I am a police officer, I have power. If I go to corporate business, I have money."

Again, the policy emphasised the arrangement of essential infrastructures for all educational institutions, especially lab, library, and human resources. But observations data showed that many of these schools did not have adequate physical infrastructures and teachers. Additionally, it was proposed that an effective mechanism would be established for monitoring the primary and secondary schools. However, there is no comprehensive and rigorous monitoring system at SS for quality assurance. On-government higher education institutions were supposed to carry out their academic activities following rules and regulations, but that is not happening as many of them are not providing quality higher education. The policy also focused on quality and original research in higher education, but the tertiary educational institutions in Bangladesh cannot allocate adequate budget for research and lack research facilities. Though recommended, sufficient fund is not given to the universities.

Quality Teachers: Reliable Recruitment and Continual Professional Development

The NEP-2010 declared that teachers are the main agents for providing quality education. Only they can produce the skilled manpower required for the overall development of the country: "Qualified teachers are essential for proper and quality education" (MOE64). Furthermore, it claimed that the quality of existing teacher education was not at all satisfactory: "The existing teachers' training system of our country is very traditional, insufficient, certificate based, loaded with theoretical knowledge, incomplete in practical learning, based on rote learning and conventional testing system. That is why the expected results cannot be achieved" (64). So, the policy urged all the stakeholders to initiate necessary steps to upgrade the standard of teacher education. It also directed to arrange training programs for teachers both home and abroad according to their needs so that they can develop professionally. The new teachers and the in-service teachers with no training were supposed to get

training. However, the newly appointed teachers do not receive any initial training in Bangladesh. Among all the six EL teachers who took part in this study, nobody received any initial training. TT2 commented: “After 7, 8, or 9 years, they come back for training, B.Ed. training or for CPD or something, but by that time they are already fossilised with the traditional teaching. So, when they go back, they don’t implement. We need to hit the iron at the beginning when it is hot. Well, when it is not fossilised.” Similarly, no fundamental training was arranged for the non-public schoolteachers as recommended in the policy. Some government and non-government institutions provide teachers with training. However, the quality of teacher training is not up to the mark, and these institutions cannot meet up the demands for teacher training as they have limited capacity.

Additionally, the existing continuing professional development (CPD) framework for teachers focused on only training, ignoring all other formats of CPD. Teacher training is not thus seen as a single form of CPD as commented by the CE: “What they are saying in the name of CPD is nothing but training... So, teacher training is the primary, the first step for teacher development. There are many other ways, training is not ‘the way’, this is one of the ways... As a result, in the name of CPD, it is a farce, it is not CPD at all.” Furthermore, nobody asked the teachers about their CPD needs. They were not pushed for taking individual responsibility for their development. Surprisingly, the bureaucrats and foreign consultants take all the decisions regarding teachers’ CPD without consulting them, most often. Again, the teacher training programs are project based having no permanent mechanism. Though the NEP-2010 asked to train teachers on pedagogical skills and their respective subject knowledge, most training programs focus on developing teachers’ pedagogical skills only. The HTs and TTs claimed that it is essential to arrange training on teachers’ language skills, especially on speaking.

Teachers’ Dignity and Accountability

The policy recommended that the stakeholders must ensure the dignity of teachers. It would be impossible to maintain the quality of education without ensuring teachers’ dignity in the society. The most qualified and skilled ones of the available workforce should be the teaching profession: “The proper dignity of teachers everywhere from the primary to the highest level is a very important factor” (MOE67). But, if dignity of the teachers is not ensured, teaching as a profession will lose appeal to the brightest students. Consequently, the learners will be taught by mediocre teachers. It also recommended a separate pay scale for the teachers: “A separate pay scale will be introduced for teachers of all levels to enhance their financial benefits” (67). “Their pay and allowances will be fixed keeping in mind their dignity and their important role in nation-building. Simultaneously, their accountability must be ensured” (16). The fact is that the teachers have not been given any separate pay scale.

The policy also asked to eradicate the discrimination against the teachers working at non-government schools.

The existing discrimination of the teachers/officers/staff of government and nongovernment educational institutions will be removed. In order to increase the benefits of the teachers of non-government institutions to the level of the

government institutions, the government will gradually increase the salary and other benefits on the basis of availability of funds and the academic and training skills of the incumbent. (MOE 75)

The government schoolteachers are given good salaries like other government officials, but teachers at non-government schools with MPO only get the basic of their salaries from the government, and teachers without MPO get no monetary support whatsoever from the government. So, teachers without MPO live a miserable life. TT3 commented: “Actually, the Non-MPO teachers- if you consider their dignity, of course, they are maltreated. Sometimes they work without any payment. So, of course, it’s a very much unhappy affair with them.” However, teachers must remember that their professional standards will decide their dignity to a large extent. The NEP-2010 mentioned that teachers are to teach learners with utmost commitment, but the classroom observation data showed that some teachers lacked commitment and motivation for classroom teaching as commented by the CE: “...There is a lack in teachers’ commitment, ok? So many teachers I have seen, they consider their job as a job, but it may sound very idealistic, but it is true that teaching is not only a job, it is a mission ...”

Interactive Teaching Methods

Teachers should devise teaching methods that are effective for local contexts through research. Following interactive and learner-centric pedagogical practices for classroom teaching, learners must be involved in collaborative tasks like group work and pair works so that all of them develop the required skills. However, classroom observation data revealed that learners were passive receivers in the English language classes as teachers mostly dominated classroom activities. Teachers very often delivered lectures in their classes and did not involve learners in language tasks. Occasionally, learners were involved in group tasks, but teachers did not monitor them properly. T4 commented: “We have failed to change the tradition (teacher-centered class) that is being followed for a long time. It has become our habit. Learners have also been habituated to this culture.” HT3 echoed the same opinion: “We are preaching that learners will learn, teachers will help them and work as facilitators, but we have failed to implement that in our classrooms. Till now, teachers are controlling the whole lesson.”

Tackling Some Pressing Concerns

The NEP-2010 listed some pressing concerns in the educator sector of Bangladesh. First, it has been repeatedly reported that many university-educated graduates are now unemployed. Considering this grim reality, the educational institutions must try to develop those skills in their graduates that are required by the employers. It is vital to build their practical skills along with the theoretical knowledge in their fields of study. Second, teachers were asked to stop private tuition and coaching outside the schools, and the guidebooks were supposed to be banned: “Guidebooks, note-books, private tuitions, coaching centers etc. are some of the hindrances to quality education system. Steps will be taken to stop all these” (MOE60). But, unfortunately, in practice these elements are still operational. Third, there is no doubt that many teachers and learners are involved in unrestrained party politics, and this practice is

being detrimental for all the stakeholders and particularly expediting the downward movement of quality education. So, the education policy asked to stop party politics at all educational institutions, but it has not been possible yet.

Discussion

The present study found many gaps between policy initiatives and their implementations. As for the proposed structural changes, the stakeholders concerned could not devise a detailed plan to extend primary and secondary education to classes 1-8 and 9-12 respectively. Additionally, implementation of these changes will require a lot of investment in infrastructures, and human resources. The fact that 98% of the SS are non-public in Bangladesh has made the scenario more complex. Moreover, as most of the students choose arts and business studies instead of science and vocational and technical education, Bangladesh is lagging behind in scientific and technological knowledge. Eventually, it would jeopardise the development of the country, and Bangladesh will be at the receiving end as far as scientific inventions and technological developments are concerned.

As the national education commission, commission for selecting teachers for non-public educational institutions, and the post of Chief Education Inspector have not been initiated, a mechanism for coordination among different agencies and quality assurance is missing. As a matter of fact, the management of education and educational institutions is highly centralised in Bangladesh. Moreover, as no law has been enacted to support the NEP-2010, it is still not officially mandatory. Consequently, different government agencies implement some directions of the policy and ignore others according to their whims. Furthermore, as the government has not formed a special body to ensure the implementation of the policy, everybody's business has become nobody's business.

The six teachers had no relevant background in EL education. As a matter of fact, those who are appointed as EL teachers at the SS are not required to have subject specific degree. So, anybody can teach English at the SS. These teachers were dominating the EL classes, as they were not familiar with learner-centered pedagogical practices. Furthermore, teachers' traditional pedagogical beliefs, lack of commitment and motivation, negative backwash effects of a faulty examination system encouraged them to follow teacher-centered pedagogy. This situation has worsened because of that fact that classroom teaching is not carefully monitored. Another fact is that many of the bright students do not want to be teachers as the whole society has become money-driven and teaching is seen as a low-status profession in the present Bangladesh.

Altogether, the stakeholders have failed to maintain the quality of education in Bangladesh though the NEP-2010 repeatedly directed to confirm quality education (Saha 35). Lack of a mechanism for rigorous monitoring is seriously affecting teachers' classroom practices and professional development at all levels. It is almost an impossible task for UGC to ensure quality education at so many private universities. We need to decide our priority-sheer number of educational institutions or quality education. Moreover, inadequate budget for education and lack of

infrastructures and research are also affecting quality. UGC in its 43rd annual report mentioned that many universities (65%) in Bangladesh had no research activities. For lack of research, we cannot solve our vernacular problems, and this is increasing our dependency on foreign experts. At present, many graduates with university degrees are not getting jobs, and the employers are claiming that graduates do not have the required skills. This is echoed by Mr. Rahman: “A large chunk of people from the surrounding countries of Bangladesh are now capturing lucrative positions in the private sector. This is happening because the employers and the entrepreneurs are not getting people with the right skill sets” (par. 16). All these factors also explain why none of the universities in Bangladesh has good position in different world rankings.

Additionally, the teacher education programs in Bangladesh have failed to prepare the teachers satisfactorily for classroom teaching (Anwaruddin 1-12; Hamid 289-310; Yadav 96-110). The fact is that nobody takes teacher preparation seriously in Bangladesh as the common belief is that anybody can teach. As teachers are sent inside the classrooms without any initial training, and they start teaching according to their personal beliefs and experiences as learners. They use the teacher-centred pedagogy as their teachers taught them EL through the GTM (Rouf and Hassan 19-29). The worse reality is that teachers’ professional development is also neglected in Bangladesh. This lack of opportunities for professional development has serious ramifications not only for the teachers but for the whole education sector and the country. Teachers become outdated in their knowledge base and do not come to know the latest developments in their respective subjects and classroom pedagogy. They just go on repeating what they learned as students.

No separate pay scale has been declared for the teachers. With their poor salary, it is difficult for the non-MPO teachers to live a decent life. Many of the teachers are involved in private tuition and coaching for maintaining their family expenditures (Hamid et al. 1-19). The teachers are supposed to groom the next generations of the country. The question is when the teachers go hungry, feel demotivated, cannot live a decent life, how can we expect that they will give their best in the classrooms? Interestingly, a lot of talking goes on in Bangladesh centering teachers’ dignity and their expected role as makers of the upcoming generations. People, both political and non-political, tend to be rhetorical about teaching, teachers and take teachers’ dignity for granted, but most often no concrete action is taken to ensure that. It is also important to remember that people will respect teaching and teachers only when they can maintain the highest professional standards.

Finally, the uncovered policy and implementation gaps pointed to a lack of coordination at different levels - philosophy of education, policy making, planning, setting goals and objectives, and monitoring. Many other studies also reported these policy-practice gaps in Bangladesh (Farooqui 441-445; Hamid and Honan 139; Rouf and Mohamed 47-52). However, other countries as reported by Hardman and A-Rahman in Malaysia (260, 272), by Mogale and Modipane in South Africa (1), by Tri and Moskovsky in Vietnam (14), by Ahmad et al. in Pakistan (240) experienced policy-practice gaps, as well. Many other studies (Al Amin and Greenwood 1-18; Ashraf et al. 1-14; Benson 115; Mbewe et al. 96) found the divergence between

policy directions and their implementations. All these findings highlight the fact that policy level directions are not automatically implemented.

Conclusion

As the key findings of the study indicate many of the NEP-2010 directions have not been implemented after 10 years of its formulation. Proposed structural changes for the primary and secondary education are being ignored, and most of the students avoid science and vocational and technical education. Administrative changes as advised by the policy i.e., forming the national education commission, commission for selecting teachers for non-public educational institutions, and creating the post of Chief Education Inspector have not been introduced. No education law has been enacted yet. Moreover, high teacher-student ratio, teachers' lack of relevant educational background, paucity of infrastructure and adequate budget, and absence of original research and monitoring are hampering the quality of education. The overall poor quality of teacher education in the country, in-service teachers' limited opportunities for CPD, even lack of training for teachers go against the spirit of the education policy. Teachers then have not been given any separate pay scale, and the non-government schoolteachers are very poorly paid. However, teachers' lack of motivation and commitment for classroom teaching is also affecting their professionalism. Teacher-centred pedagogical practices are not aligned with the policy directions, as well. Moreover, teachers' engagement in coaching and private tuition, unrestrained party politics, and use of guide books go against the directions of the policy.

Obviously, policy formation is important, but policy implementation is more significant. The NEP-2010 has been a great initiative of the present government, but it is also obvious that for lack of adequate political will, implementation capacity, and monitoring, some key policy directions have not been implemented. Like many other policy initiatives in Bangladesh, the best efforts are not being given to implement the NEP-2010 properly. The mechanism for implementation is not simply built. Though policy formulations reflect all the good intentions of the policy makers at the macro level, all those good intentions might get spoiled for the conspicuous absence of a mechanism for implementation at the micro level.

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