

Curriculum Flexibility and Multidisciplinary Education under NEP 2020: A Study of Teachers' Perceptions in Higher Education Institutions

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Abstract

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 has introduced a significant shift in the structure and functioning of higher education in India by emphasising flexibility, multidisciplinary learning, student choice, academic mobility and holistic development. One of the major objectives of the policy is to provide learners with greater freedom to select courses and develop academic pathways according to their interests and aspirations. The present study was undertaken to examine teachers' perceptions regarding curriculum flexibility and multidisciplinary education under NEP 2020 in selected higher education institutions of Agra district, Uttar Pradesh. A descriptive survey method was adopted for the study. The sample comprised 100 teachers selected from five higher education institutions of Agra district. A researcher-developed five-point Likert-type scale consisting of 30 items was proposed to assess teachers' perceptions regarding curriculum flexibility and multidisciplinary education. The scale comprised two dimensions: curriculum flexibility and multidisciplinary education, with 15 items under each dimension. For statistical analysis, frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation, independent-samples t-test, one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA), and Pearson's product-moment correlation were used. The illustrative findings showed that teachers had generally favourable perceptions regarding both curriculum flexibility and multidisciplinary education. Gender-wise differences were not statistically significant, whereas significant differences were observed with respect to institutional type and teaching experience. A statistically significant positive relationship was also found between curriculum flexibility and multidisciplinary education. The findings indicate that curricular flexibility and multidisciplinary education are closely associated components of the reforms envisaged under NEP 2020. The study suggests that faculty orientation, institutional preparedness, interdisciplinary collaboration, academic infrastructure and effective implementation mechanisms are important for translating policy provisions into meaningful academic practices.

Keywords: NEP 2020, curriculum flexibility, multidisciplinary education, higher education, teachers' perceptions, academic flexibility, curriculum reform

1. Introduction

Higher education plays an important role in developing knowledge, skills, critical thinking, creativity and social responsibility among learners. The changing requirements of the twenty-first century have created a need for higher education systems that provide students with greater academic choice and opportunities to learn across disciplinary boundaries. In India, the National Education Policy 2020 represents a major

policy initiative aimed at restructuring the higher education system around flexibility, multidisciplinary learning, skill development, research and holistic development.

NEP 2020 emphasises the development of higher education institutions that can provide broad-based and multidisciplinary education. The policy encourages students to develop knowledge in specialised areas while also acquiring exposure to other fields of study. It seeks to reduce rigid boundaries between disciplines and promote greater academic flexibility.

One important component of this transformation is **curriculum flexibility**. Traditional higher education programmes have often been organised around relatively fixed combinations of subjects. NEP 2020 seeks to provide students with greater opportunities to choose subjects and courses according to their interests and future aspirations. The University Grants Commission has consequently formulated the Curriculum and Credit Framework for Undergraduate Programmes (CCFUP), which incorporates a flexible choice-based credit system, multidisciplinary learning and multiple entry and exit options.

The UGC framework provides an institutional mechanism through which students can select courses from different areas and develop more flexible academic pathways. The framework is designed to facilitate student choice and support the broader objectives of NEP 2020.

The concept of curriculum flexibility is closely associated with **multidisciplinary education**. Multidisciplinary education allows learners to obtain knowledge from more than one academic field. It can provide opportunities for students to connect concepts from different disciplines and develop broader perspectives.

The Academic Bank of Credits is another important component of this reform. The UGC regulations describe the Academic Bank of Credits as a mechanism intended to promote curriculum flexibility and interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary academic mobility. It is designed to support credit accumulation and transfer and provide students with greater flexibility in choosing courses and academic pathways.

NEP 2020 also envisages the gradual transformation of higher education institutions into multidisciplinary institutions. This transformation requires changes in curriculum design, teaching practices, assessment, institutional structures and faculty roles.

Teachers are among the most important stakeholders in the implementation of curricular reforms. Although policy documents provide the framework for reform, teachers are responsible for interpreting curricula, teaching courses, guiding students and participating in academic planning. Their perceptions can therefore provide useful information about the extent to which curriculum reforms are understood and experienced at the institutional level.

Previous research has examined teachers' awareness and perceptions regarding NEP 2020. For example, Sowmya et al. examined teachers' perceptions of NEP 2020 and reported that teachers' feedback was important for understanding policy implementation at the grassroots level. Their study also employed statistical techniques to examine teachers' perceptions across different dimensions of the policy.

However, many studies have examined NEP 2020 as a broad policy rather than focusing specifically on the relationship between curriculum flexibility and multidisciplinary education. The present study therefore concentrates on these two closely connected dimensions and examines them from the perspective of higher education teachers in Agra district.

2. Background of the Study

NEP 2020 provides a vision for restructuring higher education around flexibility, multidisciplinary learning and student-centred education. The policy seeks to reduce rigid disciplinary boundaries and create

opportunities for students to select courses from different areas.

The UGC's Curriculum and Credit Framework for Undergraduate Programmes incorporates these principles through a flexible choice-based credit structure and multidisciplinary approach. The framework aims to facilitate students in choosing subjects and developing academic pathways based on their interests. The Academic Bank of Credits further supports this approach by providing a mechanism for the accumulation and transfer of academic credits. The system is intended to facilitate academic mobility and provide students with greater flexibility in completing their academic programmes.

Multidisciplinary education requires more than simply offering courses from different subjects. It requires institutional mechanisms that allow students to access courses across departments and disciplines. Faculty members also need to collaborate in curriculum planning and teaching.

In this context, teachers' perceptions are important because successful implementation depends partly on their understanding, preparedness and experiences with the new curricular arrangements.

3. Rationale of the Study

The implementation of NEP 2020 is taking place through several interconnected reforms in Indian higher education. Curriculum flexibility and multidisciplinary education are particularly important because they directly affect students' academic choices.

The present study was undertaken for the following reasons:

1. Curriculum flexibility is a major feature of the academic reforms associated with NEP 2020.
2. Multidisciplinary education is intended to provide students with broader learning opportunities.
3. Teachers are directly involved in curriculum implementation.
4. Institutional conditions may influence how teachers perceive curriculum reforms.
5. Agra district contains a range of higher education institutions representing different institutional contexts.
6. Empirical evidence at the district level can provide a more focused understanding of teachers' perceptions.
7. Studying curriculum flexibility and multidisciplinary education together can help identify whether teachers perceive these two dimensions as interconnected.

4. Objectives of the Study

The study was conducted with the following objectives:

1. To study teachers' perceptions regarding curriculum flexibility under NEP 2020.
2. To examine teachers' perceptions regarding multidisciplinary education under NEP 2020.
3. To determine whether teachers' perceptions regarding curriculum flexibility differ significantly with respect to gender.
4. To determine whether teachers' perceptions regarding multidisciplinary education differ significantly with respect to gender.
5. To examine whether teachers' perceptions regarding curriculum flexibility differ significantly according to institutional type.
6. To examine whether teachers' perceptions regarding multidisciplinary education differ significantly according to institutional type.
7. To determine whether teachers' perceptions regarding curriculum flexibility differ significantly according to teaching experience.

8. To determine whether teachers' perceptions regarding multidisciplinary education differ significantly according to teaching experience.
9. To examine the relationship between teachers' perceptions regarding curriculum flexibility and multidisciplinary education.

5. Hypotheses of the Study

The following null hypotheses were formulated:

H₀1: There is no significant difference in teachers' perceptions regarding curriculum flexibility with respect to gender.

H₀2: There is no significant difference in teachers' perceptions regarding multidisciplinary education with respect to gender.

H₀3: There is no significant difference in teachers' perceptions regarding curriculum flexibility with respect to institutional type.

H₀4: There is no significant difference in teachers' perceptions regarding multidisciplinary education with respect to institutional type.

H₀5: There is no significant difference in teachers' perceptions regarding curriculum flexibility among teachers having different levels of teaching experience.

H₀6: There is no significant difference in teachers' perceptions regarding multidisciplinary education among teachers having different levels of teaching experience.

H₀7: There is no significant relationship between teachers' perceptions regarding curriculum flexibility and multidisciplinary education.

6. Methodology

6.1 Research Method

The **descriptive survey method** was employed for the proposed empirical investigation. This method was considered appropriate because the study aimed to examine teachers' perceptions regarding curriculum flexibility and multidisciplinary education under NEP 2020.

6.2 Population

The study population comprised teachers working in selected higher education institutions in Agra district, Uttar Pradesh.

Agra district's official education records list several degree colleges, including Agra College, R.B.S. Degree College, St. John's Degree College, Baikunthi Devi Kanya Mahavidyalaya and R.B. Degree College. These institutions provide an appropriate institutional context for studying teachers' perceptions regarding curricular reforms.

6.3 Sample

A sample of **100 teachers** was proposed for the study.

Five colleges were selected, with **20 teachers from each institution**, giving a total sample of 100 teachers.

Table 1
Distribution of the Sample According to Selected Colleges

S. No.	Selected College	Number of Teachers
1	Agra College	20
2	R.B.S. Degree College	20

3	St. John's Degree College	20
4	Baikunthi Devi Kanya Mahavidyalaya	20
5	R.B. Degree College	20
Total		100

The selected institutions are included in the Agra district government's official listing of degree colleges.

6.4 Sampling Technique

For the proposed field investigation, a **stratified sampling approach** may be used to ensure representation of teachers from the selected institutions. Within each selected institution, teachers may be selected through random sampling subject to their availability and consent.

7. Demographic Characteristics of the Sample

Table 2
Distribution of Teachers According to Gender

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	52	52.0
Female	48	48.0
Total	100	100.0

The sample consisted of 52 male teachers and 48 female teachers, representing 52% and 48% of the total sample respectively.

Table 3
Distribution of Teachers According to Institutional Type

Institutional Type	Frequency	Percentage
Government/Aided	60	60.0
Private/Unaided	40	40.0
Total	100	100.0

The sample comprised 60 teachers from government/aided institutions and 40 teachers from private/unaided institutions.

Table 4
Distribution of Teachers According to Teaching Experience

Teaching Experience	Frequency	Percentage
Below 5 years	27	27.0
5–10 years	35	35.0
Above 10 years	38	38.0
Total	100	100.0

The largest group consisted of teachers having more than ten years of teaching experience.

8. Research Tool

A researcher-developed instrument titled:

“Curriculum Flexibility and Multidisciplinary Education Perception Scale” (CFMEPS)
was proposed for data collection.

The scale consisted of two dimensions:

Dimension I: Curriculum Flexibility

This dimension included 15 statements related to:

- freedom of course selection;
- flexible curriculum structure;
- choice-based learning;
- credit-based education;
- academic mobility;
- credit transfer;
- multiple entry and exit;
- student choice;
- interdisciplinary course selection;
- flexible academic progression.

Dimension II: Multidisciplinary Education

This dimension included 15 statements related to:

- interdisciplinary learning;
- multidisciplinary courses;
- collaboration between departments;
- integration of different academic disciplines;
- interdisciplinary teaching;
- multidisciplinary projects;
- cross-disciplinary research;
- exposure to different knowledge areas;
- institutional support;
- opportunities for holistic learning.

The respondents were asked to indicate their degree of agreement using a five-point Likert scale:

1. Strongly Disagree
2. Disagree
3. Undecided
4. Agree
5. Strongly Agree

The total score could range from **30 to 150**.

9. Validity and Reliability

For an actual field study, the preliminary scale should be submitted to experts in education, teacher education, curriculum studies and higher education for content validation.

A pilot study should subsequently be conducted to establish the reliability of the instrument.

For demonstrating the statistical format of the present paper, the following **simulated reliability values** are used.

Table 5 Illustrative Reliability of the Scale

Dimension	Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Curriculum Flexibility	15	0.88

Multidisciplinary Education	15	0.89
Overall Scale	30	0.91

The illustrative values indicate satisfactory internal consistency. However, these coefficients must be recalculated using the actual pilot-study responses before publication.

10. Statistical Techniques

The collected data were proposed to be analysed using:

- Frequency
- Percentage
- Mean
- Standard Deviation
- Independent-samples *t*-test
- One-way ANOVA
- Pearson's product-moment correlation

The level of significance was fixed at **0.05**.

11. Analysis and Interpretation

Objective 1 and Objective 2

Table 6

Overall Perceptions Regarding Curriculum Flexibility and Multidisciplinary Education

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Mean Percentage
Curriculum Flexibility	100	56.72	7.18	75.63
Multidisciplinary Education	100	58.14	7.36	77.52

The mean score for curriculum flexibility was **56.72**, with a standard deviation of **7.18**. The mean percentage was 75.63%.

The mean score for multidisciplinary education was **58.14**, with a standard deviation of **7.36**, representing a mean percentage of 77.52%.

The simulated results indicate that teachers generally expressed favourable perceptions regarding both dimensions.

12. Gender-wise Difference in Curriculum Flexibility

Table 7

Gender-wise Comparison of Teachers' Perceptions Regarding Curriculum Flexibility

Gender	N	Mean	SD	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Male	52	56.08	7.35	0.93	.354
Female	48	57.41	6.98		

The obtained *t* value of **0.93** was not statistically significant at the 0.05 level (*p* = .354).

Therefore, **H₀₁ was not rejected**.

The simulated results indicate that male and female teachers did not differ significantly in their perceptions regarding curriculum flexibility.

13. Gender-wise Difference in Multidisciplinary Education

Table 8

Gender-wise Comparison of Teachers' Perceptions Regarding Multidisciplinary Education

Gender	N	Mean	SD	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Male	52	57.61	7.55	0.75	.456
Female	48	58.71	7.15		

The calculated *t* value was **0.75**, with *p* = .456. Since the probability value was greater than .05, the difference was not statistically significant.

Thus, **H₀₂ was not rejected**.

The simulated findings suggest that gender was not associated with a statistically significant difference in teachers' perceptions regarding multidisciplinary education.

14. Institutional Type and Curriculum Flexibility

Table 9

Difference in Curriculum Flexibility Perceptions According to Institutional Type

Institutional Type	N	Mean	SD	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Government/Aided	60	58.21	6.91	2.53	.013
Private/Unaided	40	54.49	7.40		

The obtained *t* value of **2.53** was statistically significant at the 0.05 level (*p* = .013).

Therefore, **H₀₃ was rejected**.

The simulated data indicate a significant difference between the two institutional groups. Teachers from government/aided institutions reported a higher mean score on curriculum flexibility.

This result should be interpreted as a difference in perceptions rather than proof that one institutional category implements NEP 2020 more effectively.

15. Institutional Type and Multidisciplinary Education

Table 10

Difference in Multidisciplinary Education Perceptions According to Institutional Type

Institutional Type	N	Mean	SD	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Government/Aided	60	59.43	7.14	2.12	.037
Private/Unaided	40	56.21	7.62		

The calculated *t* value was **2.12**, which was statistically significant at the 0.05 level (*p* = .037).

Therefore, **H₀₄ was rejected**.

The simulated results indicate that perceptions regarding multidisciplinary education differed significantly according to institutional type.

16. Teaching Experience and Curriculum Flexibility

Table 11

ANOVA of Curriculum Flexibility Perceptions According to Teaching Experience

Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
Between Groups	474.72	2	237.36	4.63	.012
Within Groups	4971.00	97	51.25		

Total	5445.72	99			
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The obtained F value was **4.63**, which was statistically significant at the 0.05 level ($p = .012$).

Therefore, **H₀₅ was rejected**.

The simulated results suggest that teachers with different levels of teaching experience differed significantly in their perceptions of curriculum flexibility.

Table 12
Mean Scores for Curriculum Flexibility by Teaching Experience

Teaching Experience	N	Mean
Below 5 years	27	60.00
5–10 years	35	57.20
Above 10 years	38	54.80

The highest mean was obtained by teachers having less than five years of experience, while the lowest mean was observed among teachers having more than ten years of experience.

Since the overall ANOVA was significant, a post-hoc test would be required in the actual study to determine exactly which pairs of groups differ significantly.

17. Teaching Experience and Multidisciplinary Education

Table 13
ANOVA of Multidisciplinary Education Perceptions According to Teaching Experience

Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	F	p
Between Groups	353.24	2	176.62	3.33	.040
Within Groups	5141.00	97	53.00		
Total	5494.24	99			

The calculated F value was **3.33**, with $p = .040$.

Since $p < .05$, **H₀₆ was rejected**.

The simulated results indicate that perceptions regarding multidisciplinary education differed significantly among teachers belonging to different experience groups.

Table 14
Mean Scores for Multidisciplinary Education by Teaching Experience

Teaching Experience	N	Mean
Below 5 years	27	60.30
5–10 years	35	58.60
Above 10 years	38	55.90

The highest mean score was obtained by teachers with less than five years of experience.

18. Relationship between Curriculum Flexibility and Multidisciplinary Education

Table 15
Correlation between Curriculum Flexibility and Multidisciplinary Education

Variables	N	Pearson's r	p
Curriculum Flexibility and Multidisciplinary Education	100	.671	<.001

The correlation coefficient between curriculum flexibility and multidisciplinary education was $r = .671$, which was statistically significant at the 0.05 level.

Therefore, **H₀7 was rejected**.

The result indicates a positive relationship between teachers' perceptions of curriculum flexibility and multidisciplinary education. In the simulated data, teachers who reported more favourable perceptions of curriculum flexibility also tended to report more favourable perceptions regarding multidisciplinary education.

19. Summary of Hypothesis Testing

Table 16
Summary of Results of Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Statistical Technique	Result
H ₀ 1	<i>t</i> -test	Not rejected
H ₀ 2	<i>t</i> -test	Not rejected
H ₀ 3	<i>t</i> -test	Rejected
H ₀ 4	<i>t</i> -test	Rejected
H ₀ 5	ANOVA	Rejected
H ₀ 6	ANOVA	Rejected
H ₀ 7	Pearson's correlation	Rejected

The analysis indicates that gender was not associated with significant differences in either dimension. Significant differences were observed according to institutional type and teaching experience. A significant positive relationship was also found between curriculum flexibility and multidisciplinary education.

20. Discussion

The simulated findings indicate that teachers generally expressed favourable perceptions regarding curriculum flexibility under NEP 2020. This finding is consistent with the direction of current higher education reforms, particularly the UGC Curriculum and Credit Framework, which incorporates flexible choice-based credits and multidisciplinary learning.

The favourable perception of multidisciplinary education is also consistent with the emphasis placed by NEP 2020 on reducing rigid disciplinary boundaries. The policy envisages higher education institutions as multidisciplinary institutions that provide students with opportunities to study across different areas.

The absence of significant gender differences suggests that perceptions regarding these academic reforms may not necessarily vary according to gender. However, this conclusion would need to be verified through actual field data.

The significant institutional differences found in the simulated analysis may reflect differences in institutional structures, academic autonomy, curriculum practices, faculty development opportunities, administrative arrangements and access to academic resources. These factors can influence teachers' experiences of policy implementation.

The significant differences according to teaching experience are also noteworthy. Teachers with different professional backgrounds may have experienced curriculum structures in different phases of higher education reform. Teachers with shorter teaching experience may have entered the profession when

flexible and credit-based curricular arrangements were becoming more prominent, whereas senior teachers may have had longer exposure to conventional disciplinary structures.

The positive correlation between curriculum flexibility and multidisciplinary education is particularly relevant. Multidisciplinary education requires sufficient curricular flexibility to allow students to select courses and combine knowledge from different areas. Therefore, the two dimensions can reasonably be expected to operate together within the broader framework of NEP 2020.

The Academic Bank of Credits also supports this relationship by providing a mechanism for credit accumulation and transfer and by promoting flexibility and interdisciplinary academic mobility.

Thus, the findings suggest that curriculum flexibility should not be treated as an isolated administrative reform. It is closely connected with the possibility of creating meaningful multidisciplinary learning opportunities.

21. Major Findings of the Study

The major findings of the illustrative analysis are as follows:

1. The overall mean score for curriculum flexibility was **56.72**.
2. The overall mean score for multidisciplinary education was **58.14**.
3. Teachers demonstrated generally favourable perceptions regarding both dimensions.
4. No significant gender difference was found in perceptions regarding curriculum flexibility.
5. No significant gender difference was found in perceptions regarding multidisciplinary education.
6. A significant difference was observed between government/aided and private/unaided institution teachers regarding curriculum flexibility.
7. A significant difference was also observed between institutional groups regarding multidisciplinary education.
8. Teaching experience was significantly associated with perceptions regarding curriculum flexibility.
9. Teaching experience was significantly associated with perceptions regarding multidisciplinary education.
10. A significant positive relationship was found between curriculum flexibility and multidisciplinary education ($r = .671, p < .001$).

22. Educational Implications

22.1 Faculty Orientation

Higher education institutions should organise regular orientation programmes for teachers regarding the practical aspects of NEP 2020, particularly flexible curricula, multidisciplinary education, credit transfer and student choice.

22.2 Interdisciplinary Collaboration

Teachers from different departments should be encouraged to collaborate in developing courses, projects and teaching-learning activities.

22.3 Flexible Curriculum Planning

Institutions should provide genuine opportunities for students to choose courses according to their interests rather than limiting flexibility to formal curriculum documents.

22.4 Academic Credit Management

Effective credit-management mechanisms are important for implementing flexible academic pathways. Faculty members and administrative personnel should be familiar with the Academic Bank of Credits and

related procedures.

22.5 Faculty Development

Professional development programmes should focus on interdisciplinary pedagogy, curriculum design, collaborative teaching and assessment of multidisciplinary learning.

22.6 Institutional Infrastructure

Multidisciplinary education requires adequate academic infrastructure, including libraries, laboratories, digital resources, classrooms and administrative systems.

22.7 Student Guidance

Teachers and academic advisers should guide students in selecting courses from different disciplines so that flexibility results in meaningful academic pathways rather than inappropriate combinations of subjects.

22.8 Institutional Coordination

Departments need effective coordination because multidisciplinary education may require students to take courses outside their parent departments.

23. Limitations of the Study

The study has the following limitations:

1. The sample was restricted to selected higher education institutions of Agra district.
2. The sample size was limited to 100 teachers.
3. The study focused on teachers' perceptions rather than direct observation of implementation.
4. The study examined only two dimensions of NEP 2020.
5. Perception-based data may be influenced by respondents' personal experiences and understanding of policy reforms.
6. Institutional differences may influence teachers' responses.
7. The present statistical values are simulated and must be replaced by actual field data before submission as an empirical research report.

24. Suggestions for Further Research

Future researchers may extend the study in the following directions:

1. Similar research may be conducted with a larger sample covering several districts.
2. Comparative studies may be conducted between universities and affiliated colleges.
3. Students' perceptions may be studied along with teachers' perceptions.
4. Future research may examine the actual implementation of Academic Bank of Credits.
5. Studies may investigate the effectiveness of multiple-entry-and-exit provisions.
6. Mixed-method research may combine questionnaires with teacher interviews.
7. Longitudinal studies may examine changes in perceptions over several academic sessions.
8. Future research may examine the relationship between curriculum flexibility and student academic engagement.
9. Research may examine institutional readiness for multidisciplinary education.
10. Further studies may investigate the role of faculty development in successful implementation of NEP-related curricular reforms.

25. Conclusion

The National Education Policy 2020 has introduced a new direction for higher education in India by emphasising flexibility, multidisciplinary learning, student choice and academic mobility. Curriculum flexibility and multidisciplinary education represent two important components of this transformation.

The present study focused on teachers working in selected higher education institutions of Agra district. The illustrative analysis based on a simulated sample of 100 teachers indicated generally favourable perceptions regarding both curriculum flexibility and multidisciplinary education. Gender-wise differences were not statistically significant, whereas significant differences were observed according to institutional type and teaching experience.

The significant positive relationship between curriculum flexibility and multidisciplinary education indicates that these two dimensions are closely interconnected. Greater curricular flexibility can create opportunities for students to study across disciplinary boundaries, while multidisciplinary education requires academic structures that permit meaningful subject choice and mobility.

The implementation of NEP 2020 therefore requires more than curriculum revision. It calls for institutional preparedness, faculty orientation, interdisciplinary collaboration, appropriate credit-management systems, student guidance and adequate academic resources.

The study provides a focused framework for examining teachers' perceptions of two important dimensions of NEP 2020. However, the statistical findings presented here are illustrative. A final empirical study should use responses collected from the proposed 100 teachers and calculate all statistics directly from the actual dataset.

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