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Research Paper

Teacher Education in Assam in the Era of NEP 2020: Bridging Policy and Practice

Prantar Kashyap[1]*, Pranjana Saikia[2]

ABSTRACT

Teacher education occupies a central place in India's National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, which aspires to develop teachers who are intellectually capable, pedagogically skilled, and socially committed. The policy outlines a series of reforms such as the establishment of a four-year integrated B.Ed. programme, the promotion of multidisciplinary and experiential approaches to learning, the integration of digital tools, and the emphasis on lifelong professional growth. Yet, the transition from these ambitious policy ideals to their practical realization within teacher education institutions (TEIs) remains a complex challenge. The main objectives of this study are: (i) to examine the major provisions of NEP 2020 that concern teacher education, (ii) to assess institutional readiness and challenges in translating these reforms into action, and (iii) to propose strategies that can help close the gap between policy intent and on-ground implementation. This work relies solely on secondary data sources, including policy documents, official reports of NCTE and NCERT, UDISE+, SCERT Assam academic articles, and governmental publications. A critical review of these materials provides insight into the emerging patterns, strengths, and limitations of the current teacher education landscape under NEP 2020. The analysis suggests that while the policy offers a visionary roadmap for enhancing teacher preparation and professional standards, several obstacles—such as inadequate infrastructure, scarcity of qualified faculty, and weak inter-agency coordination—continue to impede effective implementation. Nonetheless, promising developments, including digital innovations and inclusive pedagogical initiatives, are beginning to reflect the spirit of reform envisioned by NEP 2020. The paper concludes that bridging the divide between policy and practice will require consistent policy support, renewed curriculum design, capacity building of teacher educators, and systematic monitoring to ensure that the transformative aspirations of NEP 2020 are fully realized in India's teacher education system.

Keywords: *NEP 2020, Teacher Education, Educational Reform, Policy and Practice, Professional Development, Implementation Challenges, India*

Education has long been recognized as the foundation of human resource development and the key to national progress. In India, the teacher occupies a central role as a mentor, facilitator, and builder of the nation's intellectual and moral capital.

[1]Assistant Professor, THB college
[2]Assistant Professor, THB college
*Corresponding Author

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However, despite the constitutional commitment to quality education for all, disparities in teacher preparation, recruitment, and professional development persist. Reports from the National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE, 2023) indicate that India hosts more than 17,000 Teacher Education Institutions (TEIs), of which nearly 60% operate privately. This expansion, while improving access, has resulted in significant variations in quality across states.

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020—introduced after more than three decades—seeks to transform the Indian education system to meet the needs of the 21st century. One of its most ambitious reforms is the restructuring of teacher education. NEP 2020 envisions a four-year integrated B.Ed. programme as the minimum qualification for school teachers by 2030 and seeks to integrate teacher education within multidisciplinary universities. The policy also emphasizes Continuous Professional Development (CPD), mentoring systems, and the creation of National Professional Standards for Teachers (NPST).

Integration of Assam's Context in the National Framework

In the context of Assam, NEP 2020 has particular significance. The state's teacher education system has historically evolved through institutions such as Gauhati University, Dibrugarh University, and the Assam State Council of Educational Research and Training (SCERT). Assam's diverse socio-linguistic composition—with multiple mediums of instruction such as Assamese, Bodo, Bengali, and English—creates both opportunities and challenges in teacher preparation. The state has over 260 teacher education institutions, including government, private, and aided colleges, yet many face challenges in infrastructure, digital readiness, and quality assurance.

Recent reports from SCERT Assam (2023) highlight that while enrolment in teacher education has increased, many TEIs lack adequate faculty and technology integration. Furthermore, NEP 2020's vision of integrating teacher education with multidisciplinary universities poses implementation challenges in a state where many colleges are still affiliated to traditional universities and lack autonomy. Despite these hurdles, Assam's proactive initiatives—such as the Assam State Mission for Quality Education and digital teacher training under DIKSHA and NISHTHA platforms—show promising alignment with NEP 2020 objectives. Thus, examining Assam's experience provides valuable insights into how national policy translates into regional practice.

The objective of this paper is therefore twofold:

1. To examine the major provisions of NEP 2020 that concern teacher education,
2. To assess institutional readiness and challenges in translating these reforms into action**.**
3. To propose strategies that can help close the gap between policy intent and on-ground implementation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Teacher education in India has undergone several reform cycles influenced by national commissions and global educational trends. The Kothari Commission (1964–66) first established a direct link between teacher quality and national development, emphasizing the need for professionalization in teacher preparation. The National Policy on Education (1986) and its 1992 modification further introduced integrated teacher training concepts and continuous learning frameworks.

The National Curriculum Framework for Teacher Education (NCFTE, 2009) advanced the constructivist model, focusing on reflective teaching, classroom experience, and contextual learning. However, numerous empirical studies (Sharma, 2010; Natarajan, 2014) found that many TEIs still rely heavily on theoretical instruction with limited field exposure. The Justice Verma Commission (2012) further identified commercialization, outdated curricula, and weak monitoring as central challenges.

Recent analyses (Kaul, 2022; Singh & Kaur, 2023) note that NEP 2020 offers a comprehensive roadmap for change, emphasizing professional standards, digital pedagogy, and lifelong learning. Yet, effective implementation requires systemic capacity-building, particularly in resource-constrained regions such as Northeast India.

Studies on Teacher Education in Assam

Academic discourse on teacher education in Assam reflects similar challenges. Research by Baruah (2021) and Saikia (2022) reveals that teacher training institutions in the state face issues of faculty shortage, uneven accreditation, and limited research engagement. The SCERT's 2023 evaluation also pointed out that in-service training often remains one-time rather than continuous. Nevertheless, efforts to digitize professional development through NISHTHA and DIKSHA platforms have led to notable improvements in teachers' ICT competence, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative secondary analysis approach using data from published reports, government documents, and academic research. Key sources include UDISE+ (2022), NCTE Annual Reports, NIEPA Statistical Handbooks, SCERT Assam evaluations, and policy reviews from the Ministry of Education.

A thematic analysis framework is used to identify recurring themes such as policy intent, institutional readiness, teacher capacity, and reform outcomes. This method provides a macro-level understanding of how NEP 2020 is reshaping teacher education both nationally and in Assam, without direct field data collection.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

NEP 2020 and the Paradigm Shift

NEP 2020 marks a fundamental shift in the philosophy of teacher education—from content transmission to competency-based, experiential learning. The integration of teacher education into multidisciplinary universities aims to enhance academic rigor and professional identity. As of 2023, about 120 institutions across India have adopted the four-year integrated B.Ed. model (NCTE, 2023).

However, disparities persist across states. Regions with advanced higher education ecosystems—such as Delhi, Kerala, and Karnataka—have adopted reforms faster, whereas states with resource constraints, including Bihar, Jharkhand, and Assam, face infrastructural and administrative bottlenecks.

Institutional Readiness and Quality Challenges

Despite NEP 2020's progressive intent, India's Teacher Education Institutions (TEIs) vary widely in governance, infrastructure, and academic quality. Around 45% of TEIs are inadequately equipped for blended learning, and many lack research facilities or mentoring

systems (NIEPA, 2021). Quality assurance mechanisms, although mandated through NCTE and NAAC accreditation, remain inconsistent.

Another persistent issue is the gap between pre-service and in-service teacher training. While NEP 2020 promotes lifelong learning and professional renewal, many TEIs still follow static curricula disconnected from school realities. Professional development often takes the form of short-term workshops rather than sustained mentoring or reflective practice.

The COVID-19 pandemic further exposed systemic weaknesses. A 2021 NIEPA report found that only 38% of rural teachers could access stable internet for online professional development. Although this accelerated digital adoption through DIKSHA, SWAYAM, and NISHTHA, it also underscored the digital divide between urban and rural areas.

Teacher Education and the Digital Turn

Digital transformation is a cornerstone of NEP 2020. Initiatives such as SWAYAM, DIKSHA, and National Digital Education Architecture (NDEAR) are intended to create an inclusive ecosystem for teacher learning. However, the successful use of these platforms depends on teacher digital literacy, access to devices, and localized content.

In many parts of India, particularly in the Northeast, teachers lack structured support for integrating ICT into pedagogy. Digital literacy training is often introductory rather than competency-based. The challenge, therefore, lies not only in providing access but also in fostering digital pedagogical competence—the ability to design and implement tech-supported learning.

For Assam, digital learning has been both a challenge and an opportunity. During the pandemic, the Assam Government's Education Department collaborated with SCERT and Gauhati University to roll out training programs through NISHTHA on DIKSHA, enabling over 150,000 teachers to participate in online capacity-building sessions. This marked a significant leap in digital engagement across rural and urban districts.

Policy Coherence and Coordination

NEP 2020 calls for seamless coordination between NCTE, UGC, NCERT, and state governments. However, implementation remains fragmented. Overlapping jurisdictions, delayed approvals for new programs, and differing state priorities have slowed progress.

To bridge this gap, the National Mission for Mentoring (NMM) and National Professional Standards for Teachers (NPST) were introduced, aiming to define clear benchmarks for teacher competencies. Yet, these standards must be contextualized. For instance, while NPST provides national-level guidelines, its success in Assam depends on how effectively it can be adapted to local realities—linguistic diversity, rural-urban disparities, and socio-cultural contexts.

Emerging Best Practices

Several states have demonstrated innovative models aligning with NEP 2020: Kerala has institutionalized reflective teaching models with integrated school internships. Delhi's SCERT has introduced the Mentor Teacher Program to promote peer learning. Karnataka has launched the Integrated B.Ed. practicum model emphasizing real-time classroom experience.

Assam, too, has taken initial steps toward reform. Dibrugarh University and Gauhati University have piloted four-year integrated teacher education programs in select colleges. Additionally, the Assam State Council of Educational Research and Training (SCERT) is developing localized digital learning materials in Assamese and Bodo to ensure inclusivity.

Teacher Education in Assam: Implementation and Challenges under NEP 2020

Historical Background of Teacher Education in Assam

Teacher education in Assam has a long history, dating back to the establishment of normal schools during the colonial period for training elementary teachers. Post-independence, institutions such as Gauhati University (1948), Dibrugarh University (1965), and the State Council of Educational Research and Training (SCERT) played crucial roles in formalizing teacher education.

Today, Assam has more than 260 TEIs, including government colleges, private B.Ed. colleges, and District Institutes of Education and Training (DIETs). However, accreditation and quality remain uneven. According to SCERT's 2023 review, only about 35% of TEIs in the state are NAAC-accredited, and many lack qualified teacher educators and modern teaching-learning resources.

NEP 2020 and Policy Integration in Assam

The Government of Assam has shown commitment to implementing NEP 2020 through various policy steps:

- The State Education Department's NEP Implementation Cell (2021) oversees alignment with central reforms.
- The four-year integrated B.Ed. has been approved in select colleges affiliated to Gauhati University and Dibrugarh University.
- Teacher Education Curriculum Review Committees have been established to align curricula with NCFTE 2009 and NEP 2020 principles.

Furthermore, the Assam State Education Mission Authority (ASEM) has initiated capacity-building programs to train faculty on outcome-based education and digital pedagogy. In collaboration with NCERT and NCTE, Assam is also developing localized versions of the National Professional Standards for Teachers (NPST) that account for multilingual classrooms.

Challenges in Implementation

Despite policy enthusiasm, several challenges persist:

1. Infrastructural Gaps – Many rural TEIs lack ICT-enabled classrooms, libraries, and laboratories essential for practical training.
2. Faculty Shortage – Around 28% of faculty positions in government TEIs remain vacant, affecting academic quality.
3. Digital Divide – Teachers in hill and char (riverine) areas often face connectivity issues, hindering online learning participation.
4. Limited Research Culture – Few TEIs conduct empirical research or publish in academic journals, which limits innovation in pedagogy.
5. Financial Constraints – Delays in fund allocation for NEP projects affect implementation timelines.

Nevertheless, Assam's gradual adoption of NEP 2020 marks a positive transition toward modernization and professionalization in teacher education.

Innovative Initiatives in Assam

NISHTHA (National Initiative for School Heads' and Teachers' Holistic Advancement) has trained over 180,000 teachers through blended modes in Assam.

- The Assam Digital Teacher Training Mission (2022) introduced digital micro-courses on classroom management and inclusive education.
- The SCERT–UNICEF partnership focuses on strengthening early childhood education training for Anganwadi workers and pre-primary teachers.
- Pilot projects under Dibrugarh University have tested school-based internship models aligned with NEP's experiential learning approach.

These initiatives represent early successes in aligning Assam's teacher education system with NEP 2020's vision, though continuous evaluation remains essential.

Broader Discussion: Linking Policy to Practice

Teacher education reforms under NEP 2020 must be understood not as isolated interventions but as part of a systemic re-imagination. The success of any educational policy depends on institutional culture, governance, and teacher motivation.

Assam's case highlights that state-specific realities often mediate national policies. While the central policy provides direction, actual transformation occurs through contextual localization—adapting curriculum, pedagogy, and teacher development to the local social and linguistic environment.

Nationally, similar challenges exist: bureaucratic inertia, shortage of qualified teacher educators, and uneven access to technology. Overcoming these demands strong leadership, cross-sector collaboration, and community participation.

Furthermore, NEP 2020 calls for research-linked teacher education, which remains underdeveloped. Establishing research centres within TEIs and integrating school-university partnerships can foster reflective practice and innovation.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Teacher education stands at the heart of India's educational transformation. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 provides a forward-looking blueprint that redefines the teacher as a reflective practitioner, lifelong learner, and agent of social change. Yet, bridging the gap between policy and practice remains a formidable challenge, especially in states like Assam with diverse socio-cultural and infrastructural contexts.

To make NEP 2020's vision achievable, the following key strategies are recommended:

1. Strengthening Institutional Infrastructure: Dedicated funding to upgrade digital labs, libraries, and practicum facilities in TEIs, particularly in rural and hilly regions.
2. Faculty Development and Recruitment: Regular recruitment drives and professional development programs for teacher educators to ensure academic quality.
3. Contextualizing NPST: Adapting teacher standards to local languages, pedagogies, and socio-cultural settings, especially in multilingual states like Assam.
4. Research and Innovation: Establishing research cells within universities and TEIs to link teacher education with community-based studies and classroom innovations.

5. Monitoring and Evaluation: Developing data-driven frameworks using UDISE+ and SCERT dashboards to assess teacher performance and institutional outcomes.
6. Public–Private Collaboration: Encouraging partnerships with NGOs, ed-tech companies, and community organizations to deliver blended professional learning.

By aligning institutional practices with NEP 2020's guiding principles—equity, excellence, and innovation—India can create a holistic and globally competitive teacher education system. Assam's evolving experience demonstrates that context-sensitive reforms, grounded in regional realities, are essential for transforming policy intent into sustainable educational practice.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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