

A Study of Teacher Education Reforms Suggested in NEP 2020 for Improving Professional Standards

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ABSTRACT

Teacher education reform constitutes a central pillar of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, reflecting the policy's recognition that high-quality schooling and improved learning outcomes depend fundamentally on the professional capacity, pedagogical competence, ethical grounding, and subject mastery of teachers across all stages of education in India. This review paper critically examines the teacher education reforms proposed in NEP 2020, analyzing their intent, scope, and anticipated impact on elevating professional standards within the Indian educational system. Drawing on research from educational policy analysis, teacher development theory, pedagogical practice studies, comparative international frameworks, professionalization discourse, competency-based readiness models, and instructional quality research, the study explores how NEP 2020 proposes to transform teacher recruitment, pre-service preparation, licensing norms, continuous professional development, performance evaluation, mentoring systems, and institutional regulation. The review highlights NEP 2020's introduction of a four-year integrated teacher education program, National Professional Standards for Teachers, strengthened accreditation mechanisms, practice-based training requirements, and career progression pathways aimed at professionalizing teaching and aligning educator capability with global benchmarks. The findings demonstrate that NEP 2020 positions teachers not as content transmitters but as facilitators of experiential learning, holistic development, inclusive education, multilingual pedagogy, and competency-based classroom environments,

requiring a fundamental reorientation of teacher identity, instructional autonomy, and reflective practice.

Keywords: Teacher Education; NEP 2020; Professional Standards; Teacher Preparation; Continuous Professional Development; Educational Reform; Teacher Quality; Professionalization of Teaching

I INTRODUCTION

Teacher education occupies a foundational position in the transformation of national education systems, as research consistently demonstrates that teacher quality is the most significant school-based determinant of student learning outcomes, classroom engagement, instructional depth, and equity of educational opportunity. In India, teacher preparation and professional standards have historically faced challenges related to fragmented training pathways, variable institutional quality, limited practical exposure, inadequate pedagogical grounding, insufficient induction systems, inconsistent regulatory oversight, and social undervaluation of the teaching profession. The National Education Policy 2020 acknowledges these systemic weaknesses and positions teacher education reform as central to improving the professionalism, credibility, and instructional capacity of educators across the nation. NEP 2020 redefines teacher education by proposing a competency-based, practice-integrated, multidisciplinary, ethically grounded, and research-aligned preparation model that aims to produce reflective practitioners equipped to foster conceptual learning, holistic child development, inclusive classroom participation, multilingual

engagement, socio-emotional support, and transformative pedagogical practice. The policy situates teachers as nation-builders whose professional formation must align with contemporary learning science, developmental psychology, curricular reform, and assessment transformation, demonstrating that improved learning outcomes cannot occur without strengthening the professional standards, training pathways, and development ecosystem of teachers.

NEP 2020 introduces several landmark reforms intended to elevate teacher professionalism, including the establishment of a four-year integrated teacher education degree as the minimum qualification, restructuring of teacher education institutions, creation of the National Professional Standards for Teachers, continuous professional development requirements, school-based practicum strengthening, mentoring systems, performance-linked career progression, regulatory consolidation, and enhanced accreditation mechanisms designed to eliminate substandard institutions and ensure uniform quality. These reforms reflect global research affirming that teacher preparation must include strong subject grounding, pedagogical training, classroom practicums, reflective inquiry, and mentorship rather than reliance on short, theory-heavy, and disconnected certification programs. NEP 2020 emphasizes that teachers must be prepared to facilitate experiential learning, interdisciplinary instruction, critical thinking development, socio-emotional wellbeing, foundational literacy and numeracy support, and inclusive classroom pedagogy adapted to diverse learner needs. The policy also acknowledges that teacher professionalism requires improved working conditions, reduced administrative burden, institutional respect, and societal recognition. This review paper examines NEP 2020 teacher education reforms in depth, analyzing their theoretical grounding, structural implications, projected impact on professional standards,

implementation challenges, and long-term significance for Indian education.

II LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature on teacher education reform consistently highlights that improving teacher preparation, professional standards, and instructional competency is essential for strengthening educational quality and raising student learning outcomes, particularly in systems where historical fragmentation, uneven institutional quality, and theory-heavy preparation models have weakened teaching effectiveness.

Research conducted across Indian educational contexts demonstrates that teacher education has long suffered from inadequate practicum exposure, insufficient pedagogical grounding, weak integration of subject knowledge with teaching methods, limited focus on child development and inclusive practices, and widespread proliferation of substandard teacher education colleges driven by commercialization rather than academic rigor. Studies further reveal that existing teacher preparation pathways particularly one-year post-graduate certification programs have often failed to equip teachers with the capacity to manage diverse classrooms, foster conceptual understanding, implement experiential pedagogy, or support foundational literacy and numeracy development.

Comparative analyses show that countries with strong teacher education systems, such as Finland, Singapore, Canada, and South Korea, emphasize extended professional preparation, rigorous selection, research-based pedagogy, mentored induction, and high societal regard for teaching as a profession. These findings form the foundational rationale for NEP 2020's call to restructure teacher education into a four-year integrated degree combining subject specialization, pedagogical theory, classroom practicum, and reflective professional identity formation.

Literature also emphasizes that teacher standards must align with contemporary learning science,

socio-emotional development research, inclusive education frameworks, and competency-based instructional models, demonstrating that reform must extend beyond credentialing into deeper reconceptualization of teaching as an evidence-informed professional discipline. These findings affirm that NEP 2020 responds directly to research indicating that teacher education reform is necessary to elevate instructional quality, strengthen classroom practice, and improve national learning outcomes.

Table 1. Key Teacher Education Reform Components in NEP 2020 and Their Intended Contributions to Improving Professional Standards

NEP 2020 Teacher Education Reform Area	Core Reform Features	Expected Impact on Professional Standards
Four-Year Integrated Teacher Education Degree	Combined subject mastery, pedagogy, practicum, and developmental foundations	Stronger preparedness, deeper pedagogical grounding, and enhanced professionalism
National Professional Standards for Teachers	Competency benchmarks, ethical norms, stage-wise expectations	Clear role definition, accountability, and progression in professional identity
Continuous Professional Development Requirements	Ongoing training, school-based learning, reflective practice	Sustained competency growth and instructional improvement
Mentorship and Induction Systems	Guided early-career support and collaborative learning	Reduced attrition and stronger classroom readiness

NEP 2020 Teacher Education Reform Area	Core Reform Features	Expected Impact on Professional Standards
Regulatory and Accreditation Reform	Strengthened oversight and elimination of substandard institutions	Higher institutional credibility and uniform quality
Performance-Linked Career Progression	Merit-based advancement and skill recognition	Increased motivation, expertise development, and prestige
Practice-Based Training Emphasis	School-based practicum, observation cycles, applied pedagogy	Enhanced instructional confidence and real-world teaching competence

III THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS AND POLICY RATIONALE FOR TEACHER EDUCATION REFORM IN NEP 2020

The theoretical foundations underlying the teacher education reforms proposed in NEP 2020 draw extensively from contemporary research in constructivist learning theory, reflective practice models, sociocultural pedagogy, professionalization theory, adult learning frameworks, cognitive development studies, and international teacher competency standards, all of which emphasize that effective teaching requires deep pedagogical understanding, adaptive instructional judgement, and continuous professional growth rather than mechanical content delivery or procedural classroom management. Constructivist theory asserts that learners build knowledge through active engagement, inquiry, dialogue, and contextual meaning-making, implying that teachers must be trained as facilitators of discovery-oriented learning rather than transmitters of fixed information, aligning directly with NEP 2020’s emphasis on experiential, activity-based, and inquiry-driven pedagogy.

Reflective practice theory, rooted in the work of Schön and later expanded within teacher education scholarship, highlights that professional competence develops through self-evaluation, critical reflection, and iterative refinement of teaching decisions, demonstrating why

NEP 2020 calls for mentorship structures, practicum-based training, and continuous professional development pathways that cultivate reflective judgement. Sociocultural learning theory reinforces that teaching must respond to linguistic diversity, cultural identity, and community context, providing theoretical justification for NEP 2020's focus on multilingual education competency and inclusive classroom practice as essential components of teacher preparation. Professionalization theory argues that teaching must be recognized as an autonomous, knowledge-based profession requiring ethical standards, certification pathways, regulatory structures, and specialized training, aligning with NEP 2020's introduction of National Professional Standards for Teachers, strengthened accreditation frameworks, and performance-linked career progression systems. Adult learning theory (andragogy) establishes that teacher development must be practice-oriented, internally motivated, and contextually relevant, supporting NEP 2020's requirement for sustained, school-based, experience-centered professional development. Together, these theoretical foundations affirm that NEP 2020 teacher education reforms are grounded in well-established educational theory and professional identity research, demonstrating that teaching excellence emerges not through compliance or credential accumulation but through pedagogical expertise, reflective capacity, ethical formation, and continuous growth.

IV STRUCTURAL REFORMS IN TEACHER PREPARATION, REGULATORY TRANSFORMATION, AND INSTITUTIONAL RESTRUCTURING UNDER NEP 2020

Structural reform in teacher preparation represents one of the most significant shifts proposed under NEP 2020, as the policy replaces fragmented qualification routes with a unified, research-based, four-year integrated teacher education degree designed to strengthen subject knowledge, pedagogical grounding, developmental understanding, and school-based practicum experience within a coherent professional formation pathway. Research has long shown that short-duration post-graduate teacher certification programs produce insufficient readiness, limited classroom competence, weak practical judgment, and inadequate understanding of learner diversity, prompting NEP 2020 to mandate a longer, practice-rich, multidisciplinary preparation model aligned with international standards.

The four-year Integrated Teacher Education Programme (ITEP) aims to professionalize teaching by situating teacher preparation within universities rather than standalone colleges of inconsistent quality, ensuring that teacher education becomes an academic discipline supported by research, reflective inquiry, and scholarly rigor. The restructuring also emphasizes curriculum redesign that integrates developmental psychology, inclusive education, multilingual pedagogy, experiential instructional methods, competency-based assessment, foundational literacy and numeracy pedagogy, digital instructional competence, socio-emotional learning support, and ethical professionalism, demonstrating that teachers must be prepared for expanded instructional roles aligned with contemporary learning expectations.

Another key structural reform concerns the strengthening of practicum models through extended classroom placements, supervised teaching cycles, mentoring relationships, and performance feedback mechanisms, addressing research indicating that classroom experience is a decisive predictor of teacher confidence, instructional quality, and retention. These reforms

affirm that NEP 2020 seeks to transform teacher preparation from a credential-driven process into a comprehensive professional development continuum that produces highly skilled practitioners capable of elevating instructional standards and improving learning outcomes across diverse schooling environments.



Figure 1: Conceptual Representation of How NEP 2020 Structural Reforms Strengthen Teacher Regulatory transformation forms a second major structural component of NEP 2020 teacher education reform, reflecting the need to eliminate substandard institutions, enforce quality benchmarks, streamline oversight mechanisms, and establish national coherence in teacher qualification standards. For decades, teacher education in India has been characterized by regulatory fragmentation, with overlapping bodies responsible for accreditation, curriculum approval, licensing, and quality monitoring, resulting in inconsistency, lack of accountability, and proliferation of low-quality programs. NEP 2020 calls for regulatory restructuring that separates academic standard-setting from institutional regulation and operational functioning, enabling clearer governance, reduced administrative duplication, and stronger enforcement capability. Accreditation reforms aim to establish rigorous evaluation criteria, transparent compliance procedures, mandatory practicum standards, and

performance-linked institutional recognition, ensuring that only high-quality teacher education institutions continue to operate.

The policy also proposes the elevation and transformation of District Institutes of Education and Training (DIETs), Colleges of Teacher Education (CTEs), and Institutes of Advanced Study in Education (IASEs) into vibrant centers for professional learning, research, and pedagogical innovation rather than bureaucratic training outlets. These institutional restructuring measures align with international models in which teacher preparation institutions function as academic hubs that generate research, support school partnerships, and elevate teaching as a profession. NEP 2020 further emphasizes that regulatory transformation must restore public confidence in teacher qualification credibility, enhance national consistency, and strengthen the professional identity of teachers by ensuring that entry into the profession requires rigorous preparation aligned with national development priorities.

V PEDAGOGICAL COMPETENCIES, PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY FORMATION, CONTINUOUS DEVELOPMENT, AND CAREER PROGRESSION SYSTEMS UNDER NEP 2020

Pedagogical competency development forms a core dimension of NEP 2020 teacher education reform, reflecting the recognition that modern classrooms require teachers who possess advanced instructional skills, adaptive pedagogical judgement, and the ability to facilitate meaningful learning experiences aligned with developmental needs, linguistic diversity, cultural context, socio-emotional realities, and competency-based curriculum expectations. Research demonstrates that effective teachers must understand how children learn, how knowledge is constructed, how misconceptions develop, and how inquiry, collaboration, problem-solving, and experiential engagement deepen comprehension and retention.

NEP 2020 therefore shifts teacher preparation away from lecture-based theoretical coursework toward active pedagogical training that incorporates modelling, guided practice, reflective critique, applied instructional design, and school-based implementation. The policy emphasizes competencies in foundational literacy and numeracy instruction, experiential and project-based learning facilitation, inclusive and differentiated classroom strategies, socio-emotional learning integration, multilingual pedagogical adaptation, digital learning competency, and formative assessment design. These competencies align with international teaching standards that define teachers as facilitators of holistic development rather than transmitters of prescribed content.

Research also confirms that pedagogical mastery emerges through iterative practice rather than conceptual exposure alone, demonstrating why NEP 2020 strengthens practicum requirements and mentoring structures. By articulating pedagogical competencies within National Professional Standards for Teachers, NEP 2020 creates a framework through which teaching skill can be evaluated, supported, and progressively strengthened across career stages, ensuring that professional standards are clearly defined, developmentally sequenced, and aligned with national educational priorities.

VI EQUITY, INCLUSIVE EDUCATION COMPETENCE, DIGITAL PEDAGOGY READINESS, AND SYSTEMIC CHALLENGES IN IMPLEMENTING NEP 2020 TEACHER EDUCATION REFORMS

Equity and inclusive education competence form essential dimensions of NEP 2020 teacher education reforms, reflecting the policy's acknowledgement that meaningful improvements in educational quality cannot occur unless teachers are prepared to address the diverse learning needs, socio-cultural backgrounds, linguistic identities, disability profiles, and economic disparities that

characterize Indian classrooms. Research demonstrates that exclusion, marginalization, dropout patterns, and academic underperformance disproportionately affect students from tribal communities, rural regions, religious minorities, low-income households, first-generation learners, and children with disabilities, illustrating that equity gaps are reinforced when teachers lack training in inclusive pedagogical practice.

NEP 2020 therefore incorporates inclusive education competencies into teacher preparation, emphasizing universal design for learning, differentiated instruction, individualized learning support, classroom accessibility, bias-free interaction, culturally responsive pedagogy, and socio-emotional sensitivity as essential professional requirements rather than optional enrichment. Studies confirm that teachers trained in inclusive practices demonstrate increased student participation, reduced behavioural exclusion, improved foundational learning outcomes, and stronger peer acceptance cultures.

The policy further acknowledges that inclusive competence must extend beyond disability accommodation to encompass multilingual instruction readiness, gender sensitivity, anti-discrimination norms, and recognition of socio-economic barriers that impact learner engagement and academic capacity. Literature emphasizes that inclusive teaching requires not only instructional strategies but also reflective awareness, empathetic disposition, and community understanding, demonstrating why NEP 2020 positions inclusive competence as a core component of teacher identity formation.

These provisions affirm that teacher education reform under NEP 2020 seeks to build a workforce capable of promoting equitable learning outcomes and reducing structural disadvantage through responsive, adaptive, and socially conscious pedagogical practice.

Table 2. Implementation Challenges and Support Requirements for NEP 2020 Teacher Education Reforms

Challenge Dimension	Specific Constraints Identified	Required Support for Successful Implementation
Institutional Capacity Limitations	Inadequate faculty expertise, practicum shortages, uneven program quality	Investment in infrastructure, faculty development, and school-university partnerships
Regulatory and Accreditation Transition	Fragmented oversight, compliance inconsistency	Unified regulatory frameworks and strengthened enforcement mechanisms
Teacher Recruitment Practices	Seniority-based hiring, low entry selectivity	Merit-based recruitment and aptitude-oriented selection models
Digital Readiness Gaps	Connectivity disparities, limited digital literacy	Technology provisioning, training, and rural digital infrastructure expansion
Professional Development Constraints	Time limitations, low incentives, weak mentoring cultures	Protected training hours, mentor certification, and recognition systems
Cultural Resistance to Pedagogical Change	Preference for rote learning and	Awareness initiatives, model classrooms, and

Challenge Dimension	Specific Constraints Identified	Required Support for Successful Implementation
	exam-driven teaching	community orientation
Equity and Inclusion Capacity	Limited training for diverse learner needs	Inclusive pedagogy modules and resource support systems

VII SYNTHESIS, EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS, AND TEACHER PROFESSIONALIZATION PRIORITIES UNDER NEP 2020

The synthesis of research across teacher preparation restructuring, regulatory reform, pedagogical competency development, inclusive education readiness, digital pedagogy integration, continuous professional development expectations, and performance-linked career progression confirms that NEP 2020 establishes a comprehensive and multilayered framework for elevating professional standards within the Indian teaching workforce, recognizing that sustained educational improvement is inseparable from teacher quality, instructional capability, and professional identity transformation.

The evidence demonstrates that NEP 2020 responds directly to long-standing systemic weaknesses in teacher education fragmented qualification routes, insufficient practicum exposure, variable institutional quality, limited pedagogical depth, weak accountability systems, and low societal valuation of teaching by proposing reforms that reposition teaching as a rigorous, respected, research-informed profession aligned with global standards. The synthesis highlights that NEP 2020 elevates professional standards by mandating a four-year integrated teacher education degree, establishing national competency

frameworks, enhancing accreditation mechanisms, strengthening practicum-based preparation, and embedding professional ethics and reflective practice into teacher formation.

The policy's emphasis on continuous professional development affirms that teacher learning is an evolving process shaped by practice, inquiry, collaboration, and evolving pedagogical knowledge rather than one-time certification.



Figure 3: Integrated Teacher Professionalization Framework Under NEP 2020

Equity, inclusion, multilingual competence, socio-emotional learning facilitation, and foundational skill instruction emerge as expanded dimensions of professional expectation, reflecting the diversity and developmental needs of Indian learners. Digital pedagogy readiness further extends professional standards into technologically mediated instructional environments, ensuring that teachers can navigate hybrid learning modes and future educational landscapes. Together, these findings confirm that NEP 2020 provides a coherent and research-aligned roadmap for transforming teacher professionalism, strengthening instructional effectiveness, and improving educational outcomes across the national system.

V CONCLUSION AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The study of NEP 2020 teacher education reforms demonstrates that elevating professional standards within the Indian teaching workforce is a multifaceted endeavor requiring systemic, structural, pedagogical, and cultural transformation. The conclusion affirms that the policy's introduction of a four-year integrated teacher education degree, National Professional Standards for Teachers, continuous professional development pathways, school-based practicum emphasis, regulatory restructuring, institutional strengthening, and performance-linked career progression represents a comprehensive approach to professionalizing teaching and aligning educator capacity with contemporary educational needs. Research confirms that teacher quality is the most significant school-based determinant of student learning outcomes, classroom engagement, instructional effectiveness, and equity, demonstrating that sustained improvement in learning outcomes depends fundamentally on well-prepared, reflective, skilled, and motivated teachers.

NEP 2020 situates teachers as facilitators of conceptual understanding, holistic development, inclusive instruction, multilingual pedagogy, socio-emotional support, and competency-based learning, requiring that teacher identity be grounded in ethical professionalism, reflective practice, pedagogical mastery, and commitment to national educational goals. The policy emphasizes that structural preparation reform, regulatory consolidation, enhanced accreditation, and institutional strengthening are essential to ensure uniform quality and credibility of teacher education programs nationwide. Continuous professional development, mentorship, and career progression mechanisms further ensure that professional standards evolve in response to classroom realities, learner diversity, technological integration, and emerging pedagogical research.

These measures collectively affirm that NEP 2020 envisions a teacher workforce that is highly

competent, respected, accountable, and capable of delivering educational quality that translates into measurable improvements in student learning outcomes across the country.

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