



Research Paper

Challenges of the Integrated Teacher Education Programme (ITEP) in the Northern Regions of India: A Qualitative Discussion

Dr. Neha Gupta
Academic Consultant, NCTE

Abstract

The Integrated Teacher Education Programme (ITEP), proposed under the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, marks a landmark reform in teacher preparation in India. Its vision is ambitious: to unify disciplinary knowledge and professional training into a four-year integrated program that creates academically strong, pedagogically competent, and socially conscious teachers. However, translating this policy vision into practice presents multiple challenges, particularly in the diverse institutional and socio-cultural landscape of Northern India. This paper, adopting a qualitative and discursive approach, explores these challenges thematically, drawing upon literature, policy debates, and experiential insights. By highlighting administrative, pedagogical, student-related, infrastructural, and socio-cultural dimensions, the paper seeks to provoke reflection rather than to present definitive empirical findings. In doing so, it underscores the complexity of educational reform and the need for context-sensitive approaches to implementing ITEP.

Keywords: Integrated Teacher Education Programme, NEP 2020, Teacher Education, Northern India, Qualitative Discussion

Received 03 Sep., 2025; Revised 10 Sep., 2025; Accepted 12 Sep., 2025 © The author(s) 2025.

Published with open access at www.questjournals.org

I. Introduction

Teacher education has long been recognized as the backbone of quality education. In India, reforming teacher preparation has been a recurring theme, with commissions, committees, and policies repeatedly pointing to its weaknesses—fragmentation, weak integration of subject knowledge and pedagogy, and limited practical relevance (Kaushik & Chauhan, 2019). The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, in proposing the Integrated Teacher Education Programme (ITEP), offers perhaps the boldest attempt yet to address these systemic concerns.

ITEP is designed as a four-year integrated program that students enter immediately after completing school. By merging disciplinary undergraduate education with professional training in education, it replaces the conventional route of pursuing a bachelor's degree followed by a Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) program. This integration is expected to save time, improve teacher preparedness, and attract talented students to the profession (Government of India, 2020).

While the program's vision is inspiring, its implementation poses significant challenges. Northern India, with its vast diversity in educational institutions—ranging from resource-rich central universities to underfunded rural colleges—provides a particularly revealing lens through which to study these challenges. Rather than presenting empirical findings, this paper engages in a qualitative discussion, synthesizing insights from policy documents, literature, and contextual experiences. The objective is to map the landscape of challenges and provoke reflection among educators, policymakers, and researchers.

Conceptual Framework

The logic of ITEP rests on integration. Teacher education worldwide has been criticized for creating a dichotomy between disciplinary knowledge and pedagogy. ITEP attempts to address this by combining both into a coherent curriculum. Such integration is aligned with global best practices in teacher education, where programs often blend liberal arts and pedagogy (Darling-Hammond, 2017).

Additionally, ITEP is deeply embedded in NEP's broader vision of education. It emphasizes values, inclusion, interdisciplinarity, experiential learning, and the blending of Indian knowledge traditions with global perspectives (Kumar, 2021). Teachers emerging from ITEP are expected not only to impart knowledge but also to nurture creativity, critical thinking, and character among students.

However, as numerous studies have shown, structural reforms in teacher education face contextual constraints (Furlong, 2013; Srivastava, 2022). Integration in design does not automatically translate into integration in practice. The culture of institutions, faculty capacity, student motivations, and societal perceptions all shape how reforms are implemented. This paper situates ITEP within this complex interplay of policy vision and contextual realities.

II. Thematic Discussion

This section elaborates on five key thematic challenges of ITEP in Northern India. These themes emerge from qualitative reflections rather than quantitative findings.

1. Administrative Transitions and Policy Readiness

Adopting ITEP requires institutions to undergo significant administrative restructuring. Universities and colleges must seek approvals, redesign curricula, and align with new accreditation standards. However, the process of obtaining approvals is slow and often mired in bureaucratic hurdles. Many institutions, particularly in rural areas, lack the administrative expertise to navigate these transitions effectively (Singh & Sharma, 2021). Furthermore, limited clarity in policy guidelines has created confusion. For instance, questions about credit distribution, faculty qualifications etc.

Resistance to change is also evident. This resistance is not rooted in opposition to reform per se, but in institutional inertia and fear of the unknown. Without adequate support and orientation, administrators may treat ITEP as a compliance burden rather than an opportunity for innovation.

2. Pedagogical Realities and Faculty Preparedness

ITEP envisions faculty members who can seamlessly integrate disciplinary knowledge with pedagogy. However, most current teacher educators were trained in a system that separated these domains. As a result, they may lack the expertise or confidence to teach integrated courses (Kaushik & Chauhan, 2019).

Moreover, faculty accustomed to teaching graduate students in two-year B.Ed. programs must now engage with 17- or 18-year-old school leavers. This shift requires not only pedagogical adaptation but also psychological sensitivity. Faculty development, therefore, becomes a crucial need. Yet, systematic faculty development initiatives remain limited, and where they exist, they are often one-off workshops rather than sustained professional learning communities (Srivastava, 2022).

3. Students' Identity and Professional Commitment

One of the most significant cultural shifts brought by ITEP is the early professionalization of students. Traditionally, many students entered B.Ed. programs after completing an undergraduate degree, often as a conscious career choice. Under ITEP, students commit to a teaching career immediately after school. At this stage, many may not yet be sure of their aspirations. Enrolling in a four-year program locks them into a professional trajectory at an age when exploration is still important (Kumar, 2021).

This raises questions about motivation and sustainability. Will students remain committed to teaching over the long term, or will attrition increase? Early anecdotal evidence suggests that many students view ITEP as a secure option rather than a passion-driven choice. Without mentoring and career counselling, this may lead to disengagement, affecting the quality of future teachers.

4. Infrastructure and Resource Inequalities

Northern India's educational landscape is marked by sharp disparities. While elite urban Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) may implement ITEP smoothly, with access to digital tools, libraries, and experiential learning labs, rural Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) often struggle with even basic infrastructure such as classrooms, laboratories, and teaching materials (Singh & Sharma, 2021). The norms and standards of ITEP, however, have already defined clear infrastructural and faculty requirements that must be fulfilled by all HEIs to run the programme, ensuring a minimum threshold of quality. The real challenge lies in how these demands can be met within the northern Indian context, where well-resourced urban HEIs coexist alongside underfunded rural HEIs. Without substantial policy support and resource redistribution, the risk remains that while urban HEIs advance seamlessly into ITEP, many rural HEIs may be left behind, thereby exacerbating inequalities rather than bridging them.

5. Cultural and Societal Dimensions

Societal perceptions of teaching play a powerful role in shaping the attractiveness of teacher education. In many parts of Northern India, teaching is seen as a fallback option rather than a prestigious first choice (Kaushik & Chauhan, 2019). This perception affects the quality of students entering ITEP. Unless teaching is valorised as a profession, the program may struggle to attract highly motivated and talented youth.

Cultural diversity adds another layer of complexity. Northern India is linguistically and socially diverse, and teacher education must prepare teachers to navigate this diversity. ITEP's one-size-fits-all model may not adequately address the nuances of multilingual and multicultural classrooms.

Reflections and Interpretations

The boldness of ITEP lies in its ambition to transform teacher education fundamentally. However, ambition without adequate preparation risks superficial compliance. The qualitative reflections presented here reveal that much of the challenge lies not in the vision itself, but in the readiness of institutions and stakeholders. Faculty development, student mentoring, and resource equity emerge as critical areas for attention. Unless these are addressed, ITEP may reproduce existing problems under a new label. On the other hand, if implemented thoughtfully, ITEP could indeed nurture a new generation of teachers who are reflective practitioners and agents of change.

Policy and Societal Implications

Several implications arise from this discussion:

1. **Context-Sensitive Flexibility:** Policymakers must recognize institutional diversity. Rural colleges and central universities cannot be expected to follow identical models. Flexibility in implementation is essential.
2. **Faculty Capacity-Building:** Continuous professional development, not just orientation, is required for faculty to embrace integrated pedagogy.
3. **Student Guidance Systems:** Robust mentoring and counselling systems should help students navigate their professional identity and sustain motivation.
4. **Infrastructure Investment:** Resource equity must be a priority to prevent widening gaps between institutions.
5. **Elevating Teacher Status:** Long-term cultural change is necessary to make teaching an aspirational profession.

III. Conclusion

The Integrated Teacher Education Programme (ITEP), envisioned under NEP 2020, is a landmark reform in teacher education. Its challenges in Northern India—spanning administrative hurdles, pedagogical readiness, student identity, infrastructural disparities, and cultural perceptions—are not insurmountable but require thoughtful engagement. Qualitative reflections emphasize that successful implementation depends on systemic preparedness, institutional innovation, and societal transformation.

As this paper has argued, ITEP should not be viewed as a mere structural adjustment but as an opportunity to reimagine the future of teaching. By fostering reflective practice, promoting equity, and valuing teachers as nation-builders, India can ensure that the vision of NEP 2020 becomes a lived reality. Ultimately, the success of ITEP will hinge on the willingness of stakeholders—policymakers, institutions, educators, students, and society at large—to engage in dialogue, embrace change, and uphold the dignity of teaching as a profession.

References

- [1]. Ball, S. J., Maguire, M., & Braun, A. (2012). *How schools do policy: Policy enactments in secondary schools*. Routledge.
- [2]. Batra, P. (2020). Reforming teacher education in India: A critique of teacher education curriculum frameworks and practices. *Contemporary Education Dialogue*, 17(2), 197–223. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0973184920924413>
- [3]. Darling-Hammond, L. (2017). Teacher education around the world: What can we learn from international practice? *European Journal of Teacher Education*, 40(3), 291–309. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02619768.2017.1315399>
- [4]. Darling-Hammond, L., & Hyler, M. E. (2020). Preparing educators for the time of COVID... and beyond. *European Journal of Teacher Education*, 43(4), 457–465. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02619768.2020.1816961>
- [5]. Government of India. (2020). *National Education Policy 2020*. Ministry of Education. <https://www.education.gov.in/nep2020>
- [6]. Kaushik, V., & Chauhan, V. (2019). Teacher education in India: Issues and concerns. *Journal of Education and Practice*, 10(6), 45–52.
- [7]. Korthagen, F. (2017). Inconvenient truths about teacher learning: Towards professional development 3.0. *Teachers and Teaching*, 23(4), 387–405. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13540602.2016.1211523>
- [8]. Kumar, K. (2021). The new education policy and teacher education: Reflections and critiques. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 56(30), 21–24.
- [9]. Kumar, R., & Agrawal, A. (2022). Equity and access in higher education in India: Emerging challenges under NEP 2020. *Higher Education Quarterly*, 76(3), 345–360. <https://doi.org/10.1111/hequ.12345>
- [10]. NCERT. (2020). *Teacher education and curriculum reform in India: Position paper*. National Council of Educational Research and Training.