



# ARE TEACHER EDUCATORS READY FOR NEP 2020? A THEORETICAL REFLECTION ON PEDAGOGICAL CAPACITY BUILDING

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## Abstract

The vision of changing the Indian education to transform the education system according to the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 hypothesises change to learner-centred, competency-based, and holistic pedagogy by the year 2020. The most important part in this realisation of this vision is the place of teacher educators, as the intent of the policy translates into classroom implementation via teacher educators who play a critical mediating role in realising the plans of the policy. This theoretical reflection is a conceptual paper that addresses the theoretical preparedness of teacher educators to undertake NEP 2020 with particular reference to pedagogical capacity building. The paper is based on the developed literature in the field of teacher education, teacher learning and change in education, and explores the changing roles and expectations of teacher educators, the complexity of pedagogical capacity, and the chronic disconnect between rhetoric and reform on the one hand and practice on the other. It has been analyzed that successful NEP 2020 implementation must involve a prolonged, practice-based capacity-building agenda based on the facilitatory nature of institutional cultures and aligned policy frameworks. The paper ends by stressing the importance of redesigning teacher education as a transformational space that enables teacher educators practice and spearhead meaningful change in pedagogy.

**Index Terms** - National Education Policy 2020, Teacher Educators, Pedagogical Capacity Building, Teacher Education Reform, Educational Change

## INTRODUCTION

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 has signified a great paradigm shift in the Indian education system where there is a heavy emphasis on the learner-centred, competency-based, and holistic education systems in all levels. Teacher education holds the place of priority in this reform agenda because it is generally accepted that decent quality of teachers and the teacher educators is the most impactful school-based influence on student learning (Government of India, 2020; Darling-Hammond, 2017). NEP 2020 proposes a full transformation to the teacher preparation methods based on multidisciplinary practices, union of theory and practice, lifetime learning, and setting of quality institutions of teacher learning.

The strategic role in this reform process is played by teacher's educators. In their role as mentors, curriculum designers and role models of pedagogy, they interfere between the policy ideal and classroom realities. Their pedagogical ideologies, teaching methods and professional standards directly influence the way would-be teachers acquaint and implement NEP-grounded changes (Loughran, 2014). Accordingly, the success of NEP 2020 is not only predetermined by policy prescriptions, but also by the pedagogical willingness and ability of teacher educators to exemplify the innovative, reflective and inclusive classrooms.

Although, most of the existing arguments concerning NEP 2020 have been somewhat centered around structural reorganisation, curriculum redesign, and regulatory reforms, relatively little theoretical discussions have placed on pedagogical capacity building among teacher educators. Capacity building is greater than the infrastructural contributions as it involves pedagogical content expertise, the reading and writing capacity, computer expertise, as well as reflecting mindfulness (Shulman, 1987; Cochran-Smith et al., 2016). Lack of long-term theoretical reflection on these dimensions poses a critical disseminator gap in knowing how NEP 2020 could be successfully operationalised in the classrooms of teacher education.

It is against this setting that the current paper attempts to critically discuss the question; Are teacher educators pedagogically prepared to implement NEP 2020, and what types of capacity building should theoretically be implemented? The study proposes to bring a conceptual reflection, which will hopefully benefit policy discussions, enhance teacher educational practice, and add to the scholarly discussion on educational reform in the Indian environment.

## CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATIONS OF NEP 2020 PEDAGOGICAL REFORMS

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 is a statement of a significant change in delivering an instructional focus that is content-heavy, examination-focused, into a learner-centred and competency-based one. The core focus of this change is that significant learning can be attained when the learners are actively involved in the construction of knowledge and do not become passive in a process of receiving information (Government of India, 2020). Competency-based education, which NEP 2020 proposes, focuses on the acquisition of higher-order cognitive skills, problem-solving skills, creativity, and socio-emotional skills and is consistent with modern learning and teaching theories (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020).

One of the most important pedagogical changes promoted by NEP 2020 is experiential, inquiry-driven and multidisciplinary learning. The policy, based on constructivist views, focuses on learning using exploring, discussion, and practical learning in the real world to enhance meaningful conceptual knowledge (Bransford et al., 2000). Multidisciplinary learning aims to eliminate the strict subject discipline and allow learners the opportunity to draw links across the disciplines, in keeping with the trends in education worldwide of prioritizing integrated information and transferable competencies (OECD, 2018). These methods require flexible, dialogic and responsive pedagogical practices in regard to the diverse contexts of learners.

Another significant point in the policy is the integration of technology and digital pedagogy, not as an objective but as a measure to promote access, engagement, and personalisation of the learning. Digital devices are placed as facilitators of blended learning, collaborative inquiry, and ongoing feedback and they demand the educators to have good techno-pedagogical abilities (Mishra & Koehler, 2006). To this is the focus on formative assessment and reflection practice by NEP 2020, that transforms assessment as an evaluative activity into a component of the learning process that guides the development of an instructional focus and missed growth in a learner (Black & Wiliam, 2009).

These pedagogical changes have far reached consequences on the roles and skills of teacher educators. Teacher educators ought to not only impart the innovative pedagogies, but set them in genuine practice in teacher education classrooms (Loughran, 2014). It requires them to have the professional identity re-oriented to reflective practitioners and pedagogical leaders. Notably, there should be a conceptual difference between policy desire and the pedagogical performance. Even though NEP 2020 presents an advanced and theoretically based vision, its implementation is hinged on how education teachers view, internalize and apply such principles into their daily teaching activity. The appropriate solution to this gap would be a matter of pedagogical capacity building which would integrate theory, practice, and professional values.

## TEACHER EDUCATORS IN THE NEP 2020 ECOSYSTEM: ROLES AND EXPECTATIONS

In the reform landscape projected by the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, teacher educators are placed at the heart of the change in education as opposed to the outskirts of the facade of implementing given curricula. Their role is much wider than subject knowledge transmission and it includes curriculum design, pedagogical mentoring, reflective practice and institutional leadership. Teacher educators are perceived as the interpreters of the national frameworks and are supposed to translate it into the coherent and context-specific learning experience of a potential teacher (Cochran-Smith et al., 2016). It would entail a profound knowledge of the disciplinary knowledge, pedagogy, and diversity of learners, coupled with the capacity to combine the multiple disciplinary and experiential strategies posited by NEP 2020.

The teacher educators are also predicted to be pedagogical mentors who provide exemplary innovative teaching strategies and lead pre-service teachers to establish reflective and inquisitive oriented professional identities. It is alleged that instructional practices exercised by teacher educators have a strong impact on the manner in which future teacher learner conceptualise effective teaching and learning (Loughran, 2014; Darling-Hammond, 2017). In this regard, NEP-aligned reforms are therefore credible by the incorporation of the teacher educators themselves to implement learner-centred, dialogic, and assessment-based pedagogies within their teacher education classrooms.

NEP 2020 also places a high value on professional autonomy, professional development, and research orientation of teacher's educators (Government of India, 2020). Autonomy is also placed as a conditioning factor to pedagogical innovation, and lets the educators explore new practice and improve the curricula to the needs of a particular locality. At the same time, professional development is positioned as a continuous process that helps educators to adapt to the changing pedagogical requirements, inventions in technology, and research. Teacher education requires a research-oriented attitude towards promoting reflective practice and evidence-based decision-making (Avalos, 2011).

Nonetheless, such expectations frequently conflict with the deeply rooted traditionality that is marked by lecture-based learning, inflexible curricula as well as lack of professional learning opportunities. These misfitting highlight why it is important to conceptualise teacher educators as negotiators of policy and the practice by negotiating constraints within an institution in an attempt to implement reform-based pedagogies. In theory, this mediating position points to the significance of the support of the teacher educators by the means of systemic capacity-building programs which would help in achieving the policy dreams and meeting the daily pedagogical realities.

### PEDAGOGICAL CAPACITY BUILDING: A THEORETICAL LENS

The systematic acquisition of knowledge, skills, dispositions and professional judgement is known as pedagogical capacity building which educators need to plan, implement and respond to successful teaching practices. Within NEP 2020, teacher educator pedagogical capacity building would not be limited to regular trainings of the professionals but can also involve more fundamental changes in the conceptualisation and practice of teaching, learning, and assessment. It is a multidimensional construct which incorporates pedagogical content knowledge, curriculum literacy, assessment literacy and digital and blended pedagogy competence.

Pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) is at the center of the pedagogical capacity and is the interruption point of subject matter knowledge and pedagogical awareness that help teachers open content and use it to make it understandable and significant to the students (Shulman, 1987). In the case of teacher educators, good PCK is not only necessary to have good teaching but should also be able to model on how future teachers can convert disciplinary knowledge into classroom class learner focused practices. PCK is complemented by curriculum literacy, or the skill of interpreting the curricular processes critically, bringing the learning outcomes to the learning goals and strategies, and modifying the content to suit the needs of various learners (Priestley et al., 2015). The flexibility, interdisciplinarity, and the competency-based nature of curriculum set out in Nep 2020 require curriculum literacy on the part of teacher educators.

Assessment literacy that is another essential dimension is the ability to design, interpret and act with assessment practices that promote learning instead of just define achievement. Formative evaluation, feedback, and reflective assessment are crucial to the pedagogical vision of NEP 2020 and ask educators teacher trainers to go beyond conventional practices of summative evaluation (Black & Wiliam, 2009). Simultaneously, the increasing focus on technology-enhanced education evidences the significance of digital and blended pedagogy competence. According to Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK) model, the dynamic interplay among the content, pedagogy and technology leads to the efficient technology integration, and not the technical competencies (Mishra & Koehler, 2006).

There are a number of theoretical frameworks which guide a comprehension of pedagogical capacity building. The constructivist learning theory focuses on the active construction of knowledge with the help of experiences, dialogue, and reflection, which places educators in the role of facilitator of knowledge instead of the disseminator of information (Bransford et al., 2000). The adult learning theory (andragogy) also implies that self-directed, practice-based, and experience-based professional development would benefit both teacher educators who are adult learners (Knowles et al., 2015). Moreover, reflective practice and professional learning community theories emphasize the role of collaborative inquiry, critical reflection and shared professional dialogue in promoting pedagogical development (Schon, 1983; Stoll et al., 2006).

Notably, the process of pedagogical capacity building is not to be perceived as a one-time intervention but a systemic process. The individual competence is evolved in contact with the institutional culture, support of the leaders and the professional norms. The individual capacity-building efforts will not be sustained without favourable organisational structures and cultures that cherish innovation, reflection, and collaboration. Therefore, enhancing pedagogical ability within NEP 2020 purview needs to be mutually supported at the level of an individual and an institution.

### ARE TEACHER EDUCATORS READY? A CRITICAL THEORETICAL REFLECTION

The degree of readiness of teacher educators to apply the pedagogical vision of NEP 2020 can be estimated by critically analyzing current structural and pedagogical circumstances in the teacher education institutions. One of the thorns, which is present in the literature, is the dominance of lecture-based, delivery-focused pedagogy in teacher education programmes. Although the benefits of learner-centred and constructivist methods are being widely recognized, the workplace of teacher education still seems to exemplify the traditional teach and test model in which the focus is set on content (rather than critical thinking and reflection) (Loughran, 2014; Zeichner, 2010). Such contradiction undermines the credibility of the discourse related to reform and restricts a chance of pre-service teachers being able to engage in innovative pedagogy in authentic manners.

The other major limitation in this regard is that even teacher educators are not well exposed to the interdisciplinary and experiential teaching methods. Multidisciplinary learning and solving problems in real-life situations have been heavily promoted by NEP 2020, yet very often, teacher educators have been socialised with strict disciplinarian borders and exam-driven institutionalized cultures (Priestley et al., 2015). This has led to pedagogical innovation being hailed as a theoretical concept that lacks implementation. Juxtaposing to this problem is a lack of proper and integrated systems of professional development that are typically oriented to short-term workshops, not to a long-term, practice-oriented learning. The studies always prove that the short-term training hardly has an extensive effect on profound pedagogical shift unless it is integrated into a continuous professional learning community and underpinned by the administrative leadership (Avalos, 2011; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017).

One of the most crucial problems that arise as a result of such challenges is the lack of correspondence between the pedagogical rhetoric and the pedagogical enactment. Teacher educators can educate regarding inquiry-based learning or formative assessment, reflective practice, but they may not always be practising them themselves. It is this disjunction that supports how researchers define a policy-practice gap, where ideals of reform are mostly symbolic and not radical (Cochran-Smith et al., 2016). Theoretically, this lack of fit destroys the apprenticeship of observation which helps future teachers develop long lasting beliefs with regard to teaching and learning (Lortie, 1975).

Preparedness, then, will have to be theorized as a multi-dimensional construct as opposed to being a binary condition. The cognitive readiness is defined as the knowledge of teacher educators regarding the principles of NEP 2020 and reform goals. Pedagogical readiness is the ability to plan and implement NEP-oriented instructional and assessment plans. It is also important to have dispositional readiness, which consists of beliefs, professional identities and changeability. It has been found that although teachers may have the necessary knowledge and skills, pedagogical change may be hampered by their strong beliefs and institutionalized practices (Fives & Buehl, 2012). In this perspective, the preparedness of teacher educators to NEP 2020 is not homogeneous and the condition dependent on the mutual interactions between individual abilities and the system.

### REIMAGINING CAPACITY BUILDING FOR NEP- ALIGNED TEACHER EDUCATION

To reinvent pedagogical capacity building according to NEP 2020, it is crucial to carefully rebuild the professional development based on fragmentation to practice-connected learning among teacher educators. It is always proven that the development of the profession is best conducted when it is directly related to the daily teaching experiences of the educators, stimulates experimentation, and allows them to reflect and get feedback (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). Professional development through practice can allow teacher educators to thoughtfully review their teaching routines and their implementation of NEP-related pedagogies as well as to revise their practices into new directions with the use of implementation and reflection processes.

Another important pillar of the capacity building is the collaborative inquiry and peer learning models. Professional learning communities also provide teachers educators with structures, where they mutually solve problems, discuss and construct knowledge, which in turn limits the isolation among teachers, as well as promoting the collective responsibility to the pedagogical improvement (Stoll et al., 2006). These kinds of



collaborative cultures are especially relevant to the development of interdisciplinary and experiential pedagogies that are promoted by NEP 2020 in the sense that they allow the educators to learn across disciplinary lines and co-create new instructions.

Combination of reflective and research-oriented practices also enhance pedagogical capacity and place teacher educators as knowledge producers as opposed to mere receivers of reform. Practitioner inquiry and small-scale research help practitioners to pursue an in-depth exploration of their own instruction, learning and growth, and to produce insights that are both contextually sensitive and relevant (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). This orientation is very similar to the orientation of NEP 2020 focused on evidence-based practice and lifelong learning.

Institutional and regulatory bodies also play an enabling role in determining the success of capacity-building initiatives at the systemic level. One of the conditions the institutional leadership should prepare is to provide the professional learning time as well as pedagogical innovation and culture of trust and collaboration (Fullan, 2016). In its turn, regulatory agencies are quite instrumental in ensuring the alignment of accreditation, assessment, and professional development frameworks with the pedagogical objectives of NEP 2020, and, as a result, making it consistent between policy and practice.

The hidden concept of sustainable pedagogical capacity building can be figured as a network of three reinforcing aspects including (a) individual teacher educator competence and professional identity, (b) facilitating institutional cultures and leadership, and (c) consistent policy and regulatory assistance. Constructing a synthesis at these levels is crucial in the way NEP 2020 can convert the vision of pedagogy in the transformation of the teacher education into continuation.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY, PRACTICE, AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The theoretical conclusions made by the paper generate significant policy outcomes of the research in the context of teacher educator professional development systems. NEP 2020 emphasizes constant professional growth, but policy-making machines have to shift away towards pre-structured training profiles, that are the same one-size-fits-all. They necessitate differentiated and contextually sensitive professional development structures that can counter the differences in backgrounds of disciplines, institutional settings, and stages in teacher educator careers (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). It is also important that policy-level should appreciate the role of teacher educators as lifelong learners, and their professional development should be facilitated based on continued learning, academic freedom and research-based practice.

Practically, the conclusion is that there is an immediate urgent need to restructure teacher education pedagogy in a manner that characteristically exemplifies NEP aligned principles. The teacher education programmes should reflect learner-centered, inquiry-driven and reflective pedagogies so that future teachers can internalize the approaches with significant meanings (Loughran, 2014). This necessitates institutional responsibility of pedagogical innovation, among these, through leadership facilities, time distribution allocated towards collaborative learning, and excellence of teaching. In the absence of such enabling conditions, the pedagogical reform warrants of being superficial and symbolic.

Due to future research, the conceptual claims put forward in this study can be empirically validated in a wide range. The data on the experiences of teacher educators in their pedagogical preparedness and capacity building can be used to support the policy and practice evidence base by means of systematic research. It is desirable, in particular, longitudinal and mixed-method research that can influence the development of pedagogical beliefs, practice, and professional identities shifts over time in reform situations (Cochran-Smith et al., 2016). Such a study, in addition to enriching the theoretical knowledge, would be applicable in culminating more efficient and sustainable teacher education reforms within NEP 2020.

### CONCLUSION

The paper has provided a theoretical reflection on how teacher educators are ready to implement the pedagogical vision of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 as the foregrounding of pedagogical capacity building; is identified as the factor that determines policy execution. It has been argued based on the existing theories in the education field on teacher education, professional learning, and educational change, that NEP 2020 is not a structural or a curricular change, but one that reflects the transformation of the conceptualisation and the actual practice of teaching and learning. In this reform space, teacher educators become central actors that bridge the policy visions and classroom experience.

This analysis reveals that effective implementation of NEP 2020 will be dependent on the presence of pedagogically empowered teacher educators who have not only considered the principles of reform in terms of conceptual knowledge but also the ability and willingness to model learner-centred, inquiry-based, and reflective pedagogy. It is necessary to see, then, that pedagogical capacity building should be viewed as a transformative exercise entailing the shift of the identity, belief systems, and institutional culture as opposed to a purely technical exercise, i.e. acquisition of skills. The potential of NEP 2020 to remain mostly tongue-tied can be witnessed without long-term, practice-based professional learning and facilitating organisational environments.

To sum up, reforming teacher education according to NEP 2020 is an urgent and a complicated process. It requires logical agreement between policy frameworks, institutional leadership and professional learning of teacher educators. It is only with such concerted efforts that realisation of transformative vision of NEP 2020 can be realised in meaningful and sustainable ways.

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