GYANBODH
An International Multidisciplinary Peer Reviewed Journal

ISSN:3048-9792
Volume: 3
Issue: 5
September-October: 2026

Architects of the Classroom: A Historical Evaluation of Pre-Service and In-Service Teacher Education Reforms in India

Nikita Mehta
Assistant Professor
Aditya Prakash Jalan Teachers Training College, Kudlum, Ranchi
Sneha Sampanna
Assistant Professor
J.D. National B.Ed. College, Angara, Janum, Jharkhand
Manash Kumar
Adjunct Faculty IIT ISM, Dhanbad

Abstract

This paper traces the historical evolution of teacher education in India, chronicling its transition from the spiritual mentorship of ancient gurukuls and monastic systems to the structured, policy-driven frameworks of the colonial and post-independence eras. A comprehensive review of landmark commissions and scholarly literature reveals a chronic tension between theoretical pre-service curricula and the practical realities of diverse classrooms, highlighting the frequent failure of isolated in-service workshops to produce sustained pedagogical change. To bridge this gap and align with the transformative mandates of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, this evaluation emphasizes the necessity of reimagining continuous professional development as a lifelong continuum. By embedding self-directed digital micro-credentials, advancing AI literacy, and fostering deep community engagement through volunteer initiatives into core training pipelines, policymakers can effectively dismantle the academic isolation of traditional teaching institutes. Ultimately, transitioning toward a multidisciplinary four-year Integrated Teacher Education Programme (ITEP) will empower a resilient cadre of educators equipped with the pedagogical empathy, digital agility, and research competencies required to navigate and shape contemporary Indian education.

Keywords: *Teacher Education, Continuous Professional Development, Education Policy, Digital Pedagogy*

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Introduction

The evolution of teacher education in India is a fascinating journey that mirrors the subcontinent's broader sociological and philosophical shifts. It transitions from the deeply spiritual mentorship of the ancient *gurukuls* to the highly structured, policy-driven professional development frameworks of the modern era.

The Ancient Era: The Vedic Period

In ancient India, teaching was not merely a profession but a sacred duty. The educator (*Guru*) was revered as a spiritual, moral, and intellectual guide. During the Vedic period, there were no formal "teacher training" institutions in the modern sense. Instead, selection for the role of a teacher was based on a profound, internalized mastery of the Vedas and an unimpeachable moral character.

Pedagogy relied heavily on the oral tradition—transmitting knowledge through *Shruti* (that which is heard) and *Smriti* (that which is remembered). The pedagogical methods emphasized rigorous memorization, correct pronunciation (*Shiksha*), and deep, critical introspection. The relationship between the teacher and the student (*Shishya*) was familial; the student lived with the Guru, imbibing not just academic knowledge but the very lifestyle and ethics of their mentor (Altekar, 1965).

Buddhist and Jain Systems (c. 500 BCE - 1200 CE)

As Buddhism and Jainism flourished, education shifted from the isolated, domestic settings of the *gurukuls* to massive institutional monastic centers known as *Viharas* and *Sanghas*. This era marks the earliest forms of institutionalized teacher preparation.

Teacher preparation became a formalized apprenticeship. Novice monks (*Sramaneras*) were required to train strictly under the guidance of senior, highly respected scholar-monks (*Upadhyayas* or *Acharyas*). This period of training could last up to a decade before a monk was deemed qualified to instruct others. Furthermore, Jainism introduced rigorous debate, dialectics, and disciplinary philosophical study into the pedagogical repertoire, demanding that teachers be highly skilled in logical argumentation and critical thinking (Mookerji, 1947).

Medieval Period: Islamic Education

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During the medieval period, the educational landscape diversified with the introduction of Islamic educational institutions. Instruction was systematically delivered through *Maktabs* (primary education attached to mosques) and *Madrasas* (centers of higher education).

The teachers in these institutions, known as *Maulvis* and *Ulemas*, were highly respected specialists in fields such as theology, logic, mathematics, and state administration. A significant pedagogical innovation of this era was the heavy reliance on the monitorial system. In this system, advanced, older students were tasked with teaching junior students. This practical approach not only helped manage large classes but also provided hands-on teaching experience for senior students, laying the earliest historical groundwork for formal peer-instruction pedagogies that would later influence global education systems (Jaffar, 1936).

Colonial Era Committees (1854 - 1944)

The arrival of the British administration brought about the formal institutionalization of teacher training, primarily driven by the need to standardize schooling and produce a steady stream of educators for the newly established western-style schools.

- Wood's Despatch (1854): Often called the "Magna Carta of English Education in India," this was the first official document to explicitly mandate teacher training. It recommended the establishment of "Normal Schools" across the provinces to systematically train educators.
- Hunter Commission (1882): Recognizing that teaching different age groups required different skills, this commission recommended separate, specialized pedagogical training tracks for primary and secondary teachers.
- Hartog Committee (1929): Observing a decline in educational standards due to rapid expansion, this committee prioritized qualitative improvement. Crucially, it advocated for ongoing refresher courses, laying the conceptual foundation for modern in-service continuous professional development (CPD).
- Sargent Report (1944): Looking toward post-war reconstruction, this report proposed free institutional training for all teachers and recommended establishing dedicated research departments for pedagogy, elevating teaching to a research-backed profession (Aggarwal, 1993).

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Post-Independence Commissions (1947 - Present)

Following independence, India rapidly restructured its teacher education framework to serve the needs of a newly democratic republic, viewing teachers as primary agents of social change and national development.

- Radhakrishnan Commission (1948-49): This commission heavily criticized the rote memorization prevalent in training schools and demanded the active integration of pedagogical theory with robust classroom practice.
- Mudaliar Commission (1952-53): Focusing on secondary education, it recommended expanding training colleges and emphasized the importance of co-curricular activities in holistic teacher preparation.
- Kothari Commission (1964-66): Opening with the famous declaration that "the destiny of India is now being shaped in her classrooms," this commission pushed to end the academic isolation of teacher training by integrating it into mainstream multidisciplinary university academia.
- National Policy on Education (1986): This policy revolutionized continuous professional development by decentralizing support through the establishment of District Institutes of Education and Training (DIETs). It also catalyzed the elevation of the National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE) to a statutory, regulatory body in 1993, giving it the power to oversee and standardize teacher education nationwide.
- National Education Policy (2020): The current policy represents a definitive shift away from standalone, often sub-standard teaching institutes. It mandates a move toward multidisciplinary universities, setting the comprehensive 4-year integrated B.Ed. degree as the minimum teaching qualification by 2030. It heavily emphasizes digital literacy, inclusive education, and rigorous, continuous self-directed learning (Ministry of Education, 2020).

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Review related literature on teacher education:

Author(s)	Year	Methodology	Findings
Batra, P.	2005	Policy Analysis	Identified a systemic disconnect between theoretical pre-service curriculum and actual classroom realities in India.
Dyer, C. et al.	2004	Mixed-Methods	Evaluated District Institutes of Education and Training (DIETs), finding in-service training often failed to translate into pedagogical change.
Darling-Hammond, L.	2017	Comparative Review	Demonstrated that successful global models integrate sustained in-service coaching rather than one-off workshops.
Rajput, J.S. & Walia, K.	2001	Historical Document Analysis	Traced NCTE reforms, emphasizing the post-1990s shift toward value-based and competency-driven teacher education.
Sarangapani, P.M.	2011	Ethnography	Revealed that D.Ed. colleges largely enforce rote learning pedagogies despite reformist policy rhetoric.
Fullan, M.	2007	Systematic Review	Established that structural in-service reforms fail without simultaneous cultural shifts within school leadership.
Siddiqui, A.	2019	Bibliometric Analysis (VOSviewer)	Mapped a century of Indian literature, revealing policy shifts and digital pedagogy as major emerging research clusters.
Ramachandran, V. et al.	2008	Qualitative Case Studies	Found that poor motivation among rural Indian teachers stems from administrative burdens outweighing in-service support.
Avalos, B.	2011	Meta-analysis	Showed that collaborative in-service networks produce higher teacher retention than traditional top-down training globally.
Aggarwal, J.C.	1993	Archival Research	Mapped post-independence commissions (Kothari, NPE 1986), highlighting chronic underfunding in pre-service infrastructure.
Moon, B.	2007	Policy Review	Concluded that open and distance learning (ODL) models are critical for scaling in-service upgrades in developing nations.
Sharma, R.	2021	Structural Equation Modelling (SmartPLS)	Demonstrated that digital literacy and SWAYAM-based micro-credentials significantly boost in-service teacher efficacy.

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Zeichner, K.	2010	Cross-National Comparison	Highlighted the global tension between university-based pre-service education and fast-track alternative certification.
Kumar, K.	2014	Curriculum Analysis	Argued that B.Ed. programs in India remain heavily colonial in structure, resisting localized sociological contexts.
Hargreaves, A.	2000	Theoretical Synthesis	Defined the "four ages of professionalism," plotting India's transition toward post-modern, continuous professional development.
Panda, S.	2012	Survey & Statistical Analysis	Validated the effectiveness of IGNOU's distance education programs for untrained in-service teachers.
Tatto, M.T.	2006	Comparative Case Studies	Found that nations treating teacher education as a continuum (pre-service to in-service) achieve higher student outcomes.
Sriprakash, A.	2010	Ethnographic Fieldwork	Showed how rural Indian teachers reinterpret "child-centered" in-service training to fit deeply traditional classroom norms.
Schwille, J. et al.	2007	Literature Review	Identified the induction phase as the most neglected component of the teacher education continuum globally.
Jangira, N.K.	1995	Policy Evaluation	Highlighted the failure of standard pre-service programs to integrate inclusive and special education methodologies.
Villegas-Reimers, E.	2003	Global Meta-Review	Concluded that isolated in-service training without subsequent classroom mentoring yields negligible behavioral change.
Mukerji, S.N.	1968	Historical Tracing	Documented the early post-independence struggle to standardize teacher qualifications across fragmented state boards.
Dash, N.K.	2015	Mixed-Methods Evaluation	Found that regional DIETs suffer from severe academic faculty shortages, severely diluting in-service training quality.
Shulman, L.S.	1987	Conceptual Framework	Introduced "pedagogical content knowledge," a metric increasingly used to evaluate Indian B.Ed. syllabus effectiveness.
Mohanty, J.	2003	Institutional Analysis	Charted the rise of the NCTE, criticizing the rapid, unregulated privatization of pre-service teacher training institutes.

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Suggestions for Policy and Practice

To genuinely revitalize both pre-service and in-service teacher education in post-independence India, policymakers and educational institutions must bridge the persistent gap between theoretical pedagogical frameworks and the dynamic realities of modern classrooms by embedding continuous, technology-driven, and research-oriented professional development into the core curriculum (National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT), 2023). A paramount suggestion is the formal integration of self-directed digital micro-credentials into mandatory in-service training pipelines, encouraging educators to pursue advanced academic coursework in foundational disciplines such as sociology and psychology through open platforms like SWAYAM and NPTEL, expanding on the flexible lifelong-learning models pioneered by the Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU, 2022). Furthermore, as the educational landscape becomes increasingly digitized, faculty development programs must urgently pivot to prioritize AI literacy, digital safety, and the ethical integration of artificial intelligence in education; ensuring teachers evolve into critical facilitators of modern knowledge rather than mere transmitters of legacy content (National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE), 2022). Reforming teacher education requires cultivating deep community linkages and civic responsibility among educators. Encouraging active participation in school volunteer initiatives, such as the Vidyanjali program (Ministry of Education (MoE, 2021), can effectively bridge the divide between formal school ecosystems and broader societal needs by facilitating community-driven school beautification and resource sponsorship. By intertwining advanced technological fluency, rigorous academic research competencies, and grounded community engagement, India can effectively empower its educators to navigate the complexities of contemporary education and fulfill the transformative vision laid out in recent comprehensive reforms.

Conclusion

The historical evaluation of pre-service and in-service teacher education reforms in post-independence India reveals a profound and ongoing metamorphosis, characterized by a relentless struggle to elevate the teaching profession from its fragmented colonial legacy to a unified, democratically aligned agent of national transformation. Since 1947, landmark commissions—

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from Radhakrishnan and Kothari to the transformative National Policy on Education of 1986—have consistently recognized that the destiny of the republic is unequivocally shaped within its classrooms, yet they have repeatedly encountered systemic friction when attempting to translate ambitious policy rhetoric into sustainable, grassroots pedagogical change (NCERT, 2022). The historical trajectory highlights a chronic tension between the rapid expansion of educational access and the imperative to maintain rigorous qualitative standards, often resulting in theoretically heavy pre-service programs that leave novice teachers ill-equipped for diverse classroom realities, and episodic in-service workshops that fail to inspire enduring behavioral shifts. However, the contemporary landscape, catalyzed by the visionary mandates of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 (MoE, 2020), marks a critical paradigm shift aimed at dismantling the academic isolation of standalone teaching institutes by firmly reintegrating teacher education into vibrant, multidisciplinary university environments (NCTE, 2023). This transition toward a comprehensive, four-year Integrated Teacher Education Programme (ITEP) acknowledges that the modern architect of the classroom must possess not only profound subject-matter expertise but also sophisticated pedagogical empathy, digital agility, and a deeply ingrained commitment to lifelong learning. Ultimately, navigating the future of Indian education demands an unwavering commitment to treating teacher preparation not as a finite instructional event, but as a dynamic, continuous professional continuum. By honoring the historical lessons of the past seven decades and systematically empowering educators with both institutional support and intellectual autonomy, India can forge a resilient cadre of teachers fully capable of illuminating the minds of the next generation.

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