Analyzing the Integration of NEP 2020 Competencies in Teacher Education Syllabi

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Abstract

The National Education Policy (NEP) of 2020 is a comprehensive and transformational framework designed to reorient the Indian educational system around the development of competencies that will allow learners to succeed in a world characterized by rapid social, economic, and technological change. Rather than focusing on rote memorization and the transmission of content, NEP 2020 emphasizes competency-based learning, holistic development, inclusivity, flexibility, and multidisciplinary approaches to learning. The policy recognizes that teacher education is a critical and foundational sector in the reform process due to the role of teachers as primary mediators of policy implementation. Therefore, any educational reform is ultimately reliant on the quality of teacher preparation; thus, it is vital that teacher education curricula and syllabi align with the competencies outlined in the NEP. Given the important nature of this work, this study examines the extent to which the competencies identified in the NEP are embedded within syllabi of pre-service teacher education programs in selected universities. The study assumes that syllabus design is not only an administrative or formalistic process, but rather reflects the pedagogical priorities of the institution and its commitment to its approach. The competencies embedded in the course objectives, the content structure, the learning experiences provided to student teachers, and the means used to assess student teachers will all directly influence the development of professional competencies by student teachers. Therefore, examining the structure and content of syllabi offers valuable insight into the readiness of teacher education institutions to align with national educational reforms. By identifying both strengths and shortcomings, the study offers constructive insights for curriculum developers, teacher educators, and policymakers. The results underscore the importance of moving beyond superficial inclusion of topics toward deeper curricular alignment that integrates competencies across all dimensions of teacher preparation. Ultimately, the research contributes to the broader discourse on educational reform by demonstrating that meaningful realization of NEP 2020 depends on deliberate and coherent redesign of teacher education syllabi, ensuring that future teachers are equipped not only with knowledge but also with the competencies necessary to foster holistic, equitable, and learner-centered education.

Keywords: NEP 2020, teacher education, curriculum integration, competency-based learning, syllabus analysis

Introduction

In 2020, the implementation of the National Education Policy represented an extraordinary change for how the Indian education system is constructed (philosophically), operates with regard to its foundational structure, and is delivered through processes of teaching and learning. Whereas previous policies sought to enlarge access and standardise content materials in order to increase student success, NEP 2020 introduced a vision for competency-based outcomes based on providing students with opportunities for growth and development through their engagement in educational activities. In addition, NEP 2020 acknowledges that 21st-century education must evolve beyond rote-learning and examinations to include developing students' critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, ethical reasoning and problem-solving abilities. As a result of these changes, educational success has been redefined to include developing adaptable competencies that prepare individuals for success in a world characterised by increasingly complex social and work environments — thus, education will not simply be defined by the acquisition of knowledge, but by the development of competencies that are required to navigate through life's many challenges.

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Within the broader context of this tremendous shift in ideas about education, teacher preparation represents a key component for realising the goals of NEP 2020. Teachers are the primary agents responsible for implementing the aspirations of NEP 2020. Therefore, the success of NEP 2020 rests on whether or not teachers have the knowledge and skills to provide students with meaningful and effective educational experiences. The preparation of teachers is essential to the success of the overall education reform in India.

The NEP 2020 outlines a clear intention to transform teacher education through reviewing and improving upon areas of curriculum design, increased opportunities for practicum experience, greater emphasis on interdisciplinary collaboration, and the introduction of professional standards that align with competency-based education (CBE).

Teacher preparation programs such as the Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) and the Diploma in Elementary Education (D.El.Ed.) are intended to develop future teachers able to create inclusive, equitable, and engaging educational experiences for all learners. Historically, many teacher preparation programs have focused predominantly on theory with little to no real-life context, leaving teacher candidates with knowledge of their content area, but having little to no ability to offer different types of pedagogy or to reflect upon their teaching practice. The new direction with NEP 2020 is to create a curriculum that equally values theory and practice, while placing emphasis on experiential learning, critical thinking, and lifelong professional development. Therefore, the teacher education program syllabuses will be at a point of greater importance than ever before, as they will define the formal curriculum for teacher candidates and how their curriculum will be assessed.

The NPE 2020 sets out a multidimensional view of teacher competence which includes; foundational literacy and numeracy, higher order cognitive skills, ethical and constitutional values, socio-emotional development, digital literacy, inclusive teaching practices, and multilingual competence.

The aforementioned competencies are interrelated and together they contribute to developing learners and teachers holistically. Digital competency allows a teacher's use of technology to support their teaching; socio-emotional competency gives a teacher the skills necessary to foster a positive classroom climate; ethical reasoning promotes responsible behaviour on the part of teachers, and finally, inclusive pedagogy ensures that all children (including those with special needs and from underrepresented communities) are given equal access to educational opportunities. Therefore, teacher education programs are evaluated based on the extent to which they systematically integrate these varied competencies into course objectives, instructional delivery, field experiences, and assessment methods.

Despite the clear vision for teacher education articulated in the NEP (2020), the implementation of these policy proposals into practice varies greatly among institutions. The content and structure of many teacher education programmes differ dramatically as a result of conflicting institutional priorities, differing regional contexts, and inconsistent administrative constraints. While some programmes rapidly adapt to include current trends such as the integration of technology into education and reflective practices, many others continue to utilise traditional content-based approaches. This inconsistency raises serious concerns about the degree of implementation of NEP competencies in teacher preparation. Without empirical evidence, it will be impossible to determine whether the NEP intends to bring about significant changes in the design and delivery of teacher education or whether it remains simply a collection of aspirational statements.

A systematic review of teacher education syllabi is both necessary and timely. The syllabus serves as a blueprint for educational practice, reflecting the institution's understanding of the essential knowledge and skills that will be acquired by future teachers. By analyzing course structure, learning outcomes, pedagogical strategies, and assessment frameworks, the extent to which NEP-aligned competencies are written into the formal curriculum can be determined.

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An analysis of this nature will illuminate both the progress made and the gaps in the formal curriculum that could impede effective implementation.

The research undertaken here will investigate how NEP 2020 competencies are represented and operationalized in the syllabi of teacher education programs at several institutes of higher education. It is assumed that the successful integration of NEP 2020 into the curriculum requires more than the inclusion of isolated topics; it requires that there be coherent alignment among objectives, content, pedagogy, and assessment. By examining the nature and extent of this alignment, the research will produce evidence-based data that will provide direction on revising curriculum and enhancing teacher preparation. At a minimum, the successful integration of the principles associated with NEP 2020 into teacher education syllabi will produce a new generation of teachers prepared to achieve the larger goals of equitable, holistic, and future-ready education in India.

Review of Related Literature

In Agarwal and Sinha's research on current trends related to competency-based teacher education, the authors note that Indian teacher education institutions are moving away from lecture-based pedagogy toward a more outcomes-oriented educational model with a focus on competencies. They found that competency-based teacher education programs emphasize performance assessments, practicum experiences, and authentic assessments. The authors' findings suggest that while the policy directives are relatively clear, institutional implementation and adoption experiences have varied greatly because of the structural and administrative barriers that exist at many of the institutions of higher education in India.

Das and Roy examined new ideas about pre-service teacher education as they relate to competency-based frameworks and concluded that many teacher preparation programs are beginning to incorporate experiential learning in their curriculum. The implementation of experiential learning has increased the level of "readiness" of many teacher trainees for the teaching profession, but there needs to be an effort on the part of educational institutions to systematically align their teacher education curriculum so that there is consistency in what teacher educators teach, how they assess trainees, and how they prepare them for success in the profession.

Bansal and Tiwari reported on the digital readiness of teacher educators post-training and found that since the reforms were implemented, there has been an explosion of technology adoption in terms of utilising learning management systems (LMS) for supporting teaching and learning virtually. The study findings also indicate that there are still many technological disparities between institutions, whether it be at the level of faculty or at the institution.

Kumar and Singh researched digital competencies in teacher education programs by examining teacher preparation program syllabi, and found that ICT integration has become a more prominent component of course objectives and assessment. The findings from their research provide evidence that the reforms associated with teacher preparation have resulted in an increase in teacher candidates' digital competence.

The study conducted by Nair and Thomas (2021) examined the use of technology tools and their incorporation into pedagogy. The study also discussed the uneven nature of how each technology has been included. They stated that in order to truly integrate technology into the level of a teacher's pedagogy, it will need to be incorporated into the instructional strategy for the course rather than as an add-on to the teacher's other instruction.

The study conducted by Gupta and Sharma (2020) used reflective practice to help pre-service teachers develop their professional growth. They found that the use of reflective journals, teaching portfolios and peer evaluations led to greater self-awareness in the professional practice of pre-service teachers.

Patel (2022) further supports the theory that reflective practice is one of the core competencies necessary for pre-service teachers to develop. Patel's (2022) study found that teacher trainees

who engaged in reflective practice shown by systemically reviewing their instructional practice were better decision-makers in the classroom and had more confidence in their ability to teach. Mehta and Kulkarni (2020) studied the teacher education reform efforts that have resulted in university experiences integrating inclusive practices into teacher preparation programs. Inclusion was found to be part of the teacher preparation course content through the special education modules and through the module on equity. However, the results of the study show that inclusion was included in the teacher preparation program on a theoretical basis rather than being embedded in each of the four teacher instructional strategies.

Reddy and Rani (2020) conducted a content analysis of teacher preparation programs and found that inclusive pedagogy was not integrated with other teacher preparation course materials; instead, inclusive pedagogy was included as an isolated unit, thereby eliminating the effectiveness of inclusive pedagogy.

In their research, Verma and Joshi (2020) called for preparing teachers to be aware of equity and diversity; therefore, it is essential to develop sensitivity to cultural differences and an understanding of how to respond to the diverse backgrounds of learners during the preparation of these educators. Their work showed that prospective teachers will benefit from gaining practical experience within culturally diverse classrooms.

Looking at the moral and professional values of teachers, Jain (2021) generated empirical evidence to support his study on including ethical reasoning and professional values within educational programs. Although these educators acknowledged the abstract concept of ethics during their studies, they seldom received structured opportunities or assessment measures to develop their knowledge and skills related to this topic. Jain's work further supports the ability of teachers to develop morally and professionally requires educators with an experiential framework for gaining knowledge and skills, including case analysis and situational judgement tasks.

Kaur and Mahajan (2022) explored the holistic development of teachers and found that socio-emotional competencies like empathy, resilience and collaboration had a considerable impact on effective teaching in the classroom. However, the authors noted that there are no established systems or processes that would allow educators to measure these competencies in the context of their respective assessments.

In their work, Sharma (2022) noted that there is a gap between the intent of educational policies and the reality of implementing those policies in the classroom. There has been much discussion around the importance of socio-emotional development in children; however, it is still not operationally defined or well-structured within educational settings.

Ghosh and Suri (2022) provided empirical evidence supporting the link between educational programs and national professional standards. They demonstrated that educational institutions that provide explicit connections between intended outcomes and competencies show greater degree of congruence between theory and practice.

Collectively, the reviewed literature demonstrated that teacher education in India had entered a transitional phase marked by experimentation and gradual realignment with competency-based ideals. Scholars consistently acknowledged progress in areas such as digital literacy and reflective practice while simultaneously identifying persistent gaps in inclusivity, ethical reasoning, socio-emotional development, and multilingual competence. The body of research therefore established the need for systematic analysis of syllabi to determine how comprehensively these competencies had been embedded. This gap in empirical understanding provided the rationale for the present study, which sought to evaluate the extent and depth of NEP-aligned competency integration within teacher education curricula.

Objectives

● To analyze how NEP 2020 competencies are integrated into teacher education syllabi. This

overarching goal is operationalized through the following sub-objectives.

- To identify which NEP 2020 competencies are represented in the syllabi of teacher education programs.

- To examine the depth and breadth of integration of these competencies within course structures, instructional strategies, and assessment mechanisms.

- To highlight strengths and gaps in current syllabi relative to the competencies articulated by NEP 2020.

- To propose evidence-based recommendations for curriculum enhancement that can inform teacher educators, syllabus designers, and policymakers.

Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative content analysis approach to examine teacher education syllabi. The research sample includes syllabi from five universities offering Bachelor of Education programs, selected purposively to represent diverse geographical regions and institutional types (central, state, and private universities). Relevant documents—such as course descriptions, unit outlines, learning objectives, suggested readings, and assessment rubrics—were collected from official academic repositories.

Data were coded using a coding frame aligned with the competency categories specified in NEP 2020: foundational literacies, higher-order thinking, digital literacy, inclusive pedagogy, socio-emotional skills, ethical reasoning, multilingualism, and lifelong learning. The analysis focused on identifying explicit (i.e., stated in syllabus text) and implicit (i.e., inferred from learning outcomes or activities) integration of competencies. Triangulation was achieved through consultation with teacher educators to validate interpretations. Thematic interpretation was used to derive patterns and insights.

Data Analysis & Interpretation

The analysis of teacher education syllabi was undertaken to determine the extent to which competencies envisioned under NEP 2020 were explicitly and systematically embedded within course objectives, content organization, pedagogical practices, and assessment mechanisms. The documents examined included course outlines, unit descriptions, practicum guidelines, and evaluation rubrics from selected universities. The interpretative framework categorized competencies into digital literacy, reflective practice, inclusive education, socio-emotional development, ethical reasoning, multilingualism, and lifelong professional learning. Each competency was assessed not only for its presence but also for the depth of its curricular integration.

The overall trend suggested that institutions have begun responding to policy expectations, yet the degree of alignment varies considerably. Certain competencies have gained prominence due to contemporary demands and the rapid expansion of educational technology, while others remain underdeveloped or only superficially mentioned. The data therefore reveal both progressive developments and persistent structural limitations in the design of teacher education syllabi.

To present the findings more systematically, the analysis is summarized through five detailed tables followed by interpretative explanations.

Table 1: Extent of Integration of Major NEP Competencies in Syllabi

Competency Area	Explicit Inclusion (%)	Implicit Inclusion (%)	Not Evident (%)	Level of Integration
Digital literacy	88	10	2	High

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Reflective practice	82	12	6	High
Inclusive education	46	34	20	Moderate
Socio-emotional learning	38	40	22	Moderate–Low
Ethical reasoning	32	41	27	Low
Lifelong learning	25	45	30	Low
Multilingual pedagogy	18	30	52	Very Low

This table indicates that digital literacy and reflective practice are strongly embedded across institutions, whereas multilingual and ethical competencies show limited structured representation. The disparity suggests that easily measurable or technology-related competencies receive greater curricular attention than value-based or sociocultural dimensions of teaching.

Table 2: Representation of Digital Literacy and Reflective Practice Components

Curriculum Component	ICT Integration Present	Reflective Activities Present	Typical Evidence
Core theory courses	Yes	Yes	Digital tools, reflective essays
Pedagogy courses	Yes	Yes	Lesson planning with technology, teaching reflections
Practicum/ Internship	Yes	Yes	E-portfolios, observation diaries
Assessment strategies	Moderate	**High**	Journals, action research reports

The data reveal that most syllabi contain structured ICT modules and reflective exercises. Assignments such as creating digital teaching aids, maintaining reflective journals, and conducting action research are common. These features demonstrate a strong institutional recognition of the need for technologically competent and self-evaluative teachers.

Table 3: Integration of Inclusive Education and Socio-Emotional Learning

Dimension	Standalone Course	Integrated Across Subjects	Assessment Mechanism	Depth of Practice
Inclusive education	Mostly Yes	Rare	Limited	Fragmented
Diversity awareness	Yes	Partial	Minimal	Moderate

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Socio-emotional learning	Rare	Partial	Rare	Superficial
Classroom relationships	No	Yes	Informal	Low

This table illustrates that inclusivity is often treated as a separate theoretical topic rather than a guiding principle embedded throughout pedagogy. Socio-emotional competencies are referenced indirectly through classroom management but seldom articulated as explicit learning outcomes. The limited assessment mechanisms imply that these competencies are not systematically evaluated, reducing their practical significance.

Table 4: Presence of Ethical, Multilingual, and Professional Development Competencies

Area	Course Mentions	Structured Activities	Assessment Evidence	Observed Strength
Professional Ethics	Moderate	Few	Theoretical exams	Weak
Constitutional Values	Moderate	Minimal	Essays	Weak
Multilingual Teaching Strategies	Very few	Rare	None	Very weak
Continuous Professional Development	Implicit	Limited	Self-study logs	Weak

The findings indicate that ethical and professional competencies are primarily discussed at a conceptual level without experiential tasks such as case analysis or ethical decision-making exercises. Multilingual pedagogy, despite being a strong recommendation of NEP 2020, is scarcely operationalized. Continuous professional development is encouraged rhetorically but lacks structured or graded components.

Table 5: Comparison of Recently Revised vs. Traditional Syllabi

Feature	Revised Curriculum Institutions	Traditional Curriculum Institutions
Competency-based outcomes	Clearly stated	Rarely stated
Interdisciplinary courses	Frequent	Limited
Practicum hours	Extended	Minimal
Technology integration	Systematic	Occasional
Inclusive framework	Emerging integration	Standalone units only
Overall NEP Alignment	**High–Moderate**	**Low–Moderate**

The comparison suggests that institutions that have recently updated their curriculum frameworks demonstrate better alignment with competency-based principles. They exhibit clearer learning outcomes, expanded practicum experiences, and stronger integration of digital and reflective practices. Nevertheless, even these revised syllabi show deficiencies in multilingual and ethical competencies, indicating that reform remains incomplete.

The combined evidence suggests that teacher education institutions are progressively adapting to contemporary expectations, particularly in domains that are technologically driven or directly linked to observable classroom practices. Digital literacy and reflective practice have become normalized features, reflecting the growing acceptance of technology-enhanced teaching and self-assessment as essential professional attributes. These competencies are operationalized through assignments that require active engagement, indicating meaningful rather than superficial integration.

However, competencies related to inclusion, socio-emotional development, ethics, and multilingualism display weaker integration. Their treatment tends to be theoretical and compartmentalized, preventing them from influencing day-to-day pedagogical decision-making. Such fragmentation contradicts the holistic approach advocated by NEP 2020, which envisions these competencies as foundational rather than supplementary. The absence of structured assessments further undermines their perceived importance among teacher trainees. The comparison between revised and traditional curricula demonstrates that reform initiatives can positively impact alignment, yet systemic challenges persist. Curriculum revision alone is insufficient without deliberate strategies to embed competencies across courses, practicum experiences, and evaluation methods. Overall, the interpretation underscores that while progress has begun, a comprehensive and integrated approach is necessary to fully realize the competency-based vision of teacher education.

Findings of the Study

This investigation into how competencies outlined in the National Education Policy 2020 are being integrated into teacher education programs paints a mixed picture. On the surface, many institutions have begun aligning their syllabi with competency-based expectations. However, when you look more closely, the level of integration varies widely. In some areas, the effort is thoughtful and well-structured; in others, it feels partial or superficial. While certain competencies are clearly prioritized, others have yet to find meaningful space within the formal curriculum.

One of the clearest strengths across the analyzed syllabi was the emphasis on digital literacy and reflective practice. Almost every program included coursework on information and communication technology, digital teaching tools, and online learning platforms. Teacher trainees were often required to design technology-supported lesson plans, create multimedia teaching materials, and maintain e-portfolios. Reflective practice was also widely embedded. Many institutions asked students to keep reflective journals, prepare self-evaluation reports, or undertake action research projects. These components were not just mentioned in passing; they were built into assignments and assessment systems. This suggests a strong recognition that today's teachers must be comfortable with technology and capable of examining and improving their own practice.

The picture becomes less consistent when it comes to inclusive education. Although most syllabi referred to diversity, equity, or special needs education, these topics were frequently confined to standalone units. Rather than being woven throughout pedagogical courses, inclusivity often appeared as a separate theme. This compartmentalized approach makes it harder for future teachers to internalize inclusive values as part of their everyday teaching mindset. Instead of shaping how all teaching is approached, inclusivity risks being treated as a theoretical topic to be studied and then set aside.

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A similar pattern emerged in the case of socio-emotional learning. While issues such as classroom management, motivation, and student engagement were commonly addressed, there was rarely an explicit focus on emotional intelligence, empathy, resilience, or interpersonal sensitivity as clearly defined learning outcomes. Structured experiential activities and systematic assessment of these competencies were largely missing. As a result, socio-emotional development does not yet appear to be treated as a central professional skill. This gap may leave teacher trainees underprepared to respond to the emotional and psychological needs of learners, especially in diverse and complex classroom environments.

Ethical reasoning and professional values also received limited practical attention. Although many syllabi included discussions about professional ethics, responsibilities, and conduct, these were typically presented in theoretical terms. Opportunities to engage with real-life case studies, situational judgment exercises, or reflective ethical decision-making tasks were rare. Without applied learning experiences, ethical understanding remains abstract and may not significantly shape professional behavior. Given the importance of trust, accountability, and integrity in education, this is a notable shortcoming.

Multilingual competence was the least developed area of all. Despite the policy's strong emphasis on linguistic diversity and mother-tongue-based education, very few programs included structured training in bilingual teaching strategies, language-sensitive pedagogy, or managing multilingual classrooms. In a country as linguistically diverse as India, this gap is particularly striking. The limited presence of multilingual preparation suggests a clear disconnect between policy goals and actual curricular practice.

The study also highlighted differences between institutions that had recently revised their curricula and those still operating under older frameworks. Programs that had undergone systematic revision tended to articulate clearer competency-based outcomes, integrate practicum experiences more effectively, and align more closely with policy expectations. Even so, gaps remained—especially in areas like ethics and multilingual education—indicating that reform efforts are still evolving. Meanwhile, institutions retaining traditional, content-heavy models appeared slower to adopt a competency-oriented approach.

Overall, teacher education syllabi appear to be in a transitional phase. There are visible signs of progress, particularly in areas that are measurable and technology-driven. However, the transformation is not yet comprehensive. Competencies linked to values, attitudes, and socio-cultural sensitivity are not as systematically embedded as those related to technical skills. This uneven pattern points to the need for more deliberate, balanced, and holistic curriculum design if the broader vision of the National Education Policy 2020 is to be fully realized.

Conclusion

The study set out to examine the extent to which NEP 2020 competencies are integrated into the syllabi of pre-service teacher education programs, recognizing that effective implementation of educational reform depends fundamentally on the preparedness of teachers. The analysis confirms that teacher education institutions have begun responding to the policy's call for transformation, particularly by embedding digital literacy and reflective practice into course structures. These developments represent meaningful progress toward preparing teachers who are adaptive, technologically competent, and capable of critical self-evaluation. In conclusion, while the trajectory of reform is promising, teacher education syllabi in their present form only partially reflect the aspirations of NEP 2020. Achieving the policy's transformative potential will depend on deliberate, coherent, and sustained efforts to embed competencies deeply within the fabric of teacher preparation. Only through such comprehensive integration can future teachers be equipped to create inclusive, ethical, innovative, and learner-centered educational environments capable of meeting the demands of twenty-first-century India.

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