ITEP under NEP 2020: A study on Integrating Academic Knowledge and Pedagogical Practice for the Development of Teacher Identity

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Abstract-- **One of the significant alterations of the National Education Policy 2020 in India is the Integrated Teacher Education Programme. This research attempts to examine ITEP's effectiveness in the integration of teaching practices, subject matter, and the professional identity of teachers. A qualitative approach was used and data was collected in-depth from 20 individuals comprising teachers and teacher educators related to the ITEP model. This research used in-depth interviews with a structured guide and then carried out thematic analysis to capture the subjective experiences of the participants. The findings from the study show that ITEP provides the opportunity for teachers to gain holistic comprehension of the subject along with teaching practices and also develops the teachers' professional identity. Findings also show improvement in reflection along with teaching practices, and advancement in understanding towards the ideal of the 2020 policy. However, participants raised the issues of application, preparedness, and support. The study asserts that ITEP can significantly change the face of teacher education in India.**

Keywords-- **Teacher Education, National Education Policy 2020, ITEP model, Teacher Educators, Pedagogy, Subject Knowledge**

I. INTRODUCTION

Quality of school education in any country is primarily dependent upon the quality of teacher education and the ability of teachers to implement the education policy in the classroom. It has been suggested (Kumar and Sarangapani 2005; NCTE 2014) that teacher education in India suffers from the following: fragmentation of subject knowledge and pedagogy, inadequate opportunities for reflective practice, and insufficient focus on the development of a professional teaching identity. National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 has addressed the above issues by introducing remodelling of teacher preparation courses.

It placed the Integrated Teacher Education Programme (ITEP) as a priority for improving the quality of teachers (Government of India, 2020). ITEP is conceptualized as a four-year multidisciplinary programme in which subject knowledge, pedagogy and professional practice are integrated. Unlike the traditional teacher education programmes in India which are primarily focused on functionalist or a compartmentalized approach; ITEP proposes to overcome this by embedding pedagogy in each of the subjects from the beginning of teacher education. This approach is expected to engender a substantive understanding and effective teaching practices in the future teachers (Government of India 2020).

A core area of focus of the NEP 2020 is the construction of a robust professional teacher identity that encompasses ethical, reflective, and lifelong learning dimensions. Teacher identity develops through teaching practice, mentoring, and professional community participation (Beijaard, Meijer, & Verloop, 2004). ITEP aims to facilitate this process by incorporating school internships, reflective practice, and ongoing engagement with classroom realities, which, hopefully, allows teacher candidates to assume professional values and obligations. While ITEP offers a radical proposition on the future of teacher education, a number of questions on the articulateness of the institution to address this proposition, adequacy of the teaching staff, the clarity of the curriculum, and the availability of the necessary support structures arise. Because ITEP is a new program, there is scant evidence on how ITEP is operationalized, and whether it is reaching its intended objectives (NCTE, 2021). Therefore, it is crucial to explore the views of teachers and teacher educators to provide an assessment on the impact and the challenges of the programme.

This study conducts an analysis regarding the Integrated Teacher Education Programme under NEP 2020 and how effectively it helps in understanding the integration of content, pedagogy, and professional identity of a teacher. The present study aims to understand the probable impacts ITEP can have on transforming Teacher Education in India, and therefore takes a qualitative approach to understand the teacher-educators perspectives.

II. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The importance of teacher education as a factor in determining the quality of education has been well established. The overall quality of school education depends significantly on the teaching staff's knowledge, skills, confidence, and professional identity. Over decades of research in teacher education, the integration of knowledge of the subject, pedagogy, and practical context has been recognized as a crucial factor in improving the practice of teaching. An important milestone in this line of research was established when Shulman (1987) introduced the term Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK). According to Shulman, teaching is more than knowing the subject and having a few pedagogical techniques. Teaching involves the transformation of subject matter so that it is accessible and interesting to learners. This transformation of teaching involves the synthesis of knowledge of the learners, the curriculum, pedagogy and assessment, and constitutes the essence of teaching professionalism. This construct of PCK has been a significant factor in bringing reform in teacher education across the globe.

In India, the traditional methods used in teacher education programmes have come under fire for a disconnect between the theoretical component and practical aspects. Kumar and Sarangapani (2005) noted that in India, many teacher preparation programmes have for years, prioritised the theoretical component at the expense of the practical component, especially in the area of classroom engagement. Such a disconnect causes beginning teachers to struggle with theoretical comprehension and effective pedagogical actions. In most teacher training institutions, the challenge of integrating disciplinary knowledge with the pedagogical praxis remains. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 seeks to make major changes to address the challenges that have lasted for years. In NEP 2020, one of the most significant innovations is the Integrated Teacher Education Programme (ITEP), a four-year multidisciplinary programme that focuses on integrating subject knowledge, pedagogy, and school-based practical training (Government of India, 2020).

The initiative highlights the importance of practical exposure to class and school environments, of internships, of reflective practices, and of alignment with the broad goals of holistic and competency-based education. Integrated programmes, it added, hold promise to enhance conceptual clarity and pedagogical adeptness by positioning teacher preparation within multidisciplinary higher education institutions.

Recent policy analyses indicate that ITEP's structural design aims to reduce fragmentation in teacher education through integration of structural components, such as academic courses, practicum, and professional ethics (NCTE, 2021). However, most of this literature is policy-driven, focusing on what is not implemented, and is more, or less, empirically driven to evaluate the processes of policy implementation. Another significant area of teacher education research has to do with professional teacher identity. Teacher identity is increasingly regarded as a complex and developing construct, as a result of a combination of personal beliefs, the institution, the subject, and the teaching experience. Beijaard, Meijer, and Verloop (2004) described professional identity as a result of the interaction of expertise in a subject area, and in pedagogy, and the self-image of teachers. Their review shows that identity development is a constantly ongoing process that is a result of both individual internal processes of reflection and the external professional context. In the same way, Kelchtermans (2009) described professional identity as very much connected with teachers' reflective practices, emotions, and sense of agency within a given professional framework. During internships and the mentoring process, reflective practice is very significant in developing a positive, professional identity that is robust and enduring. Subsequently, Darling-Hammond (2017) claimed that high-quality teacher education programmes, with enduring clinical practice and a good university-school partnership and reflective practice, impact positively on teaching competence and identity development. Within integrated teacher education programmes, the consideration of extended internships and school immersion experiences holds particular relevance.

III. NEED AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 introduced the Integrated Teacher Education Programme (ITEP) for the first time in India. The ITEP has transformed policies and regulations by offering ITEP a four-year integrated teaching program. Program graduates will receive comprehensive subject knowledge and education delivery methodologies.

Graduates will also complete professional ethical training and acquire teaching experience. Little empirical research has been conducted on the ITEP's first and second phases. Research on the ITEP's outcomes is essential for understanding the program's challenges and institutional and classroom-level functioning. The evaluation process must also determine if ITEP has been successful in integrating the content with pedagogy, the development of reflective practice, the improvement of teaching skills, and the construction of a strong professional identity. Evaluators should also determine the ITEP's responsiveness to contemporary educational requirements regarding inclusivity, the use of technology, and competency-based education as outlined in NEP 2020. This study examines the experiences and perceptions of the teachers and teacher educators involved with ITEP, which validates the study based on the ground-level insights the teachers and teacher educators offer on the program's strengths, innovations, and practical challenges. The study uses qualitative research to explain the most detailed and context-rich descriptions that may not be captured if options available in quantitative research are used, in relation to the issues that are most critical to help identify the disparity between policy and practice. Besides benefitting teachers and teacher educators, the study may provide policymakers with evidence-based recommendations to review policy frameworks and practical guidelines, incentivize teacher education institutions to reallocate curricular, personnel, and physical resources, and assist teacher educators with the integration of mentoring and teaching. The study promotes the enhancement of teacher preparation quality that resonates with the objectives of the NEP 2020 and the development of reflective and professionally committed teachers for Indian education.

IV. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. How does the Integrated Teacher Education Programme facilitate the integration of subject knowledge and pedagogical practices among teachers?
2. In what ways does ITEP contribute to the development of professional teacher identity?
3. What challenges are perceived by teachers and teacher educators in the implementation of ITEP?

V. OBJECTIVES

1. To examine the role of the Integrated Teacher Education Programme in integrating subject knowledge with pedagogical practices.
2. To explore the contribution of ITEP in the development of professional teacher identity.
3. To identify challenges related to the implementation of ITEP as perceived by teachers and teacher educators.

VI. METHODOLOGY

➢ *Method*

The researcher adopted a qualitative research approach to analysis the effectiveness of the integrated teacher education programme under NEP 2020.

➢ *Sample and Sampling Technique*

By using purposive sampling technique Twenty teachers and teacher educators were selected as a sample for this study.

➢ *Tool of the study*

An interview schedule were constructed by the researcher for data collection.

VII. ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Based on the goals of this study, data analysis and interpretation were done accordingly. The data from in-depth interviews were analyzed and organized to find some meaningful trends on the effectiveness of the Integrated Teacher Education Programme with regard to NEP 2020. The data from teacher and teacher educator interviews explained the integration of content and pedagogy, the formation of a professional teacher identity, and the implementation of ITEP.

Objective 1 To examine the role of the Integrated Teacher Education Programme in integrating subject knowledge with pedagogical practices.

A major theme that stood out was the "Integration through Practice-Oriented Learning." ITEP enabled participants to simply merge the practice with the implementation of the theory. In addition, many participants stated that, in contrast to the traditional models of teacher education, ITEP was the first to offer simultaneous opportunities for both disciplinary learning and the practice of teaching.

Participant T3 elaborated:

"Before, we learned subject content and pedagogy separately. Now, ITEP has begun teaching us how to transform pedagogical concepts into teaching."

Another educator, TE2, commented:

"An integrated curriculum lets students start thinking like teachers while learning the subjects. This deepens their understanding and prepares them to teach."

Several answered the question about theory-practice balance positively with particular regard to lesson planning workshops, teaching practice and school internship.

Theme	Description	Frequency
Conceptual Clarity	Better understanding of subject concepts	High
Application of Theory	Ability to apply theory in classroom	High
Learner-Centred Strategies	Use of interactive teaching methods	Moderate–High
Curriculum Coherence	Alignment between coursework & practicum	Moderate
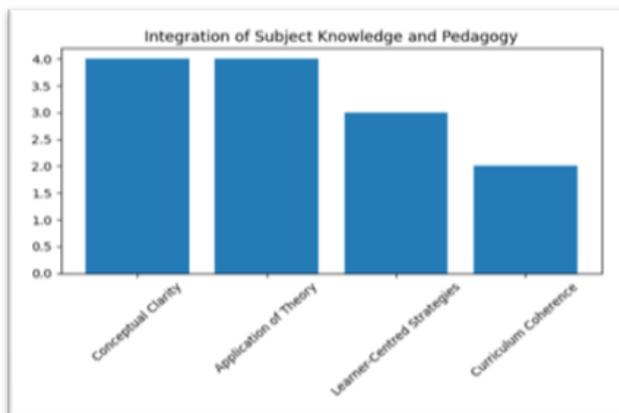
The findings indicate that participants largely perceived ITEP as effective in promoting pedagogical integration. The integrated structure appears to reduce fragmentation and support applied understanding.

Objective 2 To explore the contribution of ITEP in the development of professional teacher identity.

Thematic analysis revealed three major dimensions of professional identity formation under ITEP:

1. Reflective Practice
2. Early School Exposure
3. Professional Confidence & Responsibility

Participants pointed out the role of sustained internship and reflective journals in teaching identity development.

Participant T7 stated:

"During my first internship, I walked into the classroom and I saw myself as a teacher. That really changed my point of view a lot."

TE4 commented,

"Mentoring helps students to grasp the ethical and professional dimensions of teaching. It helps build their confidence step by step."

T2 had this to say:

"Writing a reflective diary compelled me to identify my professional strengths and weaknesses. I gained a lot from it."

Component	Impact Observed	Response Level
School Internship	Increased classroom confidence	Very High
Reflective Journals	Self-awareness & improvement	High
Mentorship	Professional values & ethics	High
Multidisciplinary Exposure	Broader understanding	Moderate

Development of Professional Teacher Identity

Challenges in ITEP Implementation
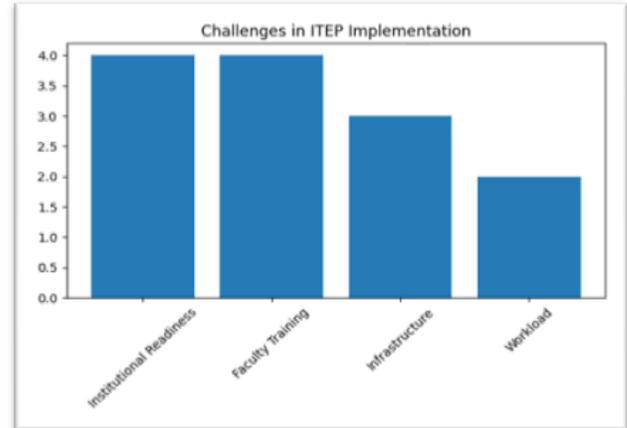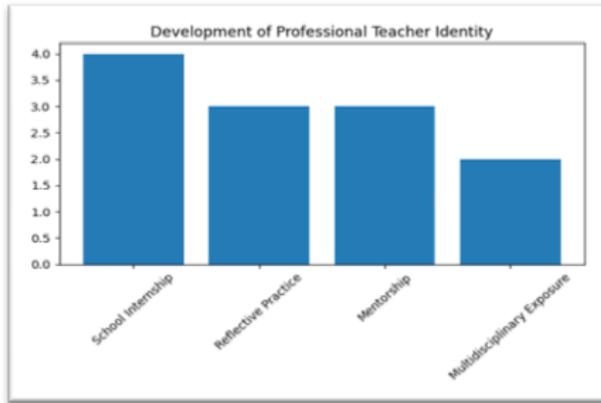
The participants noted that ITEP played a major role in shaping their professional outlook, sense of responsibility, and teaching commitment for the long haul.

Objective 3 Look at the concerns regarding the implementation of ITEP that teachers and teacher educators encountered.

Appreciating the vision of ITEP, participants mentioned a number of obstacles that the ITEP faced. The data revealed three recurring themes.

- Organizational Readiness
- Faculty Development
- Mapped Out Plans for Infrastructure and Resources

Teacher educator TE1 noted "The structure is innovative, but institutions need proper planning and trained faculty to implement it effectively." Participant T5 stated, "Sometimes we feel the workload is heavy because the programme integrates many components simultaneously." Another the participant stated, "Schools for internship are not always adequately prepared to mentor integrated programme students."

Challenge	Nature of Issue	Frequency
Institutional Readiness	Administrative & planning gaps	High
Faculty Training	Need for professional development	High
Infrastructure	Lack of adequate facilities	Moderate
Workload Management	Academic pressure concerns	Moderate

Despite these challenges, a majority of participants expressed optimism regarding the long-term potential of ITEP.

Participant TE3 summarized:

"If implemented with proper support and monitoring, ITEP can transform teacher education in India."

The Integrated Teacher Education Programme (ITEP) is showing growing success in meaningfully integrating pedagogy and teaching knowledge. Participants appreciated the program for the integrated structure that connects the theory and the practice within a teaching context. Additionally, evidence suggested that ITEP is a contributor for growing the professional teacher identity, since early school exposure, reflective practice, and mentoring foster teaching confidence, professional responsibility, and commitment. While some implementation issues, particularly those concerning institutional readiness, faculty preparation, and infrastructure, were identified, there was significant agreement that these issues were primarily structural and could be addressed through good planning and ongoing institutional support. In addition, including participant voices in the analysis provided a reliable and authentic basis for the findings that the conclusions were anchored in reality rather than abstract theory.

VIII. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The research conducted illustrates the Integrative Teacher Education Program's ability to start addressing the long-lasting issues surrounding the teaching profession in India, as dictated by the newest National Education Policy (NEP 2020).

The blending of instructional strategies with subject matter as made evident in the research is congruent with previous empirical work advocating for the inclusion of the aforementioned in teaching for the profession to be fully realized. The collective experiences of the participants point to the fact that the integrated nexus of the program fosters the development of the appropriate conceptual framework and the ability to practice, as well as teaching in a reflective, and more critically a, learner-centered style. Along with the development of a professional teaching identity, which is just one additional notable success of the program, there is consistency with prior studies on the profession that acknowledges the teaching identity development components of the program that incorporates sustained internships, mentorship, and reflective practice. This positive development is a direct function of the program in increasing the self-efficacy and the professional commitment of the teachers in the program. These findings attest to the fulfilment of the NEP 2020 ideals, particularly with regard to nurturing teachers as reflective practitioners and, more critically, as nation builders. The research also brings to the forefront issues surrounding the ITEP implementation. The issues surrounding the ITEP, notably, the operational readiness of the institution, the training of faculty, and the provision of adequate physical resources highlight the transitional state of the reform. These issues point to the fact that even though the policy is very ambitious, the realization of the constructive elements resides with deliberate, systematic, and ongoing effort at the level of the institution.

The Integrated Teacher Education Programme has the potential to transform teacher education in India by merging educational content, pedagogy, and the development of the professional teacher's identity. From the qualitative data gathered from teachers and teacher educators, positive changes are evident in the areas of conceptual understanding, teaching and professional practice. There are, however, implementation issues that this investigation has identified, contributing to the broader understanding of ITEP and the necessity for the sustainability and effect of ITEP. Sustaining the effect of the ITEP program requires bolstering institutional support, strengthening the preparation of faculty, and providing sufficient resources, as these are critical for the realization of the goals of the NEP 2020. This study will be beneficial to the teacher educators, educational institutions involved in teacher education reforms, and the policymakers in the education sector, while contributing to the research on ITEP.

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