

THE POTENTIAL AND POSSIBILITIES OF TEACHER EDUCATION IN ASSAM IN THE CONTEXT OF NEP, 2020

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ABSTRACT

This paper is an attempt to study the current scenario of teacher education in the state of Assam and identify the associated prospects and challenges in imparting quality teacher training among school teachers. The study also explores the impact of National Education Policy (NEP), 2020 upon the teacher training and its future consequences.

Keywords: *Teacher Training, National Education Policy.*

Introduction

In the school education scenario of North East Region (the seven sisters) Assam holds a pre-dominant position. According to the latest statistics UDISE 2023-24, out of total school enrolment of 103.38 lakh students in NER, that of Assam is 69.22 lakh students, thus constituting around 67% of the total enrolment. Similarly, Assam has over 62% of total number of schools in NER (56,630 schools out of a total of 90,956 schools) and around 62% of school teachers (3,42,199 out of 5,56,822). Similarly, according to the NCTE Annual Report of 2023-24, in terms of capacity to prepare prospective school teachers, as on 31st March, 2024, Assam had around 52% of teacher education institutions recognized by NCTE (115 institutions against a total of 220 in NER), over 53% of teacher education programmes (161 against a total of 299 programmes for NER) and around 51% of intake capacity (11,340 student-teachers out of a total of 22,255 for NER). Accordingly, Assam holds the key in improving the overall education scenario of NER in general, and specifically of the teacher education segment. It is therefore important to analyze the teacher education scenario of Assam, and what potentialities and possibilities exist in its improvement over the medium to long term, especially in the context of the various recommendations of NEP, 2020 to revitalize the teacher education position in the country.

It is important at this stage to understand the structure of teacher education institutions in Assam, especially the presence of government institutions vis-a-vis private institutions, as both have different implications from the perspective of Government intervention, role of NCTE, incentivisation of private investment, etc. In the Government sector, there are 23 District Institutes of Education and Training (DIETs), which were set up at the district level throughout the country in accordance with the recommendations of the National Policy on Education, 1986. These institutions primarily impart the 2-year D.El.Ed. programme which is suitable for preparing teachers for the elementary classes. However, in Assam, 15 DIETs have also been granted recognition for running the 2-year B.Ed. programme thus expanding the capacity for preparation of teachers for upper primary, secondary and senior secondary classes. DIETs also conduct in-service training for elementary school teachers and provide other types of academic support to schools. Apart from DIETs, there are 8 Colleges of Teacher Education (CTEs) which

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are primarily imparting the 2-year B.Ed. programme, apart from providing in-service training to secondary school teachers. Then there are two Institutes of Advanced Studies in Education (IASEs). Further, Assam has a history of institutions called Basic Training Colleges (BTCs) and Normal Schools which provide teacher training. These numbering 26 (19 BTCs and 7 Normal schools) also provide the 2-year D.El.Ed. programme. Hence the Government plays a major role in the overall teacher education scenario of Assam. As on 31st March, 2023, the comparative presence of Government and private teacher education institutions and their intake capacity is tabulated as under:

Table 1: Government vs Private Teacher Education Institutions in Assam

State		D.El.Ed.		B.Ed.		BA./B.Ed		M.Ed	
		G	P	G	P	G	P	G	P
Assam	I	49	18	23	53	2	0	5	2
	C	3250	850	1450	4500	100	0	250	100

(I - No. of TEIs; C – NCTE Approved Intake Capacity)

(Source: NCTE website)

From the above Table it is apparent that for the D.El. programme, the Government institutions play a major role, while for the B.Ed programme private institutions are dominant. The role of SCERT, Assam in coordination with the Government-run institutions, especially DIETs, CTEs, IASEs, etc. has been quite significant. The SCERT, Assam with a strength of around 40 faculty and several experts and allied staff in 15 Departments has been doing significant work as the State Academic authority under the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009, development of textbooks in various languages and for various subjects, digital initiatives, including development of audio books, development of teaching-learning material, Learning Enhancement programmes for select schools, etc.

Studies on Teacher Education of Assam

Several studies in the past have discussed from various dimensions the teacher education system as it has prevailed in Assam over the last several decades, especially in the post-Independence era. *Swain and Borah (2015)* trace the history of teacher education institutions in Assam since the pre-Independence era. Significantly, they indicate that the standards of the teacher education institutions in Assam have been falling, particularly due to lack of adequate infrastructure in these institutions, inadequate laboratory equipments and ICT facilities, faculty shortage, etc. The paper also eludes towards mismatch between theory and practical courses in the teacher education curriculum, inadequate professional development programmes for the teacher educators, and neglect of research in the field of teacher education. It has also highlighted some of the important shortcomings identified by the Teacher Education Resource Group of the NCTE (June, 2007), such as low maintenance of physical infrastructure of DIETs and CTEs, lack of requisite qualifications of faculty in CTEs, no scope for professional growth for teacher educators, etc.

Salam and Khan (2013) while narrating the need for teacher education, its history in Assam, identify important problems facing the teacher education scenario in Assam, including defective programs of teacher education, teaching methods lacking innovation and experimentation, lack of proper infrastructural facilities in these institutions, lack of empirical research, and inadequate facilities for professional development of teacher educators. The paper suggests several remedial action, including reorganization of the course curriculum, development of professional attitude by the teacher educators, close association of the institutions with the practicing schools, adequate funding by the Government, etc.

The Joint Review Mission (JRM) (**17-24 August, 2016**) reviewed the Centrally Sponsored Scheme on Teacher Education in five states including the North Eastern State of Assam. The major observations and recommendations with regard to **Assam** were the following:

- The SCERT, Assam has taken a lead role in revision of the 2-year D.El.Ed programme in accordance with NCFTE, 2009, and is actively engaged in coordinating the activities of the various teacher education institutions (TEIs), notwithstanding staff vacancies and funds shortage;
- SCERT may take initiative in assessing the performance of TEIs for maintaining the standards of the academic, pedagogic and learning standards in the TEIs;
- There is ample scope for professional development of the SCERT faculty, requiring adequate availability of funds by the State Government;

- The IASE requires infrastructural upgradation, syncing pre-service teacher education curriculum and pedagogical practices in tune with NCFTE, 2009, need based faculty development programmes (for the teacher educators), undertake full complement of the roles and functions envisaged of an IASE, leverage ICT, and take steps for better convergence and linkages with other institutions (SCERT, CTEs and DIETs);
- With regard to CTEs, the JRM observed that the pre-service teacher education curriculum was not in sync with the guidelines of NCFTE, 2009, faculty development programmes require to be linked to their professional needs, upgradation of infrastructure facilities, including the resource centers (library, laboratories, ICT), and strengthening the research culture in these institutions;
- With regard to the DIETs, the JRM made several recommendations, including filling up the posts of teacher educators on an urgent basis, need for assessing performance of the teacher educators, strengthening the infrastructural facilities, etc.;
- Preparation of a continuous professional development framework for capacity building of the teacher educators;
- Develop a robust monitoring and coordination institutional mechanism to oversee activities of the TEIs, and provide onsite support; and
- Strengthening of research and innovation activities in SCERT.

Singh Aarti (2023) analyzed the elementary teacher education in Assam from the perspective of inclusive education, in terms of its curriculum, infrastructural and human resources in DIETs, perception of teacher educators and student-teachers for inclusive education and suggested a framework for integration of inclusive education in D.El.Ed. programme. *Bonia and Singh (2022)* discuss the status of secondary teacher education institutions of Assam, and identify a host of deficiencies in the system, including failure to uphold quality, unprecedented expansion of teacher education institutions at the secondary level, etc. They identify numerous issues which need to be addressed, including infrastructure maintenance, adequate laboratory equipment and ICT facilities, insufficient financial grants to institutions, etc. They have also made similar suggestions for improvement, such as course reorganization, innovations in pedagogic practices, better coordination with practicing schools, etc. In another paper *Bonia and Singh (2022)* have made a SWOC (Strength, Weakness, Opportunities and Challenges) Analysis of the teacher education scenario of Assam. The study points out major strengths such as teacher educators, in the perception of student-teachers, are very cooperative, energetic and friendly. The Weaknesses of the Institutions include lack of infrastructure facilities (drinking water, canteen), non-availability of related books, shortage of furniture, etc. According to the student-teachers, the location of the Institution is a great opportunity, as also the system of scholarship to students. The biggest challenges for an institution were shortage of teaching staff, over-crowded classrooms and high fees in the private colleges.

Bari and Goswamee (2024) conducted a research study on the availability of teacher education institutions in Assam, how they differed between pre-Independence and post-Independence period and what results could be drawn from such study. The study points out that facilities in institutions have modernized and innovative teaching methodologies have been adopted which signify a proactive approach to the present educational needs, with emphasis on practical training, and real-world application. The study points towards the need to establish meaningful collaboration with government bodies, private entities and educational experts which can have the potential to catalyse the teacher education environment in Assam and overcome the major challenges of inadequate resources, faculty shortages, and the requirement of continuous professional development of teacher educators.

Recommendation of NEP, 2020 on Teacher Education

The National Policy on Education, 2020 devoted a separate chapter on teacher education, relevant paragraphs from which are extracted, as under:

- *“Teacher education is vital in creating a pool of schoolteachers that will shape the next generation. Teacher preparation is an activity that requires multidisciplinary perspectives and knowledge, formation of dispositions and values, and development of practice under the best mentors...”*
- *As teacher education requires multidisciplinary inputs, and education in high-quality content as well as pedagogy, all teacher education programmes must be conducted within composite multidisciplinary institutions. To this end, all multidisciplinary universities and colleges - will aim to establish, education departments which, besides carrying out cutting-edge research in*

various aspects of education, will also run B.Ed. programmes, in collaboration with other departments such as psychology, philosophy, sociology, neuroscience, Indian languages, arts, music, history, literature, physical education, science and mathematics. Moreover, all stand-alone TEIs will be required to convert to multidisciplinary institutions by 2030, since they will have to offer the 4-year integrated teacher preparation programme.

- *The 4-year integrated B.Ed. offered by such multidisciplinary HEIs will, by 2030, become the minimal degree qualification for school teachers. The 4-year integrated B.Ed. will be a dual-major holistic Bachelor's degree, in Education as well as a specialized subject such as a language, history, music, mathematics, computer science, chemistry, economics, art, physical education, etc..."*

In the spirit of NEP, 2020, the University Grants Commission (UGC) prepared in 2022 a comprehensive set of Guidelines for transforming Higher Education Institutions into multi-disciplinary institutions, including multiple ways such as collaboration, merging and clustering between institutions to achieve the characteristics of a multidisciplinary institution. Further, the NCTE prepared a new curriculum framework for a 4-year Integrated Teacher Education Programme (ITEP) in July, 2023, and also initiated the process of grant of recognition to institutions for ITEP from the academic session 2023-24.

Students and Teachers Holistic Advancement through Quality Education (SARTHAQ), Government of India, Ministry of Education, Department of School Education and Literacy (2021) is an implementation plan for the recommendations of NEP, 2020. The strategy developed for implementation of the NEP recommendations, along with timelines include : (i) The National Testing Agency (NTA) to conduct entrance test for the 4-year integrated B.Ed programme; (ii) National Mission for Mentoring to be set up, including of teacher educators; (iii) Public standalone TEIs to move towards multidisciplinary Higher Education Institutions; (iv) A robust regulatory and accreditation system for TEIs to be put in place; (v) Customised teacher education programmes to attract students would be made available. The NEP, 2020 recommended the development of a 4-year Integrated Teacher Education Programme (ITEP) as the future of the teacher education environment in the country. In terms of the recommendations of NEP, 2020, the NCTE developed in 2023 a curriculum framework for the 4-year Integrated Teacher Education Programme (ITEP). The ITEP is a dual degree programme – the first is a Major in Education and second is a Major in an opted Discipline with Stage Specific Specialisation – (a) Foundational Stage Specialisation for teaching in pre-school and grades 1 & 2 of schools; (b) Preparatory Stage specialization for teaching children of Grades 3-5; (c) Middle Stage specialization for teaching children of Grades 6, 7 and 8; and (d) Secondary Stage Specialisation for teaching children of grades 9, 10, 11 & 12. The Curriculum is to be offered in a multi-disciplinary environment (available mainly in Universities), with admission after senior secondary through a national level common entrance test, and is aligned with the 5+3+3+4 system of school education recommended by the NEP. It follows a credit based system with multiple entry and exit, and re-entry options – A Certificate on exiting after completion of one year (two semesters) of study, Diploma for those who exit after completing two years (four semesters) of study, a Bachelor's degree to those who wish to exit after completion of three years (or six semesters) of study, and a dual-major Bachelor's degree on successful completion of the four years with the nomenclature of B.A.B.Ed, B.Sc.B.Ed or B.Com.B.Ed for each of the Stage Specialisation. The NCTE notified the Norms and Standards of the ITEP vide its Regulation dated 22nd October, 2021, and 42 TEIs across the country were given approval for commencing the ITEP from the academic session 2023-24 in respect of 79 ITEP courses (38 for B.A.B.Ed, 10 for B.Sc.B.Ed and 31 for B.Com.B.Ed). Out of these, 5 institutions of NER were also granted recognition to run the ITEP programme. For academic year 2024-25 onwards, 22 more institutions were granted recognition by the NCTE for the ITEP, of which 4 were from NER. In respect of Assam, 3 institutions have been granted recognition for ITEP – North Lakhimpur College (Autonomous), North Lakhimpur, Tyagbir Hem Baruah Collge, Sonitpur, and Chaiduar College, Gohpur.

NEP, 2020: Challenges and opportunities for Assam

is in the above context that the implementation of NEP, 2020 in respect of teacher education in Assam can be discussed. The main tenets of NEP, 2020 in the realm of teacher education are : (i) establishment of Education Departments in all multidisciplinary University and colleges to run 4-year dual degree Integrated Teacher Education programme (ITEP); (ii) offering of the ITEP by multi-disciplinary institutions; (iii) All standalone Teacher Education Institutions to convert to multidisciplinary institutions by 2030 as they will have to offer the 4-year ITEP; (iv) regulatory system to be empowered to take stringent action against sub-standard and dysfunctional teacher education institutions. The first three aspects can be analysed in the context of Assam, the fourth being a regulatory aspect which is in the domain of NCTE.

At present only one three institutions in Assam have been granted recognition by the NCTE for the 4-year ITEP. However, given the mandate of NEP, 2020 there are several Universities in Assam which have an established Department of Education and are offering various undergraduate, postgraduate and PhD programme sin Education. This is tabulated as under:

Table 2: Universities in Assam having Department of Education

S. No.	University	Category	Year of Establishment of Department of Education	Courses offered
1	Assam University, Silchar	Central	1995	MA (Education), PG Degree/Diploma in Education Planning and Management, B.Sc.BEd, M Phil, PhD, DLitt
2	Tezpur University, Tezpur	Central	2014	M.Ed., B.Ed., Integrated B.Sc.B.Ed., MA (Education), PhD (Education)
3	Gauhati University, Guwahati	State	1948	MA (Education), M.Ed, PhD
4	Dibrugarh University, Dibrugarh	State	1965	B.Ed, M.Ed., MA (Education), M.Phil, PhD
5	Assam Women University, Jorhat	State	2015	5-year integrated MA (Education), 2-year MA (Education)
6	Cotton University, Guwahati	State	1959	4-year BA, MA (Education), PhD
7	Bhattadev University, Barpeta	State	1996	BA (Education)
8	Madhabdev University, Pnbari	State		MA (Education), 4-year Undergraduate programme
9	Bodoland University, Hojai	State	2015	MA (Education), PhD
10	Assam Don Bosco University, Sonapur	Private		BA (Hon) Education, MA (Education), PhD

(Source: websites of the Universities)

The above Universities with well-established Departments of Education and being multi-disciplinary institutions offering several programmes in Education are best suited for offering the 4-year dual degree ITEP programme. In fact several of them are already offering 4-year programmes in Education and hence migrating to the 4-year ITEP can be undertaken in almost a seamless manner. Yet another advantage is that, other than Assam Don Bosco University which is privately owned, the remaining 9 Universities are owned and managed either by the Central Government or by the State Government of Assam. Hence any intervention by way of additional funding, hiring of faculty, training/orientation of the existing faculty, etc. can be easily initiated, as implementation of NEP, 2020 is a national agenda with Central and State Governments being equal partners. Accordingly, all these institutions may be encouraged to apply to NCTE for grant of recognition of the 4-year ITEP programme.

In light of the recommendation of NEP, 2020, the other multidisciplinary Universities which at present do not have a Department of Education must be encouraged and appropriately funded by the State Government to start an Education Department and offer the ITEP Programme. At the same time, prominent private multi-disciplinary Universities, such as Assam Kaziranga University, Jorhat and Royal Global University, Guwahati should establish a Department of Education and come forward to apply for the ITEP programme.

In Assam there are six autonomous colleges each of them having a large number of Departments – North Lakhimpur College, Lakmimpur (21 Departments), Furkating College, Golaghat (13 Departments), Arya Vidyapeeth College, Kamrup (21 Departments), Nowgong College, Nagaon (22 Departments), Jagannath Barooah College, Jorhat (23 Departments), Sibsagar College, Sivasagar (16 Departments). In addition, two more colleges have recently (August, 2024) been granted status of an autonomous college by UGC – Dimoria College, Khetri (23 Departments) and Dhakaukhana College,

Nabakatharbari (16 Departments). While North Lakhimpur College is already running the ITEP programme, the other autonomous colleges being multidisciplinary institutions can also apply for the same to NCTE.

Another set of institutions which have the potential to offer the ITEP programme are the DIETs. There are 23 DIETs, out of which 15 are offering 2-year D.Ed and 2-year B.Ed programmes. These DIETs have a long history of running the pre-service Diploma programme and are enriched with additional faculty from different fields of knowledge (total strength of 17 faculty in a DIET) who are also engaged in in-service training of school teachers. In coordination with SCERT, the DIET faculty are actively engaged with the schools in their neighbourhood for various activities – school internships and practice teaching of student-teachers, in-service training of school teachers, textbook and TLM development, extension services, action research, etc. In view of their close linkage with the school system, and given their vast experience in the field of teacher education, and possessing amongst the most qualified and experienced faculty, the State Government of Assam may look at DIETs as yet another set of institutions which can offer the 4-year ITEP programme.

SCERT, Assam with a large faculty strength across 15 Departments (including the Department of Teacher Education), and with its vast experience in the field of teacher education and interaction with schools, also has a high potential in offering the 4-year ITEP programme. Although SCERT, Assam presently is not offering any pre-service teacher education programme, its faculty has vast experience in this field, as several of them have experience of working in DIETs/CTEs, as college faculty, etc. and are actively engaged with DIETs, CTEs and IASEs. SCERT, Assam can therefore also explore this possibility.

With regard to the other privately managed institutions which have been running teacher education programmes recognized by the NCTE (mainly B.Ed), majority of them are standalone institutions. In terms of the recommendations of NEP, 2020, these institutions need to convert into multi-disciplinary institutions by 2030 so as to have the potential to offer the 4-year ITEP programme. Given that these institutions are in private hands, the owners/trustees of these institutions will have to decide the future course of these institutions, and how they can be converted into multi-disciplinary institutions, as these have several financial and other regulatory implications, including expansion of physical infrastructure, setting up more Departments, hiring of faculty with appropriate qualifications, seeking affiliation to University for offering other courses/programmes, etc. According to the All India Statistics for Higher Education (AISHE 2021-22), there are 607 Colleges in Assam, of which 368 are general colleges, while the remaining specialize in certain fields of knowledge (Agriculture, Architecture, Engineering, Medicine, Management, etc). The possibility of tie-up/collaboration of the standalone teacher education institutions with the general colleges, especially which are co-located or located in geographical proximity to each other could also be explored by the management of these institutions, with academic tie-ups, sharing of faculty, and other coordinated effort such as collaboration, merging and clustering, in line with the UGC Guidelines of 2022. Such collaborative arrangement can them pave way for some of the existing standalone TEIs to upgrade themselves as multidisciplinary institutions and be in a state of readiness to offer the 4-year ITEP programme.

Conclusion

The above analysis shows that Assam has huge potential in improving its teacher education environment in the spirit of the various recommendations NEP, 2020. For this to happen, the Central and State Universities, and institutions such as SCERT, Assam and the DIETs will need to be adequately encouraged and supported by the Central Government and the State Government of Assam with adequate funding, handholding and other interventions to enable these to become pace-setting institutions in the field of teacher education. In respect of DIETs, additional funding under the *Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan* for infrastructure upgradation, filling up vacant faculty posts, professional development of teacher educators will also be required. At the same time, private standalone TEIs can look at potential collaboration with other private/government colleges for upgrading themselves as multi-disciplinary institutions and then decide to offer the 4-year ITEP programme.

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