
7

EMPOWERING EDUCATORS FOR SUSTAINABLE FUTURES: THE ROLE OF NEP 2020 IN TRANSFORMING PRE-SERVICE TEACHER EDUCATION FOR QUALITY AND SUSTAINABILITY

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Abstract

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 marks a transformative shift in India's educational landscape, placing teacher education at the heart of systemic reform. This paper explores how NEP 2020 redefines pre-service teacher training to align with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 4—Quality Education. It examines the integration of sustainability principles into curriculum design, pedagogical practices, and institutional frameworks. Drawing on policy documents, academic literature, and case studies, the paper highlights the challenges and opportunities in embedding Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) into teacher preparation programs. It argues that empowering pre-service teachers with sustainability competencies is essential for fostering inclusive, equitable, and future-ready classrooms. The study concludes with recommendations for policy implementation, curriculum innovation, and capacity building to ensure that teacher education becomes a catalyst for sustainable development in India.

Keywords: NEP 2020, teacher education, sustainable development, SDG 4, pre-service training, ESD (Education for Sustainable Development), quality education, India

1. INTRODUCTION

It is often acknowledged that education is a key component of sustainable development. It creates inclusive societies, empowers individuals, and fortifies communities. Education is at the center of the global development agenda, according to the 2015 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations. SDG 4 specifically demands that all people have access to inclusive, equitable, and high-quality education as well as opportunities for lifelong learning (UNESCO, 2020). According to this theory, teacher education, especially pre-service training, is crucial in determining how societies and educational systems will develop in the future.

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 in India signifies a radical change

in educational theory and practice. With a focus on ethics, environmental awareness, and global citizenship, NEP 2020 prioritizes immersive, holistic, and transdisciplinary learning (Ministry of Education, 2020). These ideas are in line with the objectives of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), which aims to enable students to make responsible decisions and take action for social justice, economic viability, and environmental integrity (UNESCO, 2020).

A crucial area for integrating sustainability is pre-service teacher education, which is the stage in which prospective teachers receive formal training prior to entering the field. Future educators create their professional identities, pedagogical views, and teaching practices during this crucial time. Incorporating sustainability into pre-service training guarantees that teachers are not just knowledgeable about global challenges but also prepared to encourage students' critical thinking, empathy, and action. Teachers who have received training in sustainability-oriented pedagogy can encourage students to become responsible members of society who help create a more equitable and sustainable world (Kumari, 2024).

In order to improve teacher education, NEP 2020 offers a number of modifications. The creation of a four-year integrated B.Ed. curriculum that blends subject knowledge, pedagogical training, and real-world experience is one of the most important. Additionally, the policy highlights the value of inclusive education, ongoing professional development, and the use of technology in instruction (Mondal, 2024). The integration of sustainability ideas into teacher education programs is made possible by these improvements.

In order to achieve the objectives of NEP 2020 and the larger SDG agenda, academics contend that integrating sustainability into teacher education is crucial (Saha, 2025).

The paper attempts to give a thorough understanding of the role of NEP 2020 in fostering sustainable development through teacher education by drawing on scholarly literature, policy papers, and case studies from Indian teacher education institutions. In order to turn teacher education into a catalyst for sustainable development, the report ultimately urges politicians, educators, institutions, and communities to work together.

2. NEP 2020: A REVOLUTION IN TEACHER EDUCATION

One of the most significant changes to India's educational system in recent years is the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. It seeks to improve education's adaptability, inclusivity, and emphasis on practical skills. NEP 2020 makes significant reforms to teacher education that will better equip future educators to teach in the modern world.

2.1. Integrated B.Ed. Program for Four Years

The implementation of a four-year integrated Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) curriculum is one of the most significant innovations. Subject knowledge, teaching abilities, and real-world experience are all included in this program. Students now receive a comprehensive education that equips them to be considerate, competent, and moral educators rather than completing a separate degree and a brief teacher

training program (Ministry of Education, 2020). To help aspiring educators learn by doing, this curriculum also offers classroom practice and internships. They gain experience in classroom management, lesson planning, and problem-solving by working with instructors and kids in actual schools (Kumari, 2024).

2.2. Emphasis on Multidisciplinary and Holistic Education:

A comprehensive approach to learning is encouraged by NEP 2020. This implies that education should emphasize morals, creativity, and world understanding in addition to textbooks and tests. These days, life skills, environmental studies, and ethics are taught in teacher education programs. These aid aspiring educators in helping pupils develop into law-abiding individuals (Mondal, 2024).

2.3. Equity and Inclusion

NEP 2020 is a firm advocate for inclusive education. This means that every child should have equal access to education regardless of their gender, background, or skill level. Future educators are now better equipped to comprehend and support a diverse student body through teacher education programs. They acquire the skills necessary to instruct children who speak different languages, are from rural or tribal areas, and have disabilities (Saha, 2025).

2.4. Technology Use in Teacher Education

Another important component of NEP 2020 is technology. Digital tools, such as smart boards, instructional software, and online learning platforms, are taught to aspiring educators. They are able to make learning more accessible and interactive as a result. Additionally, it equips them to instruct pupils in both urban and rural settings, where resources could differ (UNESCO, 2020).

Like reading and writing, digital literacy is widely regarded as a fundamental ability for educators. Teachers can encourage sustainability by use technology responsibly, such as by cutting back on paper use or disseminating information about climate change through games and films.

2.5. Education Based on Ethics and Values

NEP 2020 highlights the significance of imparting virtues like integrity, decency, and accountability. These days, teacher education programs include instruction on how to help children develop moral principles and character. This is intimately related to sustainability because global issues require qualities like cooperation and empathy (Ministry of Education, 2020).

3. EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT (ESD) IN PRE-SERVICE TRAINING

A teaching strategy known as Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) aims to teach students how their activities impact the world and how they can make responsible decisions for a better future. It promotes critical thinking, problem-solving, and teamwork in order to save the environment, advance justice, and create harmonious communities (UNESCO, 2020).

3.1. ESD is Essential to Pre-service Teacher Education

It equips aspiring educators to help pupils develop into responsible, thoughtful adults. This is supported by NEP 2020, which promotes global citizenship, environmental consciousness, and values-based education (Ministry of Education, 2020). Let's examine how pre-service training in India incorporates ESD.

ESD is about developing abilities and attitudes, not simply facts. UNESCO lists the following as essential skills for sustainability: -

- **Systems thinking:** Observing the connections between various regions of the planet, such as the effects of farming on forests or pollution on health.
- **Critical thinking:** Critical thinking involves challenging unsustainable behaviors and coming up with better ones.
- **Collaboration:** Collaboration is the process of solving difficulties with others.
- **Empathy and values:** Concern for people, animals, and the environment.

Activities that support the development of these competences are now part of teacher education programs. For instance, they might discuss moral dilemmas, examine case studies on climate change, or create group projects on regional environmental challenges (Kumari, 2024).

3.2. Connecting ESD to NEP 2020 Objectives

Beyond textbooks, NEP 2020 promotes education. It encourages practical learning. It encourages learning that is ethical, useful, and relevant to everyday life. This is a natural fit with ESD, which aims to equip students to address global issues including poverty, inequality, and climate change (Mondal, 2024).

For example, NEP 2020 suggests that life skills and environmental education be included in teacher education. These aid aspiring educators in helping pupils comprehend sustainability and behave appropriately. Pre-service teachers become sustainable living role models by learning how to teach these subjects.

3.3. ESD Techniques in the Classroom

Future educators learn how to incorporate sustainability into the classroom during pre-service training.

- **Project-based Learning:** In which students work on real-world issues like planning a recycling campaign or creating a water-saving system, is one popular approach.
- **Story-telling and Role Playing:** Teachers utilize role-playing and storytelling to impart virtues like justice, generosity, and reverence for the natural world.
- **Outdoor Learning:** To foster a connection between pupils and the natural world, classes are held in gardens, parks, or farms.

These techniques increase the significance and engagement of learning. Additionally, they assist kids in realizing the importance of their acts and how they might improve the world (Saha, 2025).

3.4. Local Contexts and Community Involvement

Local community-based learning is encouraged by ESD. This entails teaching

sustainability in India through local customs and traditional knowledge. For instance,

- Learning from village elders about rainwater harvesting.
- Studying local farmers' organic farming practices.
- Investigating folktales that instill reverence for the environment these regional components are taught to pre-service teachers as part of their training.

This increases the relevance of education and encourages students to consider global challenges while appreciating their cultural heritage (UNESCO, 2020).

3.5 Difficulties with ESD Integration

Even though ESD is becoming more and more important, integrating it into all teacher education programs remains difficulties:

- ESD concepts are unfamiliar to some teacher educators.
- There could not be enough sustainability content in curriculum materials.
- Effective ESD instruction is not well-trained.

Institutions must update their curricula, support sustainability education with resources, and invest in faculty development in order to overcome these obstacles (Kumari, 2024).

4. CURRICULUM INTEGRATION STRATEGIES

It's crucial that the subjects and approaches covered in the curriculum of aspiring educators reflect sustainable principles in order to prepare them for sustainability. NEP 2020 pushes teacher education programs to incorporate ethical thinking, environmental awareness, and real-world challenges in addition to traditional academics. This section describes how Indian pre-service teacher education curriculum incorporate sustainability.

4.1. Multidisciplinary Education

Interdisciplinary learning is one of NEP 2020's major concepts. This entails integrating information from several disciplines to comprehend challenging issues. For instance, future educators may utilize geography to illustrate the effects of climate change, science to explain its causes, and social studies to talk about how communities are impacted (Ministry of Education, 2020).

Pre-service instructors can assist students in seeing the wider picture by learning how to teach in this manner. They gain the ability to make connections between concepts and comprehend the connections between various aspects of life, such as the environment, economy, and society. Sustainability requires this kind of thinking (UNESCO, 2020).

4.2. Field-Based and Experiential Education

Experiential learning, or learning by doing, is encouraged by NEP 2020. This comprises practical exercises, field trips, and community initiatives in teacher education. For instance,

Prospective educators may go to a nearby farm to gain knowledge about organic farming.

They could arrange a tree-planting campaign for their neighborhood or campus. They might teach water conservation to kids in remote schools. Pre-service teachers gain a practical understanding of sustainability through these experiences. Additionally, they learn how to create comparable activities for their upcoming classrooms (Kumari, 2024).

4.3. Including Environmental Education

A crucial component of sustainability is environmental education. NEP 2020 promotes the inclusion of subjects including biodiversity, pollution, climate change, and conservation in teacher education programs. Pre-service teachers are taught how to teach these subjects in interesting ways, like: -

- Explaining the value of forests through narrative.
- Making lectures and posters about cutting less on plastic use.
- Setting up discussions about renewable and non-renewable energy.

These exercises assist aspiring educators in helping their pupils develop awareness and responsibility (Saha, 2025).

4.4. Utilizing Online Resources and Digital Tools

Modern schooling heavily relies on technology. NEP 2020 encourages the use of digital tools to increase accessibility and interactivity in education. Training on platforms that provide content on sustainability and environmental challenges, such as DIKSHA, SWAYAM, and e-Pathshala, is now part of teacher education programs (Mondal, 2024). Pre-service teachers are taught how to teach sustainability through games, movies, and simulations. For instance, kids can utilize a virtual lab to investigate the effects of deforestation or an online game to demonstrate how pollution impacts marine life. These resources make learning enjoyable and facilitate students' comprehension of difficult subjects (UNESCO, 2020).

4.5. Incorporating Indigenous and Local Knowledge

Sustainability encompasses both local and global solutions. The application of indigenous knowledge and cultural practices in education is encouraged under NEP 2020. Traditional farming techniques, water conservation strategies, and nature-respecting folktales are now taught in teacher education programs.

Pre-service teachers can make the connection between sustainability and students' daily lives by learning about these behaviors. Additionally, they support community-based solutions and aid in the preservation of cultural heritage (Kumari, 2024).

4.6. Innovation and Flexibility in Curriculum

Institutions can create adaptable curriculum that address regional needs thanks to NEP 2020. This implies that universities can design unique sustainability curricula or electives. Courses like "Education for Sustainable Development" are offered by some institutions. "Climate Change and School Curriculum" and "Environmental Ethics and Teaching." These programs equip aspiring educators

with more in-depth information and useful skills to advance sustainability in classrooms (Saha, 2025).

5. INNOVATIONS IN PEDAGOGY

The techniques and approaches teachers employ to support students' learning are referred to as pedagogy. NEP 2020 promotes the adoption of creative, student-centered teaching strategies in place of rote learning in teacher education programs. These innovative methods are particularly crucial for teaching sustainability because they encourage critical thinking, problem-solving, and community involvement.

5.1. Project-Based Methods and Active Learning

When students participate in the learning process rather than only listening to lectures, this is known as active learning. Future educators learn how to employ techniques like debates, group discussions, and practical projects during pre-service teacher education. These techniques support students' meaningful exploration of sustainability-related subjects.

In a project-based learning environment, for instance, students might be asked to:

- Examine local water contamination and offer remedies.
- Make posters to spread the word about climate change.
- Plan a recycling drive for the entire school.

These exercises aid students in comprehending real-world issues and honing their problem-solving abilities (Kumari, 2024). Pre-service teachers are taught how to direct these initiatives and relate them to the objectives of the curriculum.

5.2. Critical and Inquiry-Based Thinking Techniques

NEP 2020 encourages inquiry-based learning, in which students pose questions and investigate potential solutions via investigation and testing. This is particularly helpful for teaching about sustainability, which frequently deals with difficult and contentious topics.

Future educators are taught to motivate pupils to:

- Pose queries such as "Why is air pollution increasing?" or "How can waste be decreased?"
- Gather information from their environment.
- Examine various perspectives and reach well-informed conclusions.

Students who receive this kind of instruction develop into responsible and intelligent citizens (Saha, 2025). Additionally, it equips educators to address delicate subjects with tact and moderation.

5.3. Applying Local and Indigenous Knowledge

Sustainability involves both local and global answers to problems. NEP 2020 promotes the utilization of community wisdom and indigenous knowledge in

the classroom. Pre-service teachers learn how to include customs like rainwater gathering techniques utilized in villages into their lessons. Generations-old organic farming methods; folktales that instill reverence for the environment. Students can better connect with their culture and comprehend how sustainability has always been a part of Indian society because of these behaviors (Mondal, 2024). Teachers are also taught to value and respect local knowledge systems.

5.4. Teacher Identity and Reflective Practice

Reflective practice entails giving one's own instruction careful thought. NEP 2020 invites aspiring educators to consider their ideals, convictions, and experiences in the classroom. This is crucial for sustainability because it makes educators more conscious of their role and influence.

Pre-service teachers discuss ethical conundrums, keep journals, and provide comments to their peers. For instance, they may consider:

- How their instruction fosters equity and inclusivity?
- Whether they are motivating kids to take care of the environment?
- How they handle differing viewpoints in the classroom.

Teachers' dedication to sustainability is strengthened by this process, which also aids in their professional and personal development (UNESCO, 2020).

5.5. Pedagogy Enhanced by Technology

Technology has the potential to improve accessibility and engagement in sustainability education. NEP 2020 encourages the use of digital resources in the classroom. Pre-service educators acquire the following skills:

- Animations and films that illustrate environmental ideas.
- Online games and tests to assess understanding of sustainability.
- Virtual field tours to investigate ecosystems and conservation initiatives.
- Students can see issues and their solutions with the aid of these tools.

Additionally, they enable educators to reach students in faraway locations and modify lessons to accommodate various learning styles (Ministry of Education, 2020).

6. INSTITUTIONAL PRACTICES AND CAPACITY BUILDING

In addition to curriculum and pedagogy, institutions such as colleges, universities, and teacher training centers play a crucial role in preparing future educators. Institutions are urged by NEP 2020 to take a "whole-institution approach" to sustainability. This implies that sustainability should be implemented throughout campus operations, faculty development, and community involvement in addition to being taught in classrooms.

6.1. Whole-Institution Approach to Sustainability

A whole-institution approach means that every part of the teacher education institution supports sustainability. This includes:

- **Green Campuses:** Institutions install solar panels, manage waste responsibly, and conserve water.
- **Sustainability Clubs:** Student-led groups organize events like Earth Day celebrations, clean-up drives, and awareness campaigns.
- **Eco-friendly Policies:** Colleges reduce paper use, promote digital learning, and encourage sustainable transport.

These practices help future teachers see sustainability in action. When they experience it daily, they are more likely to carry these values into their own classrooms (UNESCO, 2020).

6.2. Training and Development for Faculty

Only educators who have a thorough understanding of sustainability can teach it. The necessity of ongoing professional development is emphasized in NEP 2020. Institutions now host webinars and workshops on sustainable teaching practices, climate change, and the SDGs.

Training on digital tools that assist sustainability education - Partnerships with NGOs and professionals to include real-world perspectives into teacher education. Teachers are trained to provide classes that encourage ethical decision-making, environmental consciousness, and critical thinking. This contributes to creating a solid basis for teacher education's sustainability (Kumari, 2024).

6.3. Community Involvement and Institutional Collaborations

Additionally, institutions are urged to collaborate with regional groups and communities. These collaborations support sustainable growth and give pre-service teachers access to real-world experiences. Working with farmers to comprehend organic agriculture is one example.

Collaborating with nearby educational institutions to implement environmental education initiatives. Working together on trash management initiatives with local governments. These kinds of exercises assist aspiring educators in making the connection between classroom instruction and community needs. Additionally, they encourage virtues like civic duty, empathy, and teamwork (Saha, 2025).

6.4. The Function of Quality Assurance and Accreditation

The creation of new accrediting systems with sustainability indicators is encouraged by NEP 2020. These methods verify if:-

- Sustainability-related subjects are covered in the curriculum.
- Students engage in sustainability-related activities.
- Faculty receive ESD training.

In order to achieve these objectives, accrediting organizations such as NCTE and NAAC are revising their rules. This guarantees that organizations are held responsible and encouraged to make improvements (Ministry of Education, 2020).

9. CONCLUSION

A significant chance to transform teacher education in India is provided by the

National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. It promotes a change from conventional, exam-focused instruction to one that is more inclusive, comprehensive, and value-based. The incorporation of sustainability into pre-service teacher training is at the core of this change. In line with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 4 on quality education, NEP 2020 fosters the growth of educators who are dedicated to improving the world in addition to having strong pedagogical skills. The principles and resources required to equip educators for this position are provided by Education for Sustainable Development (ESD). Pre-service teachers can learn how to motivate their pupils to think critically, act responsibly, and take care of the environment and society through interdisciplinary learning, experiential projects, digital resources, and community involvement.

In summary, integrating sustainability into teacher education is a moral and social obligation rather than only a policy objective. In order to guide the next generation toward a more equitable, inclusive, and sustainable future, future educators must be prepared. The vision is provided by NEP 2020; institutions, educators, and legislators must now make it a reality.

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