

Bridging the Divide: Teacher Training and Actual Classroom Teaching in Schools – Gaps and Strategic Interventions

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Abstract

Teacher education is widely recognized as a cornerstone of educational quality and reform. It is commonly acknowledged that the foundation of educational change and quality is teacher education. The realities of classroom teaching and pedagogical preparation continue to diverge notwithstanding organised pre-service and in-service teacher training programs. The gap between teacher preparation and real classroom practices is critically examined in this essay, with a focus on Indian schools. The study highlights important areas of disconnect, such as theory–practice misalignment, inadequate classroom management preparation, limited exposure to inclusive and diverse settings, assessment literacy gaps, and inadequate mentoring systems, by drawing on theoretical perspectives, empirical literature, and policy frameworks like the National Education Policy (2020). The study makes the case that teacher preparation is still too theoretical and not adequately grounded in real-world educational settings. Extended school-based residencies, organised induction and mentoring, reflective practice models, cooperative school-university alliances, and ongoing professional development systems are some of the strategic solutions it suggests. The report provides policy and institutional recommendations to improve student learning outcomes and teacher effectiveness by redefining teacher training as an ongoing, practice-oriented, and context-responsive activity.

Keywords: Teacher education, classroom practice, professional development, teacher preparedness, pedagogy, school education, NEP 2020

1. Introduction

Teachers play a pivotal role in shaping the intellectual, emotional, and social development of learners. The quality of education delivered in schools is deeply influenced by the competence, confidence, and contextual adaptability of teachers. Recognizing this, policy reforms globally emphasize strengthening teacher education systems. In India, the National Education Policy 2020 underscores teacher preparation as the “heart of the education system,” advocating for integrated, multidisciplinary, and practice-oriented teacher education programs.

However, despite reforms and expanded teacher training frameworks, a recurring concern persists: teachers often feel inadequately prepared for real classroom environments. Newly inducted teachers frequently report challenges in managing diverse classrooms, implementing competency-based pedagogy, addressing inclusive education needs, and navigating institutional expectations. This phenomenon indicates a substantial gap between teacher training programs and the realities of school teaching.

The purpose of this paper is threefold:

1. To examine the nature of the gap between teacher training and actual classroom teaching.
2. To analyze systemic and structural factors contributing to this disconnect.
3. To propose strategic, evidence-based interventions to bridge the divide.

The discussion is particularly contextualized within Indian school education, though many findings resonate globally.

2. Theoretical Perspectives Underpinning Teacher Preparation

Teacher education is informed by several theoretical traditions. The constructivist paradigm views learning as an active, context-bound process, requiring teachers to facilitate knowledge construction rather than transmit information. Shulman's concept of pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) emphasizes the integration of subject knowledge and teaching strategies. Experiential learning theory (Kolb) and Schön's reflective practitioner model stress learning through practice and reflection.

Despite these theoretical advancements, teacher education programs often emphasize conceptual understanding without sufficiently embedding these frameworks in lived classroom experiences. As a result, teachers may possess theoretical clarity but struggle with practical enactment.

3. Review of Literature

3.1 The Theory–Practice Divide

The theory–practice gap has been a longstanding issue in teacher education research. Studies indicate that pre-service programs often prioritize lectures, examinations, and theoretical assignments over immersive classroom engagement. Teaching practice components are typically short-term and highly supervised, offering limited autonomy.

Darling-Hammond (2017) argues that high-performing education systems integrate clinical practice throughout teacher preparation. In contrast, many programs in developing contexts compartmentalize theory and practice, resulting in fragmented professional readiness.

3.2 Classroom Management Challenges

Research consistently identifies classroom management as one of the greatest difficulties faced by novice teachers. While training programs may include modules on child psychology and behavior management, they rarely simulate real-life classroom unpredictability. Large class sizes, multilingual learners, and socio-economic diversity complicate classroom dynamics beyond what controlled micro-teaching sessions prepare teachers for.

3.3 Inclusive Education and Diversity

With increasing emphasis on inclusive education, teachers are expected to address diverse learning needs. However, practical exposure to inclusive classrooms remains limited. Teachers often report insufficient training in differentiated instruction, individualized education planning, and socio-emotional support mechanisms.

3.4 Assessment Literacy and Competency-Based Education

Recent curricular reforms promote competency-based assessment. Yet teachers frequently struggle with designing formative assessments aligned with learning outcomes. The gap lies not in awareness of assessment theories but in practical implementation and feedback mechanisms.

3.5 Technology Integration

Although ICT modules are included in teacher training curricula, digital integration remains superficial. Teachers may learn theoretical uses of technology but lack contextual understanding of how to blend digital tools with pedagogy meaningfully.

4. Nature of the Gap: Key Areas of Disconnect

4.1 Limited Authentic Classroom Exposure

Teaching internships are often brief and procedural. Pre-service teachers may deliver a limited number of observed lessons, reducing opportunities to experiment, fail, reflect, and improve. Real classroom challenges—such as time constraints, administrative responsibilities, parental interactions, and assessment pressures—remain underexplored during training.

4.2 Overemphasis on Theoretical Coursework

Teacher education curricula devote extensive hours to educational philosophy, sociology, and psychology. While these disciplines are important, insufficient linkage to classroom scenarios creates abstraction. Teachers may understand Piagetian or Vygotskian frameworks but find difficulty translating them into lesson planning strategies.

4.3 Contextual Mismatch

Many teacher education institutions operate in urban settings, while graduates may serve in rural or government schools. Training modules often do not adequately address multi-grade classrooms, resource constraints, or community engagement.

4.4 Weak Mentoring and Induction Systems

After graduation, teachers are frequently placed directly into full teaching responsibilities with minimal induction support. Structured mentorship is either absent or informal, leading to professional isolation.

4.5 Administrative and Documentation Burden

Teachers encounter significant non-teaching responsibilities, including record maintenance, examination duties, and co-curricular management. Training programs seldom prepare them for balancing pedagogical and administrative roles.

5. Methodological Framework for Empirical Investigation

While this paper is primarily conceptual and literature-based, an empirical study could adopt a mixed-method design involving:

- Survey of pre-service and in-service teachers
- Classroom observations
- Semi-structured interviews
- Analysis of teacher education curricula

Such methodology would generate quantitative and qualitative insights into teachers' perceptions of preparedness and challenges.

6. Discussion

The persistence of the training–practice gap suggests systemic misalignment. Teacher education is often structured as a one-time certification process rather than a continuum of professional growth. Moreover, accountability structures emphasize examination performance over pedagogical innovation, constraining teacher autonomy.

The gap is not merely individual but institutional. Universities, regulatory bodies, and schools function in silos. Without collaborative ecosystems, teacher preparation remains disconnected from lived school realities.

7. Strategic Interventions

7.1 Extended School-Based Residency Models

Teacher preparation should incorporate year-long residencies similar to medical internships. Continuous immersion fosters experiential learning and contextual competence.

7.2 Strengthening School–University Partnerships

Formal partnerships can enable joint curriculum design, co-supervision of internships, and research collaborations. Such models promote mutual accountability.

7.3 Structured Induction and Mentorship

Mandatory induction programs for novice teachers can ease transition. Experienced teachers should receive mentoring training to guide new entrants.

7.4 Embedding Reflective Practice

Teachers should maintain reflective journals and teaching portfolios. Institutions must cultivate cultures of peer observation and feedback.

7.5 Continuous Professional Development (CPD)

Professional learning must be ongoing, needs-based, and classroom-centered. One-time workshops should be replaced with sustained learning communities.

7.6 Contextualized and Inclusive Curriculum

Teacher education programs must include field exposure to diverse settings—rural schools, inclusive classrooms, multilingual environments—to ensure adaptability.

7.7 Assessment Reform Alignment

Teacher training must align with competency-based curricular reforms. Practical workshops on rubric design, formative feedback, and diagnostic tools are essential.

8. Policy Implications

Implementation of NEP 2020’s four-year integrated B.Ed. program offers an opportunity to redesign teacher education. Regulatory agencies must ensure:

- Quality assurance mechanisms for internships
- Accreditation standards focusing on classroom impact
- Mandatory mentoring frameworks

- Technology-enabled professional learning platforms

Policymakers should incentivize collaboration between higher education institutions and school systems to reduce fragmentation.

9. Implications for Primary Education

In primary classrooms, where foundational literacy and numeracy are critical, teacher preparedness is particularly significant. Teachers require specialized training in early childhood pedagogy, multilingual instruction, and socio-emotional development. Addressing the training–practice gap at this stage can significantly influence long-term educational outcomes. In primary classes more attention is required on developing the skills. As its foundation level and any gap at this level leads to faulty foundation impacting learning of little ones for lifetime.

10. Conclusion

The gap between teacher training and actual classroom teaching is a multidimensional challenge rooted in structural, pedagogical, and contextual factors. Bridging this divide demands a paradigm shift—from viewing teacher education as a certification requirement to recognizing it as an evolving professional journey. Practice-oriented training, sustained mentorship, contextual responsiveness, and institutional collaboration are key pillars of reform.

Strengthening the alignment between teacher preparation and classroom realities is essential not only for teacher effectiveness but also for achieving equitable and quality education for all learners. As education systems undergo transformation, teacher education must evolve accordingly to meet contemporary classroom demands. It is high time when we realise this gap and bridge it as it is creating a valley of discrepancy between theory and practice and actual outcomes of teacher Education. Teacher preparation programs are designed to equip educators with theoretical knowledge, pedagogical skills, and professional values. Yet, many teachers entering schools experience a marked disconnect between what they learned during training and the practical demands of real classrooms. This paper examines the persistent gap between teacher education and actual teaching practice, with particular attention to the Indian school context. Drawing on contemporary scholarship, policy discourse, and professional observations, the study identifies key areas of divergence, including limited experiential learning, insufficient mentoring, challenges in inclusive education, assessment implementation gaps, and contextual mismatch. The paper argues that teacher education must transition from a predominantly theory-driven model to a practice-embedded and context-responsive framework. Strategic recommendations are proposed, including extended clinical practice, structured induction systems, collaborative school–university ecosystems, and reflective professional learning communities. The paper concludes by asserting that sustainable educational reform is contingent upon narrowing the training–practice divide.



References

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