



Teacher Educators as Policy Intermediaries: Understanding and Delivering NCF-SE 2023-Aligned Training

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ABSTRACT

The successful implementation of the National Curriculum Framework for School Education (NCF-SE) 2023 depends critically on the quality of professional development provided to in-service teachers. Teacher educators, as frontline policy intermediaries, play a pivotal yet under-researched role in interpreting and delivering NCF-SE-aligned training. This mixed-methods study investigated 30 teacher educators from DIETs, SCERT resource groups, private training institutes, and Block Resource Centres across two districts of Uttar Pradesh. Using a Trainer Knowledge and Beliefs Survey, semi-structured interviews, and live training session observations, the study examined three dimensions: comprehension of NCF-SE 2023 key tenets, perceived preparedness to deliver competency-based training, and actual training practices.

Results reveal that while 80% of teacher educators claim familiarity with NCF-SE 2023, only 36.7% correctly identified the four-stage curricular structure, and just 23.3% could describe competency-based assessment without prompting. Training delivery remains predominantly lecture-based (73.3% of observed session time), contradicting the experiential pedagogy they are expected to model. Major barriers include inadequate trainer-of-trainers programmes (86.7%), lack of model lesson plans (76.7%), and institutional pressure to cover the syllabus rather than deepen understanding. The study concludes that teacher educators are willing but unsupported, and recommends a cascading quality-assurance model with practice-based toolkits.

Keywords: teacher educators, NCF-SE 2023, professional development, policy implementation, competency-based training, India

INTRODUCTION

Background

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 and its operational framework, the National Curriculum Framework for School Education (NCF-SE) 2023, represent a fundamental shift in India's educational paradigm. Moving away from rote memorisation and examination-centric instruction, the policy advocates competency-based, experiential, and holistic learning (Ministry of Education, 2023; Yadav, 2025).

The framework introduces a new 5+3+3+4 curricular structure, emphasises formative assessment, and mandates the development of 21st-century skills. However, as Fullan (2007) reminds us, educational change depends on what teachers do and think. Before teachers can transform classrooms, those who train them — teacher educators — must first internalise and model the new pedagogies.

Rationale of the Study

Teacher educators serve as "policy intermediaries" (Spillane et al., 2002) who interpret official guidelines, design training curricula, and deliver professional development to thousands of school teachers. Their understanding, beliefs, and instructional methods directly shape the quality of implementation at the grassroots level. Yet, research on teacher educators in the Indian context remains scarce. Existing studies focus largely on school teachers' challenges, leaving the trainers as a "black box" in the implementation chain. Preliminary evidence suggests that training programmes are often lecture-dominated, theoretical, and misaligned with NCF-SE 2023 principles (Patel & Desai, 2023).

This study asks: How do teacher educators interpret and deliver NCF-SE 2023-aligned training, and what barriers prevent them from effectively modelling the desired pedagogy?

Research Objectives

- To assess the level of understanding of NCF-SE 2023 among teacher educators.
- To examine their perceived preparedness to deliver competency-based, experiential training.
- To observe and document the actual training practices employed by teacher educators.
- To identify the systemic and individual barriers that hinder effective delivery.
- To generate evidence-based recommendations for improving trainer development programmes.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Teacher Educators as Policy Intermediaries

Spillane et al. (2002) conceptualised policy implementation as a process of "sense-making" in which frontline actors interpret policy messages through their existing cognitive frameworks. Teacher educators are no exception. Their prior training experiences, institutional pressures, and access to resources shape how they translate NCF-SE 2023 guidelines into training curricula. Kennedy (2016) suggests that without targeted professional development for trainers, policy messages become diluted or distorted at each cascade level.

Professional Development of Teacher Educators

Internationally, the importance of train-the-trainer (ToT) models has been recognised. In Rwanda, ToT programmes that included simulated teaching, peer feedback, and follow-up coaching significantly improved trainer confidence and practice (Williams, 2019). In India, Patel and Desai (2023) documented that most teacher educators receive only one-time, content-heavy orientations that fail to model the active pedagogies they are expected to use. Rai and K. (2025) similarly noted a training-of-trainers gap in India's teacher education system.

Competency-Based Training and Pedagogy Alignment

The NCF-SE 2023 explicitly advocates experiential learning, arts-integrated pedagogy, and competency-based assessment (NCERT, 2023, p. 45). However, a SCERT Delhi (2025) survey found that fewer than 30% of in-service training sessions used any form of hands-on activity. Sharma (2023) concluded that the education fraternity is not yet ready to adopt what is being offered — a finding that applies equally to trainers.

Barriers to Effective Training Delivery

Identified barriers at the trainer level include large batch sizes (often exceeding 100 teachers), lack of model training materials, inadequate infrastructure, and the absence of accountability mechanisms for training quality (Singh, 2021; Verma & Sharma, 2022). Prajapati (2025) added that many teacher educators suffer from digital

anxiety and lack confidence in using platforms such as DIKSHA. Institutional culture often prioritises coverage of content over depth of understanding.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

A convergent mixed-methods design (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) was adopted. Quantitative and qualitative data were collected simultaneously to triangulate findings and provide a comprehensive understanding of teacher educators' practices.

Sample and Sampling Technique

Using purposive and snowball sampling, 30 teacher educators were recruited who had conducted at least one NEP/NCF-SE-related training for in-service school teachers in the previous 12 months, drawn from four institution types. Sample profile: Mean age 41.2 years (SD 9.4), mean experience 14.7 years (SD 7.2), 53.3% male, 80% M.Ed. qualified, 20% Ph.D.

Table S1. Sample Distribution by Institution Type (N = 30)

Institution Type	n
District Institute of Education and Training (DIET)	12
SCERT Resource Groups	8
Private Teacher Training Institutes	6
Block Resource Centres (BRCs)	4

Instruments Used

Table S2. Data Collection Instruments

Instrument	Description	Purpose
Trainer Knowledge & Beliefs Survey (TKBS)	32-item questionnaire with Likert-scale, MCQ, and open-ended items. Measured NCF-SE knowledge, preparedness, beliefs, and barriers. Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.79-0.88$.	Quantitative data from all 30 trainers
Semi-structured Interview Guide	12 open-ended questions on policy interpretation, training design, challenges, and suggestions. Duration: 25–45 min each.	Qualitative depth from 12 trainers
Training Session Observation Protocol	Structured sheet recording training methods, duration, participant engagement, and NCF-SE pedagogy alignment. 8 sessions observed (48 hrs total).	Observed session coding

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Understanding of NCF-SE 2023 (RQ1)

Teacher educators' factual knowledge was assessed using 10 multiple-choice and 5 open-ended items. Only 23.3% reported having read more than 50% of the NCF-SE 2023 document; 66.7% relied on secondary summaries or PowerPoint slides provided by state authorities.

Table 1. Teacher Educators' Correct Responses to Key NCF-SE 2023 Concepts (N = 30)

Knowledge Item	Correct %	Most Common Incorrect Response
Four stages of school education (5+3+3+4)	36.7%	"Primary, upper primary, secondary, higher secondary" (50%)
Meaning of competency-based education	43.3%	"Students completing syllabus on time" (33.3%)
Pedagogical approach for foundational stage	56.7%	"Direct instruction and memorisation" (30%)
Three key principles of holistic progress card	23.3%	Only 7 could name formative, peer, and self-assessment
Difference between experiential and activity-based learning	30.0%	Used interchangeably (60%)
Integration of 21st-century skills — correct examples	50.0%	"Using computers" (40%)
Role of DIKSHA in NCF-SE implementation	66.7%	—
What is multidisciplinary education?	53.3%	"Teaching many subjects separately" (36.7%)
Purpose of formative assessment (open-ended)	40.0%	"To give marks for classwork" (43.3%)
NIPUN Bharat alignment with NCF-SE Foundation stage	60.0%	—

"I know there is a new framework, but frankly, the document is 600+ pages. We were given a two-day orientation. I understood the keywords — holistic, competency, experiential — but if you ask me to explain how to design a competency-based unit, I would struggle." — **TE-07 (Interview)**

Perceived Preparedness (RQ2)

Teacher educators rated their preparedness on a 4-point scale (1 = Not at all prepared; 4 = Well prepared). The lowest scores were recorded for the holistic progress card and assessing teacher learning, both of which are central to NCF-SE reform.

Table 2. Self-Perceived Preparedness to Deliver NCF-SE-Aligned Training (N = 30)

Preparedness Dimension	Mean (SD)	% Well Prepared (4)	% Not at All (1)
Explaining the rationale of NCF-SE 2023	2.9 (0.8)	26.7%	10.0%
Designing competency-based learning objectives	2.3 (0.9)	13.3%	23.3%
Modelling experiential learning in training sessions	2.5 (0.9)	16.7%	20.0%
Training teachers on holistic progress card	1.9 (0.7)	3.3%	46.7%
Integrating technology (DIKSHA, e-content)	2.8 (0.9)	23.3%	13.3%
Facilitating collaborative peer-learning	3.1 (0.7)	40.0%	6.7%
Adapting training for diverse school contexts	2.4 (0.8)	13.3%	26.7%
Assessing teacher learning during training	2.0 (0.8)	6.7%	36.7%

Scale: 1 = Not at all prepared · 2 = Somewhat unprepared · 3 = Somewhat prepared · 4 = Well prepared. Rows shaded in blue indicate critical gaps.

"We were told to use experiential methods, but our own training involved 200 people in a hall with a projector. I have never observed a model session of competency-based training. How can I model what I have never experienced?" — TE-15, DIET (Interview)

Actual Training Practices — Observation Findings (RQ3)

Eight training sessions (totalling 48 hours) were observed. Lecture dominated 100% of the sessions; practice-based assessment was completely absent.

Table 3. Observed Training Practices vs. Recommended NCF-SE Pedagogy (8 Sessions)

Training Activity / Method	Sessions Observed (%)	Avg. Duration (min)	NCF-SE Alignment
Lecture (trainer talking >20 min continuously)	100%	112 min	No
PowerPoint slides reading	87.5%	68 min	No
Showing video of classroom demonstration	37.5%	12 min	Partial
Hands-on activity (e.g., designing lesson plan together)	25.0%	18 min	Partial
Role-play or simulation of classroom situation	12.5%	8 min	Yes
Teachers practising formative assessment on each other	0%	0 min	No
Use of DIKSHA modules interactively	25.0%	15 min	Partial
Q&A session (teachers asking questions)	62.5%	10 min	Partial
Group discussion on applying concepts to own classrooms	50.0%	22 min	Yes
Feedback / assessment of teacher learning (quiz, micro-teaching)	12.5%	5 min	Partial

Field Observation (Session 4): The trainer explained competency-based education for 90 minutes using a prepared slide deck. Teachers were passive note-takers. When asked to provide an example of a competency from their subject, most could not. The trainer then moved to the next topic without checking for understanding.

Barriers to Effective Delivery (RQ4)

Table 4. Perceived Barriers to Delivering NCF-SE-Aligned Training (N = 30, Multiple Responses)

Barrier	n	%	Representative Quote
Inadequate ToT (train-the-trainer) programmes	26	86.7%	"We received only 2 days of orientation. That is not enough to understand such a paradigm shift." (TE-03)
Lack of model training materials / ready-to-use modules	23	76.7%	"There is no training kit with sample activities, videos, or assessment rubrics." (TE-11)

Barrier	n	%	Representative Quote
Time pressure — too much content in short training	21	70.0%	"The district says: finish NCF-SE, FLN, assessment, technology, and inclusive education in 5 days." (TE-19)
Large training batches (>50 teachers per session)	19	63.3%	"How can I facilitate group work or give individual feedback when I have 80 teachers?" (TE-22)
Own lack of confidence in competency-based methods	17	56.7%	"I rely on lectures because that is how I was taught." (TE-08)
No follow-up or mentoring support for trainers themselves	15	50.0%	"We train teachers, but no one retrains us. There is no refresher programme." (TE-29)
Poor digital infrastructure (venue, projector, internet)	14	46.7%	"Many BRCs have no working projector." (TE-13)
Resistance from teachers (negative attitudes)	12	40.0%	"Teachers ask — why change what has worked for 20 years?" (TE-05)

Espoused Beliefs vs. Enacted Practices

A striking gap was documented between what teacher educators believe and what they actually do in observed sessions:

Table 5. Espoused Beliefs vs. Enacted Practices (Survey N = 30; Observations N = 8)

Belief Statement	% Agreeing (Survey)	% Actually Doing (Obs.)	Gap
"Training should be interactive and activity-based."	93.3%	25.0%	-68.3%
"Teachers learn best when they practise teaching a concept."	86.7%	12.5%	-74.2%
"I use formative assessment during training to check understanding."	70.0%	12.5%	-57.5%
"My training aligns with NCF-SE 2023 pedagogy."	80.0%	12.5%	-67.5%

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Summary of Key Findings

- Limited conceptual understanding: Only one-third of participants correctly identified the 5+3+3+4 structure; even fewer grasped the holistic progress card or competency-based assessment (36.7% correct).
- Low preparedness for holistic assessment: Mean preparedness score of 1.9 on a 4-point scale; 46.7% felt 'not at all prepared' to train teachers on the holistic progress card.
- Lecture-dominated delivery: Over 73% of observed training time consisted of passive lecture — directly contradicting experiential pedagogy.
- Belief–practice gap of -68%: 93% believe in interactive training; only 25% actually incorporated any hands-on activity.

- Systemic barriers dominate: Inadequate ToT (86.7%), lack of ready-to-use materials (76.7%), and time pressure (70.0%) were the most frequently cited barriers.

DISCUSSION

The results reveal a troubling disconnect: teacher educators expected to usher in a pedagogical revolution cannot themselves demonstrate the practices they are supposed to teach. This "cascade failure" (Otieno et al., 2020) is not due to resistance — most trainers expressed genuine willingness to improve — but due to systemic neglect. The findings align with Fullan's (2007) observation that the meaning of educational change is often lost in transmission.

When trainers receive only superficial orientation (2 days for a 600-page framework), they naturally default to familiar lecture methods. The preparedness gap for holistic progress cards (mean = 1.9) is particularly alarming: if teacher educators cannot design or model such assessment, school teachers will never implement it. The absence of any observed practice-based assessment during training (0%) suggests that teacher learning itself is not being evaluated — attendance remains the only metric.

A positive finding is that teacher educators are not resistant to change — 80% expressed willingness to adopt new methods if given proper resources and support. This points to a solvable, systemic problem.

"I know activity-based training is better. But when I have to cover 20 topics in 2 days and the head office sends a fixed PowerPoint, I just lecture. It is survival mode." — **TE-02, Senior Trainer (Interview)**

CONCLUSION AND EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

This study demonstrates that teacher educators in Uttar Pradesh currently lack deep understanding of NCF-SE 2023, feel unprepared to deliver competency-based training, and predominantly rely on lecture methods that contradict reform principles. However, they express strong willingness to improve. The barriers are primarily systemic, not a matter of individual resistance. Without urgent intervention at the trainer level, the transformative vision of NCF-SE 2023 will remain unrealised in classrooms.

Policy and Practice Recommendations

For Policymakers	For SCERT / DIETs	For Institutional Leaders	For Quality Assurance
Replace 2-day orientations with a minimum 80-hour, practice-based, competency-focused ToT programme with mentored practice and periodic refreshers.	Develop open-source training toolkits in regional languages: model session plans, video exemplars, role-play scenarios, and rubrics for trainer performance.	Reduce batch sizes to a maximum of 30 teachers per trainer; establish peer observation and feedback systems for trainers themselves.	Shift monitoring from attendance registers to competency-based assessment of trainer performance and teacher learning outcomes.

Suggestions For Further Research

- Longitudinal studies: Track the same cohort of teacher educators over 2–3 years to measure changes in practices following targeted interventions.
- Impact studies: Examine whether improved trainer practices lead to measurable changes in school teachers' classroom behaviour and student learning outcomes.
- Comparative studies: Compare teacher educators across different states and training systems (government vs. private) to identify contextual factors.

- Design-based research: Develop and test a scalable ToT model (blended learning, peer coaching) and evaluate its effectiveness using controlled trials.
- Digital divide studies: Investigate how teacher educators in remote rural areas use (or fail to use) DIKSHA and other online resources, and design appropriate support mechanisms.

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