

Reimagining District Institutes of Education and Training as Centres of Excellence in the Higher Education Ecosystem

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Abstract

District Institutes of Education and Training (DIETs) were created in accordance with the National Policy on Education (1986) with the objective of serving as academically sound institutions for teacher preparation and for improving the quality of school education at the district level. Despite this vision, their role over time has become largely restricted to the conduct of routine in-service training programmes, which has constrained their potential contribution to educational scholarship, innovation and reflective practice. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 provides a timely opportunity to reassess and strengthen the role of DIETs by placing teacher education within the larger framework of multidisciplinary higher education. Within this context, the present article examines the scope for transforming DIETs into Centres of Excellence that are integral to the higher education ecosystem. Using policy analysis and theoretical perspectives on teacher education and institutional development. The paper highlights the need for structural reforms, academic restructuring and an expansion of institutional functions to support this transformation. The paper argues that a reconceptualised DIET can function as a district-level centre for knowledge generation and professional learning. By promoting reflective teaching, educational research, curriculum design and leadership development, such institutions can create stronger linkages between school education and higher education. This transformation is expected to contribute to sustained professional development of teachers and to the overall strengthening of the education system.

Keywords

DIET, Teacher Education, Multidisciplinary Higher Education Institutions, Centre of Excellence, NEP 2020.

Background:

The quality and effectiveness of an education system education within the larger higher education are closely linked to the clarity of vision, intellectual framework, the policy calls for a fundamental engagement and professional responsibility of its rethinking of institutions such as DIETs, encouraging teachers. Teacher education, therefore, extends them to evolve into academically active spaces beyond the acquisition of technical competencies; it is focused on research, knowledge creation and an academic and cultural process that influences how reflective professional practice. This paper knowledge is shaped, interpreted and communicated investigates the potential of repositioning DIETs as in educational settings. In India, District Institutes of Centres of Excellence within the higher education Education and Training (DIETs) were established ecosystem, highlighting the need for renewed under the National Policy on Education (1986) as academic purpose and an expanded institutional district-level institutions intended to support the scope.

decentralisation of elementary education. These institutes were designed to serve as academic support centres, fostering pedagogical guidance, reflective practice and ongoing professional learning among teachers. In practice, however, the role of DIETs has become increasingly limited. Many have come to be viewed largely as platforms for short-term training initiatives, rather than as institutions committed to sustained scholarly engagement and academic development. This shift has constrained their ability to contribute meaningfully to curriculum reform, educational research and leadership development within districts. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 presents a critical opportunity to re-examine this constrained institutional role. By integrating teacher

Present Structure and Functions of DIETs:

District Institutes of Education and Training (DIETs) presently operate as district-level academic bodies with the mandate of strengthening elementary education. Conceived as instruments of decentralisation, they were intended to localise academic planning and professional support, by aligning educational decision-making more closely with schools and community contexts. In their current functioning, DIETs act as intermediary institutions connecting state-level academic authorities with schools and other grassroots educational agencies. Their organisational design reflects an effort to integrate administrative coordination with academic

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responsibilities, while their primary functions focus on teacher education, school-based support and the improvement of educational quality.

Administratively, DIETs function under the oversight of the State School Education Department and receive academic guidance from the State Council of Educational Research and Training (SCERT). Each institute is headed by a Principal who is responsible for providing academic leadership, guiding institutional development and liaising with district-level authorities. The Principal is assisted by a team of Senior Lecturers, Lecturers and faculty members who undertake responsibilities related to teaching, training, research and field-based academic support. These academic roles are complemented by administrative and technical staff who manage institutional logistics, records and operational requirements. As Centres of Excellence (CoE), DIETs have been organised into distinct functional branches to address various dimensions of school education in a systematic manner. These branches commonly include:

1. Pre-Service Teacher Education

This branch is responsible for the preparation of prospective teachers through programmes such as the Integrated Teacher Education Programme (ITEP). It emphasises the development of pedagogical understanding, subject knowledge and reflective professional practice.

2. In-Service Teacher Education

This unit focuses on the ongoing professional learning of in-service teachers. It conducts orientation programmes, refresher courses, workshops, mentoring activities and other capacity-building initiatives for strengthening classroom pedagogy and updating professional competencies.

3. Direct Field Intervention and School Improvement (Supportive Supervision)

This branch maintains close engagement with schools by providing academic mentoring and supportive supervision. Its activities include school visits, demonstration teaching, context-specific interventions and collaborative efforts to address instructional challenges and enhance teaching-learning processes.

4. Planning, Management and Research

This unit undertakes district level educational planning, micro level analysis, data-based decision making and action research. Its role is to generate locally relevant evidence that informs planning processes and contributes to improved educational outcomes.

5. Curriculum and Learning Resource Development

This branch is engaged in the development of curriculum which is aligned with teaching-learning materials, academic support resources

and assessment tools consistent with prescribed learning outcomes and curricular standards.

DIETs were initially conceptualised as decentralised academic institutions designed to strengthen district-level capacities for teacher preparation, professional development and educational research (MHRD, 1989). But their evolution has often been hindered by limited academic autonomy, uneven availability of qualified faculty and weak institutional linkages with universities and other higher education institutions. These constraints have frequently curtailed their potential to function as potential centres of academic engagement.

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 marks a conceptual shift by redefining teacher education as a multidisciplinary field drawing upon insights from philosophy, psychology, sociology and subject disciplines (Government of India, 2020). This approach is synchronous with the international perspectives that conceptualise teaching as a research-informed profession rooted in ethical judgment, critical reflection and professional autonomy (Darling-Hammond, 2017).

The introduction of the Integrated Teacher Education Programme (ITEP) further underscores the need for institutions capable of sustaining rigorous academic standards and interdisciplinary engagement. With appropriate repositioning within the higher education framework, DIETs possess the institutional architecture necessary to undertake this expanded academic role.

Centres of Excellence as Intellectual Spaces:

In contemporary higher education literature, a Centre of Excellence is taken not only as an organisational title, but as an intellectually dynamic setting that supports sustained inquiry, innovation and scholarly exchange. Such centres are commonly characterised by academic freedom, consistent research engagement, interdisciplinary interaction and a strong emphasis on reflective and critical practice (Altbach et al., 2018).

When this understanding is applied to District Institutes of Education and Training (DIETs), their potential role extends far beyond the delivery of standardised programmes and routine training activities. They can be reconceived as district-level academic hubs that generate educational knowledge, facilitate linkage between theory and classroom practice and contribute to broader debates and reforms in education.

This reconceptualization demands for a movement away from a compliance-focused operational approach towards a knowledge-oriented institutional identity. In doing so, DIETs would be more closely aligned with the objectives of the National Education Policy 2020 and the expectations of the wider higher education environment.

Structural Transformation of DIETs:

Governance and Academic Autonomy

For DIETs to emerge as Centres of Excellence, their governance mechanisms must shift from an emphasis on procedural adherence to one that actively nurtures intellectual leadership and academic deliberation. Institutional decision-making should be grounded in scholarly dialogue, collective reflection and strategic academic planning, rather than being limited to administrative execution.

The formation of a Governing Council with significant academic participation can help articulate long-term vision and policy direction. In parallel, the establishment of an Academic Council would ensure curricular integration nurturing research integrity, uphold academic standards and provide guidance for scholarly pursuits.

Together, these governance reforms would reposition institutional leadership as an exercise in intellectual responsibility rather than bureaucratic oversight, thereby aligning DIETs with the academic culture and ethos characteristic of higher education institutions.

Reorganisation of Academic Domains

For DIETs to be effectively integrated within the higher education framework, their academic organisation must shift towards interdisciplinary domains that reflect the complex and evolving nature of education. Possible domains may include:

- Pedagogy and Teacher Professional Studies
- Educational Research and Field Engagement
- Inclusive Education and Equity Studies
- Curriculum Studies and Knowledge Construction
- Educational Leadership, Governance and Policy Analysis

Reconfiguring DIETs around such academic domains would enable them to conceptualise education as a socially embedded, culturally informed, ethically grounded and intellectually rigorous field of study. Moving beyond a limited training-oriented focus, this approach would encourage deeper academic inquiry, foster cross disciplinary collaboration and cultivate a stronger research oriented institutional culture.

Restructuring of District Institutes of Education and Training (DIETs):

Under the proposed restructuring framework, the State Council of Educational Research and Training (SCERT), Uttar Pradesh, shall function as the apex academic and regulatory authority for all District Institutes of Education and Training (DIETs) within the state. DIETs will operate under the academic supervision and policy direction of SCERT, while maintaining clearly defined functional and academic linkages with affiliating universities for the conduct of pre-service teacher education programmes. In sync with the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, the

institutional structure of DIETs shall be reorganised into two principal academic streams:

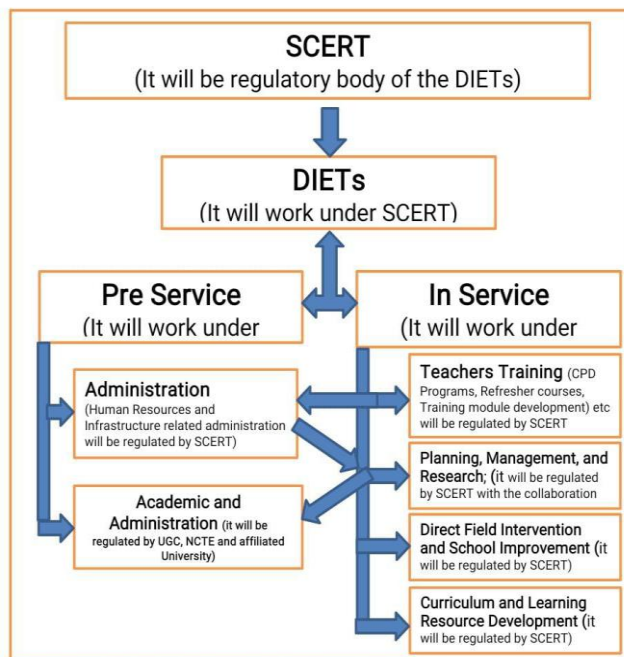
1. **Pre-Service Teacher Education**
2. **In-Service Professional Development and Academic Support**

This bifurcation reflects the conceptual distinction between initial teacher preparation and continuing professional engagement, while allowing for meaningful academic integration between the two domains.

A. Restructuring of the Pre-Service Teacher Education Department

The Pre-Service Teacher Education Department shall be strengthened and repositioned as the core academic unit responsible for implementing four-year integrated teacher education programmes (B.A. B.Ed. and B.Sc. B.Ed.). In this capacity, DIETs shall function as affiliated higher education institutions delivering degree programmes in accordance with national regulatory standards and university statutes.

Figure 1: Illustration of the proposed regulatory and functional structure of the Pre-Service Teacher Education Department within the DIET framework:



Academic Regulation

The academic functioning of the Integrated Teacher Education Programmes including curriculum design, admissions, examinations, evaluation and award of degrees shall be governed by the following regulatory bodies:

- The affiliating university
- University Grants Commission (UGC) norms
- National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE) regulations

This arrangement ensures that pre-service teacher education conducted at DIETs meets the academic design, disciplinary depth and quality standards expected of higher education institutions.

Administrative and Developmental Regulation

While academic matters will be regulated by the affiliating university and national bodies, administrative and developmental functions shall remain under the jurisdiction of SCERT, Uttar Pradesh. These responsibilities shall include:

- Infrastructure development and maintenance
- Human resource recruitment in accordance with UGC norms
- Appointment, promotion and service conditions of faculty
- Institutional policy direction
- Monitoring, evaluation and quality assurance

This dual regulatory structure balances academic credibility within the higher education ecosystem with state-level coordination, accountability and strategic oversight.

B. Three-Tier Regulatory and Governance Framework:

The governance of pre-service teacher education programmes within DIETs shall follow a clearly articulated three-tier structure:

1. SCERT, Uttar Pradesh (Apex Authority)

- Provides academic vision and long-term strategic direction
- Ensures alignment with NEP 2020 and state education priorities
- Oversees institutional quality assurance and academic standards
- Regulates administrative and developmental dimensions

2. Affiliating University

- Approves curriculum frameworks and academic regulations
- Conducts admissions in accordance with university norms
- Manages examinations, evaluation, moderation and certification
- Awards academic degrees

3. DIET

- Delivers teaching-learning processes
- Organises internships, school attachments and field engagement
- Conducts internal assessments
- Provides student mentoring and academic support
- Maintains infrastructure and institutional facilities

This multi layered governance model ensures clarity of roles, academic accountability and effective coordination among regulatory and implementing institutions.

C. Regulation of Academic Components

Regulatory responsibilities within the pre-service stream shall be distributed as follows:

- **Curriculum:** As per UGC, NCTE and university regulations
- **Admissions:** As per affiliating university norms
- **Faculty Recruitment:** In accordance with UGC eligibility criteria

• **Examinations and Evaluation:** Conducted by the affiliating university

• **Quality Assurance:** Guided by SCERT and monitored through Institutional Internal Quality Assurance Cells (IQAC), UGC and NCTE mechanisms

D. Faculty Recruitment and Professional Development

Faculty recruitment for the B.A. B.Ed. and B.Sc. B.Ed. programmes shall strictly adhere to UGC regulations. Existing DIET faculty members shall be academically strengthened through structured professional development initiatives, including:

- Faculty development programmes
- Research mentoring and supervision
- Academic collaborations with universities
- Exposure to interdisciplinary and humanities-based scholarship

SCERT shall play a facilitative and supervisory role in ensuring sustained academic growth, research engagement and professional enrichment of DIET faculty.

E. Examination and Evaluation

All external examinations, moderation processes and the award of degrees shall be conducted by the affiliating university. DIETs shall function as authorised examination centres and ensure strict compliance with university regulations, assessment protocols and standards of academic integrity.

In-Service Professional Development and Academic Support:

The In-Service wing of DIETs shall continue to function under the regulatory authority of SCERT, as reflected in the proposed structural model. Its conceptual orientation shall shift from routine training delivery to sustained professional and intellectual engagement.

1. Teachers' Training

In-service education shall be conceptualised as an ongoing process of professional inquiry rather than remedial skill acquisition. DIET Centres of Excellence can provide platforms for teachers to critically examine:

- Classroom practices
- Learner diversity
- Curriculum assumptions
- Assessment approaches

Such reflective engagement fosters professional autonomy, ethical judgment and continuous intellectual growth. While regulated by SCERT, this wing shall function in academic coordination with the Pre-Service Department and affiliating universities where appropriate.

2. Research

Research activities within DIET Centres of Excellence shall prioritise context-sensitive and practice-based inquiry, including:

- Action research
- Case studies
- Narrative and qualitative investigations
- District-level educational analysis

These research initiatives shall be undertaken collaboratively with the Pre-Service department and affiliating or partnering universities to ensure methodological and academic credibility. Such collaboration strengthens the relationship between theory and classroom practice while generating locally grounded knowledge.

3. Curriculum, TLM and Resource Development

Curriculum-related work within DIET Centres of Excellence shall extend beyond material production to include critical interpretation of national and state frameworks in relation to:

- Local languages and cultural contexts
- Community knowledge systems
- Learner experiences and diversity

While remaining under SCERT regulation, this function shall adopt a research informed and reflective approach, treating curriculum as a dynamic educational and cultural construct rather than a fixed syllabus.

4. Direct Field Intervention and School Improvement (Supportive Supervision)

This branch shall continue to engage closely with schools through academic mentoring and supportive supervision. Its activities shall include school visits, demonstration lessons, need based interventions and collaborative problem solving aimed at strengthening teaching-learning processes and institutional effectiveness.

Discussion

Transforming DIETs into Centres of Excellence requires more than organisational restructuring. It necessitates a cultural shift that values inquiry, dialogue and academic responsibility. In the absence

of such a transition, institutional reforms risk remaining procedural or symbolic. When supported by academic autonomy, professional trust and intellectual leadership, however, DIETs can emerge as vibrant knowledge institutions within the higher education landscape.

Conclusion

From a humanities oriented perspective, reimagining DIETs as Centres of Excellence represents an effort to reclaim teacher education as an intellectually grounded and socially meaningful enterprise. Such institutions can serve as critical bridges between policy and practice, theory and classroom experience and school education and higher education. In doing so, DIET Centres of Excellence serves closely the broader vision of NEP 2020, which seeks to build an education system rooted in knowledge creation, equity and reflective professional practice.

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