



Effectiveness of School-Based Internship in Teacher Education: A Study in the Indian Context.

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ABSTRACT

School-based internship constitutes the cornerstone of teacher education programmes, serving as the critical bridge between theoretical coursework and authentic classroom practice. In the Indian context, the significance of school internship has been substantially elevated through policy reforms, particularly the National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE) Regulations of 2014 and the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, which mandate extended internship durations and emphasise experiential learning. This article examines the effectiveness of school-based internship in teacher education within the Indian context through a comprehensive review of policy frameworks, empirical studies, and contemporary research. The analysis reveals that while school internship programmes demonstrate significant potential in enhancing pupil-teachers' pedagogical skills, classroom management capabilities, and professional development, their effectiveness is contingent upon multiple factors including the quality of mentoring, supervisory feedback mechanisms, school-university partnerships, and institutional preparedness. The study identifies persistent challenges such as inadequate mentoring, superficial feedback practices, weak school-university collaboration, and infrastructural constraints that undermine internship effectiveness.

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Drawing upon empirical evidence from studies conducted across various Indian states, the article proposes a multi-dimensional framework for strengthening school-based internship through structured mentoring, reflective practices, technology integration, and robust partnership models. The findings have significant implications for teacher education institutions, policymakers, and educational administrators in enhancing the quality of pre-service teacher preparation in India.

1. Introduction

Teacher education occupies a pivotal position in any educational system, as the quality of teachers directly determines the quality of learning outcomes. Recognising this fundamental truth, teacher education programmes worldwide have progressively emphasised the integration of theory with practice, placing school-based internship at the heart of pre-service teacher preparation. In India, the evolution of teacher education has witnessed significant transformations, particularly in the past decade, with school internship emerging as the most critical component of the Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) curriculum.

The school internship programme in teacher education provides pupil-teachers with the necessary skills along with hands-on experience in a real classroom setting. It is the stage where student teachers apply the theoretical knowledge and skills they had acquired from the institute of teacher education in real life situations. The National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE) has recognised this transformative potential and has consequently restructured teacher education programmes to accord greater emphasis to school-based experiential learning.

The significance of school internship in the Indian context has been further amplified by the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, which has laid a huge emphasis on the quality of teacher training, especially in the use of tools, technology and practicum or school internships. The policy envisions a transformed teacher education landscape where field-based training, internships in schools, and community engagement constitute strong components of the curriculum. The Integrated Teacher Education Programme (ITEP), a flagship initiative under NEP 2020, integrates theory, practice, and internships, preparing teachers for real classroom challenges.

This article aims to comprehensively examine the effectiveness of school-based internship in teacher education within the Indian context. It explores the policy framework governing school internship, analyses

empirical evidence on internship effectiveness, identifies persistent challenges, and proposes strategies for strengthening this critical component of teacher preparation.

2. Policy Framework for School Internship in India

2.1 Historical Evolution

School internship has been an integral part of teacher education programmes from their inception. However, for many years, the internship component remained relatively short and inadequately structured. The National Curriculum Framework for Teacher Education (NCFTE) 2009 envisioned school internship as one of the three major aspects of a teacher education programme. Prior to the reforms introduced in 2014, the internship period for B.Ed. students typically ranged from six to seven weeks. The NCFTE (2009) proposed that teacher preparation should be more participative, engaging and reflective, wherein teachers linked the theoretical inputs received in teacher education institutions be tested and validated in the classrooms. This duration was widely considered insufficient for pupil-teachers to develop meaningful teaching competencies and gain adequate classroom experience.

2.2 NCTE Regulations and Guidelines

A significant turning point in the history of teacher education in India occurred in 2014 when the NCTE revised the course structure of B.Ed. and M.Ed. programmes. As a result, the course duration of the B.Ed. programme was extended to two years. The school internship period for B.Ed. students was extended to 20 weeks, which previously ranged from six to seven weeks. According to NCTE regulations, student teachers are required to complete a sixteen-week internship during the second year of the B.Ed. course, fostering comprehensive development.

In 2016, the NCTE further emphasised the importance of school internship by releasing a comprehensive framework and guidelines document. This document, titled "School Internship: Framework and Guidelines," advocated securing the involvement of student-teachers in school internship for up to 20 weeks. The total period of field engagement was decided to be 20 weeks, with 14 weeks dedicated to teaching and related activities in the school and 2 weeks of engagement with the community. Out of the 16 weeks full-time school internship, two weeks shall be for community work, and the rest be divided equally between practice teaching and all school-based activities.

The NCTE framework clearly delineated the roles and responsibilities of each partner in the teacher education programme. Two important players in the school internship programme for the student teacher are

the mentor teacher in the school and the supervising teacher in the institute of teacher education. The guidelines recommend that student teachers spend 80% of their school internship in government schools and the remaining 20% in private schools, and they are advised to get exposure at secondary and primary level classes or secondary and higher secondary classes. The guidelines also emphasise the need for student teachers to undergo internship in urban, rural as well as tribal schools. There are sixteen specifically mentioned tasks ranging from observing classroom teaching of regular teachers to community work/survey which have to be completed by the student teachers during the period of school internship.

2.3 National Education Policy 2020

The National Education Policy 2020 represents a paradigm shift in India's approach to teacher education. The policy reinforces the significance of teacher education and mandates fifty hours of Continuous Professional Development (CPD) for in-service teachers annually. More significantly, NEP 2020 stipulates that by 2030, the minimum degree qualification for teaching will be a four-year integrated B.Ed. degree offered at multidisciplinary higher education institutions.

The policy emphasises that structured internship programmes for preparatory teacher education must be developed. The ITEP, introduced under NEP 2020, seeks to transform teacher education in India by integrating disciplinary knowledge with pedagogical training in a four-year dual-major degree. This integration ensures that prospective teachers gain substantial field experience through internships embedded throughout the programme duration.

2.4 National Curriculum Framework for Teacher Education

The National Curriculum Framework for Teacher Education (NCFTE) 2009, which continues to serve as the operative guide for teacher education in India, highlighted the significance of ICT along with e-learning. It emphasised that "There is a growing demand for ICT and it is included in the education. It has become more of a fashion statement to have computers or multimedia in schools, the result being that in spite of its potential to make learning liberating, its implementation is often not more than cosmetic". This observation remains pertinent to the school internship context, where the integration of technology often remains superficial.

3. Theoretical Foundations of School-Based Internship

3.1 Experiential Learning Theory

The effectiveness of school-based internship is grounded in experiential learning theory, which posits that learning occurs through experience and reflection. During the internship, interns are placed in a school and are expected to take up the responsibilities of a full-time teacher. This immersive experience enables pupil-teachers to apply theoretical knowledge in authentic situations, develop practical skills, and construct professional knowledge through reflection on practice.

3.2 Theory-Practice Integration

School internship serves as the crucial bridge between theoretical coursework and actual classroom practice. Student teachers get the opportunity to apply the techniques, methods, approaches and theories in actual classroom situations. This phase of the teacher education programme is also considered as the "make or break" phase for the student teachers. The integration of theory and practice during internship is essential for the development of competent and reflective teachers.

3.3 Socio-Cultural Theory of Learning

The socio-cultural theory of learning, particularly the work of Vygotsky, provides a valuable framework for understanding school internship. The internship experience occurs within a community of practice comprising pupil-teachers, mentor teachers, supervisors, and school administrators. Learning occurs through guided participation, scaffolding, and collaborative engagement. The mentor teacher, as a more knowledgeable other, plays a crucial role in facilitating the pupil-teacher's professional development.

4. Effectiveness of School Internship: Empirical Evidence

4.1 Impact on Professional Development

Empirical studies conducted in the Indian context have provided valuable insights into the effectiveness of school internship programmes. Research indicates that school internship programmes are helpful for enhancing the professional skills of student teachers. The internship experience enables pupil-teachers to develop competencies in lesson planning, classroom management, instructional delivery, and student assessment.

A study by Bisht, Singh, Maikhuri, and Kaur (2024) examined the effectiveness of school internship programmes for pupil-teachers seeking to shed light on supervisor observations and pupil-teacher development during the internship period. The study, conducted on 89 pupil-teachers from the Department of Education, Birla campus, H.N.B.G.U, Uttarakhand, using a self-made questionnaire in the form of a

rating scale, revealed that the school internship programme seems to be more effective for pupil-teachers who are female, are from the science stream, and have completed their post-graduation.

Mahdoom Ariffa and Raja Mohammed (2024) assessed the internship's impact on trainees' growth and examined the challenges they face across ten dimensions: classroom management, lesson planning, personal constraints, instructional objectives, infrastructure, workload, emotional aspects, mentoring, educational technology, and evaluation methods. Their study, involving 200 B.Ed. students from various colleges across Tamil Nadu, found that students highly applied their skills in their teaching practice.

4.2 Role of Mentoring and Supervision

The quality of mentoring and supervision significantly influences internship effectiveness. Central to the transitional phase of internship, the role of supervisory feedback significantly influences the professional development of student teachers. Research by Das and Sultana (2026) investigated the nature and frequency of interactions between university supervisors and student teachers before, during, and after classroom teaching sessions. Their findings indicated that although an important developmental role is played by supervisory feedback, its effectiveness is largely dependent on its clarity, timeliness, relevance, and the nature of the interaction between the supervisor and the student teachers.

Significant barriers to feedback implementation that emerged during their analysis were unclear and delayed feedback and lack of follow-up. The need for more collaborative, specific, and reflective feedback, supported by modelling suggestions and consistent mentoring, was emphasised by student teachers. The study called for more structured, empathetic, and responsive feedback practices that align with the developmental needs of student teachers and foster their growth as reflective and competent educators.

Roy, Agarwal, and Priyadarshini (2024) explored the school internship journey of two pre-service teachers in India enrolled in the B.Ed. programme. Their narrative inquiry, using Clandinin's three-dimensional conceptual framework, analysed reflection essays written by pre-service teachers across four semesters and reflection narratives written after completing one year of independent classroom teaching. The findings highlighted guided reflection and affective guidance in mentoring as important aspects in teacher preparation.

4.3 Challenges in Internship Implementation

Despite the policy emphasis and recognised importance of school internship, numerous challenges impede its effectiveness. Studies have documented various problems faced by student teachers during internship. At

internship schools, subject teachers were conspicuously absent from overseeing trainees, failing to provide guidance and lesson plan reviews. Practice instructions often lacked seriousness and quality, and most of the time, teaching practice of student-teachers was not observed during internship.

Sinha and Singh (2023) examined issues that need to be addressed, such as duration, implementing innovative strategies while teaching, regular feedback from school administrators, teachers and peers, and reflective activities on the teaching process during internship. They also documented ongoing practices such as the use of student case diaries and checklists to maintain diversity and inclusion records.

Research has also highlighted the dissonance among participants, raising concerns regarding the nature of partnership between university and school and its impact on interns' growth. Student teachers belonging to linguistic minority groups face challenges during internship caused by communication barriers. In many universities, student teachers are not encouraged to conduct co-curricular activities or participate in school-based activities other than classroom teaching.

4.4 Impact of COVID-19 on School Internship

The unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic posed considerable challenges to the prevailing school internship in teacher education institutions. School internship was badly stalled due to COVID-19. Most teacher education institutions in India were not adequately prepared to conduct virtual internships during the pandemic, as the concept emerged amid uncertainty. However, some states initiated alternative internship programmes. For instance, Odisha initiated an Alternative Internship Programme (AIP) for D.El.Ed students with the support of UNICEF, bridging the learning gap during school closure.

4.5 Technology Integration during Internship

Research has demonstrated that pre-service teachers benefitted significantly from ICT use during their school internship. The outcomes of various studies indicate that technology integration during internship contributes to quality training for pre-service teachers. Chaurasiya and Singh (2025) explored prospective teachers' preparedness and perceived experience towards using ICT during virtual school internship to attain inclusive classroom set-up. However, despite numerous policy documents recommending the use of ICT in teaching-learning processes, the content of ICT could not get a respectable place in the curriculum of pre-service teacher education programmes in the country.

5. Factors Influencing Internship Effectiveness

5.1 Quality of Mentoring

The effectiveness of school internship is substantially determined by the quality of mentoring provided to pupil-teachers. Mentors play a crucial role in guiding, supporting, and assessing student teachers. The NCTE framework clearly delineates the roles assigned to mentor teachers and supervising teachers. However, research indicates a gap between prescribed roles and actual practice. Many mentor teachers fail to provide adequate guidance, and supervising teachers often do not observe teaching practice during internship.

5.2 School-University Partnership

The nature and quality of school-university partnership significantly influence internship effectiveness. School-university partnership for effective teaching practicum experiences requires structured collaboration between teacher education institutions and schools. The school internship is a combined task of schools and teacher education institutions. However, the partnership between the school and teacher education institutions often remains "just ornamental". Strengthening this partnership through models such as Lesson Study, with its proven effectiveness in other countries, can go a long way in improving internship quality. Rastogi and Vaid (2022) suggested that lesson study can be adapted and followed in the school internship of pre-service teacher education programmes in India, leading to a win-win situation for both by equipping the prospective teachers with the skills to handle real classroom situations effectively under the mentorship of school teachers and facilitating the school mentors in their professional growth.

5.3 Duration and Structure

The duration of internship is a critical factor influencing its effectiveness. While the NCTE has mandated extended internship periods, research suggests varying opinions on sufficiency. Only 47 percent of experts reported that the duration of 6-10 weeks is sufficient for student teachers, while the majority (26.5 percent) opined that 15-20 weeks of school internship is sufficient for the four-year integrated programme. The structure of internship, including the distribution of time across different activities, also affects outcomes.

5.4 Institutional Preparedness

Teacher education institutions vary significantly in their preparedness to conduct effective internship programmes. Critics highlight implementation shortfalls such as overloaded syllabi, inadequate sequencing of courses, and insufficient infrastructure for internships. Institutional capacity to provide adequate supervision, establish school partnerships, and support student teachers during internship substantially affects programme effectiveness.

5.5 Student Teacher Characteristics

Research has identified student teacher characteristics as factors influencing internship effectiveness. The study by Bisht et al. (2024) found that the school internship programme seemed to be more effective for pupil-teachers who are female, are from the science stream, and have completed their post-graduation. These findings suggest that prior academic background and personal characteristics may influence how pupil-teachers benefit from the internship experience.

6. Strengthening School-Based Internship: A Proposed Framework

6.1 Structured Mentoring Programme

A structured mentoring programme is essential for enhancing internship effectiveness. This should include:

- **Selection and Training of Mentors:** Mentor teachers should be carefully selected based on their teaching experience, pedagogical expertise, and willingness to mentor. They should receive training in mentoring skills, including providing constructive feedback, facilitating reflection, and supporting professional growth.
- **Clear Role Definition:** The roles and responsibilities of mentor teachers and supervising teachers should be clearly defined and communicated to all stakeholders. Regular interaction between mentor teachers, student teachers, and supervising teachers is essential to help student teachers overcome challenges.
- **Affective Guidance:** Mentoring should include affective guidance, as highlighted by Roy et al. (2024), where guided reflection and emotional support are important aspects of teacher preparation.

6.2 Strengthening Feedback Practices

Feedback practices during school internship require substantial improvement. Research indicates that the effectiveness of supervisory feedback is largely dependent on its clarity, timeliness, relevance, and the nature of the interaction between the supervisor and the student teachers. Recommendations for strengthening feedback practices include:

- **Timely and Specific Feedback:** Feedback should be provided promptly after teaching sessions and should be specific, focusing on observable behaviours and providing concrete suggestions for improvement.
- **Collaborative and Reflective Feedback:** Feedback should be collaborative, involving dialogue between supervisor and student teacher. It should encourage reflection and self-assessment.

- Modelling and Demonstration: Supervisors should model effective teaching practices and demonstrate strategies, rather than merely providing verbal feedback.
- Consistent Follow-up: Regular follow-up should ensure that feedback is implemented and its impact is assessed.

6.3 Strengthening School-University Partnerships

Effective school-university partnerships are fundamental to successful internship programmes. The school internship is a combined task of schools and teacher education institutions. Strategies for strengthening partnerships include:

- Formal Partnership Agreements: Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between teacher education institutions and schools should clearly outline roles, responsibilities, and expectations.
- Joint Planning and Coordination: Regular meetings between teacher education institution faculty and school staff for planning, coordination, and review of internship activities.
- Lesson Study Approach: Adapting the lesson study model, with its proven effectiveness in other countries, can strengthen partnership and improve internship quality.
- Shared Professional Development: Joint professional development activities for mentor teachers and teacher educators can enhance understanding and collaboration.

6.4 Integration of Technology

Technology integration during school internship can enhance learning and preparation for contemporary classrooms. Pre-service teachers benefitted significantly from ICT use during their school internship. Recommendations include:

- Digital Tools for Lesson Planning and Delivery: Training student teachers in the use of digital tools for creating and delivering lessons.
- Virtual Observation and Feedback: Using video recording and online platforms for observation and feedback, particularly relevant in the context of blended and remote learning.
- Online Professional Learning Communities: Creating online platforms for student teachers to share experiences, resources, and seek support from peers and mentors.

6.5 Reflective Practice

Reflective practice is central to professional growth during internship. Student teachers should be encouraged to:

- **Maintain Reflective Journals:** Documenting daily experiences, challenges, and insights. Sehrawat and Roy (2020) found that reflective journals written by student-teachers showed various reflective aspects such as student-teacher relationship, teaching-learning process, self-assessment, teachers' responsibility, and classroom environment.
- **Engage in Collaborative Reflection:** Participating in group discussions and peer observation to reflect on teaching practice.
- **Use Structured Reflection Frameworks:** Employing frameworks such as Clandinin's three-dimensional narrative inquiry approach used by Roy et al. (2024) for systematic reflection.

6.6 Comprehensive Evaluation

Evaluation of internship should be comprehensive, formative, and developmental. The assessment should encompass multiple dimensions: classroom management, lesson planning, instructional objectives, mentoring, educational technology, and evaluation methods. Evaluation should involve multiple stakeholders including mentor teachers, supervising teachers, and student teachers themselves.

7. Conclusion

School-based internship constitutes the most critical component of teacher education in India, serving as the bridge between theoretical knowledge and professional practice. The policy framework established by NCTE and reinforced by NEP 2020 has significantly elevated the status and duration of internship, recognising its transformative potential in preparing competent and reflective teachers.

Empirical evidence from studies conducted across various Indian states indicates that school internship programmes contribute positively to the professional development of pupil-teachers, enhancing their pedagogical skills, classroom management capabilities, and professional competencies. However, the effectiveness of internship is contingent upon multiple factors including the quality of mentoring, supervisory feedback, school-university partnerships, institutional preparedness, and student teacher characteristics.

Persistent challenges such as inadequate mentoring, superficial feedback practices, weak school-university collaboration, and infrastructural constraints continue to undermine internship effectiveness. The COVID-19 pandemic has further exposed the vulnerabilities of existing internship models and highlighted the need for flexible, technology-enabled approaches.

The proposed framework for strengthening school-based internship emphasises structured mentoring, strengthened feedback practices, robust school-university partnerships, technology integration, reflective practice, and comprehensive evaluation. Implementation of this framework requires commitment from all stakeholders—teacher education institutions, schools, policymakers, mentor teachers, and student teachers themselves.

As India moves towards the implementation of NEP 2020 and the four-year integrated teacher education programme, the importance of high-quality school-based internship will only increase. It is imperative that policymakers, educational administrators, and teacher educators work collaboratively to address the challenges and realise the full potential of school internship in preparing the next generation of teachers for India's diverse and dynamic classrooms.

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