Interpretation of Assessment Data: The Load-Bearing Teacher Competency in NEP 2020's Assessment Reform

Vivek Gupta[1], Prof. (Dr.) Tania Gupta[2]

[1]Research Scholar, K.R. Mangalam University, Gurugram, Haryana, India

[2]Dean, School of Education, K.R. Mangalam University, Gurugram, Haryana, India

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ABSTRACT

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 repositions assessment as a means of improving teaching and learning, a shift that presupposes teachers who can interpret assessment data and act on it. This paper asks how three national documents, NEP 2020, the National Curriculum Framework for School Education (NCF-SE) 2023 and the National Professional Standards for Teachers (NPST) 2023, state and specify this competency, and what they leave unspecified. Using qualitative document analysis (Bowen, 2009), the study coded passages from each document on a three-level scheme (implied, named, specified), borrowing the content-focus idea of Desimone (2009) as a limited heuristic and reading the results through the sensemaking account of Spillane et al. (2002). The analytical finding is a progression in specificity: NEP 2020 section 4.34 states a purpose that presupposes interpretation, NCF-SE 2023 section 3.4.1 names interpretation and analysis as steps before use, and NPST sub-domain 8.2 sets out stage-wise descriptors. The analysis also finds gaps: no document defines what interpreting assessment data involves, NEP 2020's provisions on teacher preparation do not name it, and NCF-SE 2023 uses the language of data in its school-process section rather than in its assessment sections. The paper argues that the progression supports treating the competency as a priority in teacher education, while the gaps define work that programme designers must do.

Keywords: NEP 2020; assessment for learning; assessment data literacy; NPST; NCF-SE; teacher professional development

INTRODUCTION

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 (Ministry of Human Resource Development [MHRD], 2020) marks a transformative shift in how the school education system in India understands the purpose of assessment. For decades, assessment in schools has been closely connected with summative examinations oriented to certification and progression, a trend linked with an emphasis on rote memorization over conceptual understanding (MHRD, 2020, p. 17). NEP 2020 explicitly aims to move away from this trend. In Section 4.34, it states that the primary purpose of assessment will be for learning, directing that assessment help "the teacher and student, and the entire schooling system, continuously revise teaching-learning processes to optimize learning and development for all students" (MHRD, 2020, p. 17).

This shift carries a consequential implication, which this paper argues is central to whether the transformation succeeds in practice. Assessment can inform and improve teaching only if someone interprets what an assessment result means and acts on that interpretation. A test score, a rubric rating, or a classroom observation is, by itself, inert; it becomes a tool of learning only through an act of interpretation that connects the evidence to a pedagogical decision in the classroom. Without this intermediary step, the distinction NEP 2020 draws between assessment of learning and assessment for learning risks collapsing back into the certification-oriented practice the policy explicitly seeks to move beyond. A teacher can administer a well-designed formative assessment and still use it only to assign a grade, if the competence to interpret and act on what it

reveals is not exercised. The interpretation of assessment data is therefore treated here as the load-bearing competency of NEP 2020's assessment reform. It is the improvement mechanism on which the reform relies on and does not function without it.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The idea that assessment improves learning only when its evidence is used has a long research history. Black and Wiliam's (1998) review of research on classroom formative assessment concluded that innovations designed to strengthen the frequent feedback students receive about their learning yield substantial learning gains. Later work on teachers' data literacy gives this use a more precise shape. Mandinach and Gummer (2016) lay out the knowledge, skills and dispositions teachers need to use data effectively and responsibly, including turning data into information and information into decisions, and combine data skills with content and pedagogical content knowledge; they conclude with a call to schools of education to integrate data literacy into teacher preparation. Datnow and Hubbard's (2016) review of a decade of international research found that teachers' capacity for and beliefs about data use are shaped within their professional communities and in training, that efforts to build capacity often fall short of their goals and that some teachers feel they lack the ability to use data to inform instruction. Prenger and Schildkamp (2018) found, among Dutch primary teachers, that perceived control, instrumental attitude and intention significantly influenced data use, and Hase and Kuhl (2024), in a systematic review of 11 studies of teachers' use of data from digital learning platforms, report that research on how teachers use such data for instructional design remains exploratory.

Research in India has approached the question mainly through teachers' beliefs, practice and perceptions. Brown et al. (2015) surveyed secondary school teachers, predominantly in private schools, on the purposes and practices of assessment under the 2005 curriculum framework. Teachers most strongly endorsed the improvement purpose of assessment, and this endorsement was the strongest predictor of self-reported diagnostic practice (changing teaching because of what was learned about students); the authors also concluded that continuous and comprehensive evaluation was being used predominantly as cumulative, summative evaluation and noted a complicated relationship between having time to finish the curriculum and using assessment diagnostically. Varier and Mehdi (2019) conducted a content analysis of India's 2005 national curriculum framework, assessment policy and capacity-building documents, using a model of teachers' assessment literacy in practice, and reported preliminary findings that policy and practice focus largely on developing teachers' knowledge of sound assessment, while critical reflection and teacher dispositions toward assessment are not articulated. Killimangalam et al. (2023), in a qualitative case study of 11 teachers in Delhi Board of School Education schools, found that teachers reported changing their teaching strategies on the basis of assessment results while also expressing a need for further training and support, and they call for further research linking teacher professional development to data-informed teaching strategies. Chakraborty et al. (2024), in a case study of nine teachers' perceptions of formative assessment for students with disability, report that teachers described using assessment data to change their strategies but had not received specific training on assessing the learning of these students. Kulal et al. (2024), in a mixed-methods evaluation of NEP 2020 among students, teachers and experts in Karnataka colleges, report that teachers believed they needed further capacity building and training to deliver the range of subjects and skills the policy envisions; that study concerns higher education. Within the sources consulted for this paper, none of these studies examines how the post-2020 national documents themselves state and specify the competency of interpreting assessment data; the one document analysis among them concerns the 2005 framework. That is the gap this paper addresses.

This paper maps how the competency of interpreting assessment data is treated across three national documents: NEP 2020 (MHRD, 2020), which establishes the vision of assessment reform; the NCF-SE 2023 (National Council of Educational Research and Training [NCERT], 2023), which elaborates it as a pedagogical purpose; and the NPST (National Council for Teacher Education [NCTE], 2023), which specifies it as an operational teacher competency. Read together, the documents show a progression in specificity from one stage to the next. The paper's purpose is to make this progression explicit, to identify what the documents

leave unspecified, and to consider what both imply for how assessment data interpretation should be prioritized within teacher education and professional development.

Research Questions

The paper is guided by the following three research questions:

- How does each of the three documents state, define or specify the competency of interpreting assessment data?
- Does the treatment of the competency become more specific from the policy document (NEP 2020) to the curriculum framework (NCF-SE 2023) to the professional standard (NPST)?
- What gaps, inconsistencies or tensions in this treatment do the documents leave for teacher education and professional development?

Conceptual Framing for the Competency of Assessment Data Interpretation

Two ideas anchor the analysis of the competency of assessment data interpretation in the documents. The first is the idea of a policy cascade, used here only as a descriptive device for the documentary hierarchy: a policy document sets vision and direction, and the frameworks and standards it authorizes are expected to operationalize that vision (NEP 2020 section 5.20 provides for NPST, and NCF-SE 2023 describes itself as continuing the journey begun by NEP 2020). Against this hierarchy, it is to be expected that NEP 2020's section 4.34 states the purpose of assessment in general terms. The cascade is not, however, a claim about how policy is implemented. Spillane et al. (2002) argue that implementation is a process of sensemaking: implementing agents construct meaning from policy signals through the interaction of their existing knowledge, beliefs and attitudes with their situation, so that what a policy means in practice is constructed locally and is not simply passed down. On this view, the explicitness of a policy text matters, because what a document leaves unspecified is left to be interpreted by teachers and teacher educators. This gives the analysis a reason to look for gaps as well as for convergence.

The second is a heuristic for judging whether a competency is being given priority in a text, rather than mentioned only in passing. Desimone's (2009) conceptual framework identifies content focus, attention to subject matter and to how students learn it, as one of five core features of effective professional development, alongside active learning, coherence, duration and collective participation. The framework was designed for studying professional development and not for judging policy texts, so specificity in a document is not taken here as a cause of effective development. It borrows only the content-focus idea, a competency is more specifically attended to when a document names it, describes what it involves and states what a teacher is expected to do. This is operationalized in the three-level coding scheme described in the Method and the result is treated as an indication of textual priority, not as evidence of effect. Together, these ideas frame the analytic task: to trace whether the assessment for learning vision of NEP 2020 is carried through NCF-SE 2023 and NPST with increasing specificity (Research Questions 1 and 2), and to identify what remains unspecified at each stage and is therefore left to local sensemaking (Research Question 3).

Method: A Document Analysis Approach

This paper uses qualitative document analysis (Bowen, 2009), an iterative combination of skimming, thorough reading and interpretation, to trace a single competency, assessment data interpretation, across three national educational documents. The documents were chosen because each occupies a different, linked position within India's education policy ecosystem: NEP 2020 (MHRD, 2020), the policy document that establishes the assessment for learning vision (section 4.34) and, in section 5.20, provides for national professional standards for teachers; NCF-SE 2023 (NCERT, 2023), the curricular framework that elaborates the purposes and principles of assessment (sections 3.4.1 to 3.4.4); and NPST (NCTE, 2023), the standards document that specifies teacher competencies across career stages, including under its Assessment of, for and as learning domain (standard 2, domain 8). As Bowen (2009) cautions, documents are produced for purposes other than research, so the analysis reads them as statements of intent and not as evidence of practice.

The analytic procedure had four steps:

- **Locating passages**: Each document was searched in full text for the word stems "assess," "data," "interpret," "analys," "evidence" and "insight"; every hit was read in context, and the passages describing teachers' use of information about student learning were retained.
- **Coding each retained passage on a three-level scheme**: Level 1 (implied), where the passage's purpose presupposes interpretation but does not name it; Level 2 (named), where the passage names interpretation, analysis or "data and its interpretation" as an act without performance descriptors; and Level 3 (specified), where the passage sets out the competency as a distinct strand with descriptors of what a teacher is expected to do. This scheme is how the content-focus idea of Desimone (2009) was operationalized.
- **Comparing the coded passages**: Comparison across the three documents (Table 1) to describe the progression in specificity.
- **Noting for each document**: Note of what the passages leave unspecified, including terminology, scope, stage logic and links to teacher preparation, in order to identify gaps and tensions.

A passage was coded at the highest level that its wording supports and not above it. The scheme is an interpretive device developed for this study and has not been validated beyond it; a different reader might code borderline passages differently. Each coded passage is quoted with its page number in the Analysis and in Table 1. This is a textual, policy-document analysis rather than an empirical study of teacher knowledge, perception, or classroom practice, so its claims are limited to what the documents state and do not extend to how assessment data interpretation is understood or practised by teachers.

The scope of this paper was bounded as follows. Chapter 5 of NEP 2020 (on teachers) was read for passages on teacher preparation for assessment, in particular sections 5.15 (continuous professional development), 5.20 (NPST) and 5.24 (B.Ed. programmes), as the paper discusses what the documents say about the competency of interpretation of assessment data while the rest of that chapter, which concerns recruitment, service conditions and career management, was not analysed. On the similar lines, only the relevant chapters of NCF-SE and NPST were analysed. Other materials related to assessment reform such as the guidance of the PARAKH or the Holistic Progress Card framework were not analysed, as their stated purposes aligned with system-level assessment standards and with reporting to parents. Extending the analysis to them would shift the question from how the competency is specified for teachers to how assessment is organized and reported across the system. Where the three core documents refer to these provisions, the references are noted but the external documents are not analysed. The selection bounds the study: the excluded materials may treat the competency differently.

Analysis

NEP 2020: Establishing the Vision

NEP 2020 section 4.34 states that the aim of assessment will shift from one that is "summative and primarily tests rote memorization skills to one that is more regular and formative, is more competency-based, promotes learning and development for our students, and tests higher-order skills" (MHRD, 2020, p. 17). It adds: "The primary purpose of assessment will indeed be for learning; it will help the teacher and student, and the entire schooling system, continuously revise teaching-learning processes to optimize learning and development for all students" (MHRD, 2020, p. 17). This represents a marked departure from an assessment culture that the policy associates with rote memorization and summative testing. The operative claim in section 4.34 is that assessment results are meant to change what happens in the classroom next; the verb is "revise," not "record" or "report."

This claim carries an implicit but unavoidable requirement: revision presupposes interpretation. A teacher cannot revise a teaching-learning process on the basis of an assessment result without first making sense of what that result indicates about student learning. In terms of the coding scheme, section 4.34 is at Level 1 (implied): it contains neither the word "data" nor any term for teachers' interpretation or analysis of results,

and the capacity it presupposes is not defined. This is consistent with the appropriate scope of a policy document: NEP 2020 establishes that this capacity matters and leaves its specification to the frameworks that follow. Three further provisions of NEP 2020 bear on the competency. Section 4.35 refers to "learning data," but in connection with AI-based software that students could use to track their own growth (MHRD, 2020, p. 18). Section 5.15 requires that continuous professional development "systematically cover the latest pedagogies regarding foundational literacy and numeracy, formative and adaptive assessment of learning outcomes, competency-based learning, and related pedagogies" (MHRD, 2020, p. 22), and section 5.24 lists "multi-level teaching and evaluation" among the content of B.Ed. programmes (MHRD, 2020, p. 23). None of these three provisions names the interpretation of assessment data by teachers.

NCF-SE 2023: Elaborating the Pedagogical Mandate

NCF-SE 2023 takes up the task of elaboration. Section 3.4.1 describes assessment in the classroom as "any process of gathering information about student learning that can be interpreted, analysed, and used by the Teacher (and others, where relevant) for guiding the teaching-learning process, aggregating student learning at relevant junctures, and reporting student progress over time" (NCERT, 2023, p. 116). Section 3.4.2 defines assessment for learning as "evidence of student learning gathered by the Teacher that provides inputs to guide teaching-learning processes" and adds that "Teachers who have a good sense of where students in class do well and where they struggle can take more informed decisions about their pedagogical practices" (NCERT, 2023, p. 116). Section 3.4.4(b) states that collecting such evidence "helps Teachers understand the effectiveness of their pedagogy in terms of what the students have understood, what needs to be worked on further, which methods of teaching work, what kinds of resources work" (NCERT, 2023, p. 117). Crucially, the wording of section 3.4.1 places "interpreted" and "analysed" before "used": evidence is first interpreted and analysed, and only then used to guide instruction. This makes explicit what NEP 2020 leaves implicit, that a teacher's engagement with assessment evidence has an interpretive stage of its own, logically and temporally prior to any resulting instructional action. Section 3.4.1 is coded Level 2 (named); section 3.4.2, which describes the outcome (informed decisions) and not the act, is coded Level 1.

In doing so, NCF-SE 2023 performs the elaborative function a curricular framework is expected to perform: it takes the general commitment of NEP 2020 to assessment for learning and translates it into pedagogical language specific enough to identify interpretation as a distinct professional act, without yet specifying it as an operational competency with performance indicators, a task that falls, appropriately, to NPST. The framework also uses the language of data in a different place. In its section on school processes (Part D, Section 2.3.3), it states that "Progress review, planning, and reporting- all depend on authentic data and its interpretation" (NCERT, 2023, p. 539) and that "School Principals and Teachers need to regularly study the student learning data to understand the status and take requisite steps in a timely manner" (NCERT, 2023, p. 540).

The same passage cautions that data management "should aid student learning efforts rather than becoming an undue burden for Teachers" (NCERT, 2023, p. 540). In the passages read, the assessment sections and the school-process section thus speak of related activity in two vocabularies (evidence and information; data and its interpretation) without an explicit link between them.

NPST: Specifying the Operational Competency

NPST completes this progression. Standard 2, Knowledge and Practice, includes Domain 8, "Assessment of, for and as learning," which is divided into three sub-domains: Assessment Strategies (SD 8.1), Assessment Data (SD 8.2), and Communication and Feedback (SD 8.3) (NCTE, 2023, pp. 30–31). The Assessment Data sub-domain specifies, in concrete and actionable terms, what NCF-SE 2023 names only as "interpreted" and "analysed." Its three stage headings, which correspond to NPST's three career stages (Proficient, Advanced and Expert Teacher; NCTE, 2023, pp. 10–11), read: "Derive insights on students, from assessment data"; "Use assessment data to set targets and create learning plans"; and "Leverage data from multiple sources to form a consolidated view of student/ class performance and support learning through appropriate remediation" (NCTE, 2023, p. 31).

Four indicators elaborate them, for example 8.2.1, "Uses assessment data to identify and address common issues and alternative conceptions in classroom learning," and 8.2.3, "Synthesizes information on student learning collected using multiple assessments to identify areas of improvement in instruction and planning" (NCTE, 2023, p. 31).

Applying the coding scheme, SD 8.2 is at Level 3 (specified): Assessment Data is a named sub-domain, separate from Assessment Strategies, with indicators that describe a progression from using data to identify common issues, to modifying lesson plans and pedagogy, to synthesizing information from multiple assessments and planning specific interventions. NPST, in other words, does not merely repeat the language of NEP 2020 or NCF-SE 2023; it operationalizes it, giving teacher educators and CPD designers a concrete basis for building this competency deliberately rather than incidentally.

The specification is nevertheless compact. The sub-domain has four indicators across three stages; the two indicators at the Expert stage (8.2.3 and 8.2.4) overlap in wording, both referring to "areas of improvement in instruction and planning"; and the term "insights" in the first stage heading is not defined.

A Converging Architecture

Read together, section 4.34 of NEP 2020, sections 3.4.1 and 3.4.2 of NCF-SE 2023, and sub-domain 8.2 of domain 8 in NPST's standard 2 describe a single competency moving through three levels of specification: from an implied purpose in NEP 2020, through a named pedagogical act in NCF-SE 2023, to a specified, stage-wise standard in NPST (Table 1).

At no stage does the competency disappear or get displaced by other priorities, and each stage adds precision the previous stage did not supply. This progression is the analytical finding of this paper's document analysis. It is consistent with the cascade that the hierarchy of the documents would lead one to expect, but it is a finding about the texts and not about how they are taken up in practice.

Table 1. Coded passages on assessment data interpretation across the three documents

Document and location	Key wording	Coding level	Left unspecified in the text
NEP 2020, Section 4.34	"continuously revise teaching-learning processes to optimize learning and development for all students"	Level 1 (implied)	Who interprets results; what interpretation involves; how teachers are prepared for it
NEP 2020, Sections 5.15 and 5.24	CPD to cover "formative and adaptive assessment of learning outcomes" B.Ed. to include "multi-level teaching and evaluation"	Not coded (competency not named)	Interpretation of assessment data is not named in either provision
NCF-SE 2023, Section 3.4.1	information "that can be interpreted, analysed, and used by the Teacher (and others, where relevant)"	Level 2 (named)	Performance descriptors; how interpretation is learned; who the "others" are
NCF-SE 2023, Section 3.4.2	"Teachers who have a good sense of where students in class do well and where they struggle can take more informed decisions"	Level 1 (implied)	The act by which teachers acquire this sense is not described
NCF-SE 2023, Part D, Section 2.3.3	"authentic data and its interpretation" "regularly study the student learning data"	Level 2 (named), in a school-process context	No explicit link to the assessment sections; responsibility shared by Principals and Teachers; caution about burden
NPST, SD 8.2 Assessment Data	"Derive insights on students, from assessment data" "Leverage data from multiple sources to form a consolidated view"	Level 3 (specified)	"Insights" undefined; kinds and quality of data not stated; 8.2.3 and 8.2.4 overlap

Gaps and Tensions

The progression in Table 1 is not the whole picture. Read for what they leave unspecified, the documents show five gaps or tensions, which matter because, on a sensemaking view (Spillane et al., 2002), what a document does not specify is left to be interpreted locally.

First, in the passages analysed, no document defines what interpreting assessment data involves. NEP 2020 presupposes it, NCF-SE 2023 names it, and NPST lists what teachers should do with data, but none states what makes an interpretation sound: for example, how a teacher should weigh a single test score against several sources, or when a pattern in class results is reliable enough to act on. NPST's heading "Derive insights on students, from assessment data" is the closest the documents come, and "insights" is not defined (NCTE, 2023, p. 31).

Second, the vocabulary changes between documents. NEP 2020 Section 4.34 speaks of the purpose of assessment; the assessment sections of NCF-SE 2023 speak of "information" and "evidence"; its school-process section and NPST speak of "data." The phrase "assessment data," which names the competency in this paper, appears in the documents analysed only in NPST. The documents may be describing the same activity, but a reader moving across them must infer that they are.

Third, responsibility for interpretation is distributed unevenly. NEP 2020 names "the teacher and student, and the entire schooling system" as users of assessment (MHRD, 2020, p. 17); NCF-SE 2023 section 3.4.1 adds "others, where relevant," and its school-process section assigns the study of learning data to Principals and Teachers (NCERT, 2023, p. 540); NPST addresses the individual teacher and frames its indicators at the level of the student and the class (NCTE, 2023, p. 31). NEP 2020 also provides for system-level data through a sample-based National Achievement Survey (MHRD, 2020, p. 32). How classroom interpretation and system-level data are expected to relate is not set out.

Fourth, the documents do not connect the competency to a route for developing it. NEP 2020's provisions on teacher preparation mention assessment pedagogy in CPD (Section 5.15) and "multi-level teaching and evaluation" in B.Ed. programmes (Section 5.24) but do not name data interpretation (MHRD, 2020, pp. 22–23). Section 5.20 states that NPST "will also inform the design of pre-service teacher education programmes" (MHRD, 2020, p. 22), so the route from the competency to pre-service preparation depends on NPST being used in that way, which is a matter of implementation and not of the texts. NPST's first stage, Proficient Teacher, is described as the stage at which a teacher "is expected to be professionally independent" (NCTE, 2023, p. 10), so indicator 8.2.1 sets an expectation that applies from the point of independent practice.

Fifth, there is a tension between expectation and workload. NCF-SE 2023 asks Principals and Teachers to study learning data regularly while cautioning that data management should not become "an undue burden for Teachers"; it adds that "Intelligent use of technology has a lot of potential to ease things on this front" (NCERT, 2023, p. 540). NPST asks teachers to use assessment data to modify plans and pedagogy and to synthesize multiple assessments (NCTE, 2023, p. 31). The documents do not say what tools, time or support make this feasible. A survey study of Indian secondary school teachers raises a related concern about the earlier reform, arguing that without automation through appropriate software it would be unrealistic to expect teachers to produce diagnostic information manually, given class sizes and workloads (Brown et al., 2015, p. 60).

DISCUSSION

Why does this progression matter, beyond confirming that three documents agree with one another? Two implications follow. First, a progression in specificity across documents operating at different levels of the policy architecture is consistent with the competency being treated as a priority. It would be possible for NEP 2020 to gesture toward assessment for learning without any framework subsequently giving it operational form; policy visions frequently outpace the frameworks meant to implement them, and a vision left unspecified at the framework level typically remains aspirational rather than actionable. That NCF-SE 2023 names the

interpretive act and NPST specifies it, rather than diluting or generalizing it, suggests that it is not treated as one item among many in the assessment reform agenda but as part of the infrastructure the reform needs in order to work. This is an inference from textual specificity and does not speak to priority in funding, training time or enforcement.

Second, the specific way NPST operationalizes this competency is worth taking seriously as a design signal. NPST's Assessment Data indicators are phrased as active, sequenced capacities and not as passive knowledge: using data to identify common issues, using data to modify lesson plans and pedagogy, and synthesizing information from multiple assessments to plan interventions. This sequencing implies that NPST envisions assessment data interpretation as a skill that develops in sophistication across career stages, which has direct implications for how teacher education and CPD content might be sequenced rather than delivered as a single, undifferentiated module. The overlap between indicators 8.2.3 and 8.2.4 suggests that the stage logic would benefit from clarification.

The gaps identified above are as informative as the convergence, and they clarify why assessment data interpretation deserves deliberate attention and not incidental coverage. India's assessment culture has, for decades, centred on examinations that primarily certify rather than diagnose (MHRD, 2020, p. 17), a pattern NEP 2020 explicitly seeks to reverse. That reversal is not self-executing: a shift in the stated purpose of assessment changes what assessment is for only if the people carrying it out are equipped to use it that way. Because no document defines what sound interpretation involves or links it to a route of preparation, the risk is not that assessment reform fails outright, but that it persists in name while assessment practice continues to function primarily as a certification exercise: formative in label, summative in effect. It follows that treating the development of the competency as incidental to general pedagogical training would leave a gap between reform vision and reform practice that the documents, read closely, do not themselves close.

The study has limitations that bound its claims. The analysis shows that assessment data interpretation is progressively specified across NEP 2020, NCF-SE 2023, and NPST, and that the documents leave certain matters unspecified; it does not show how well this specification has translated into delivered professional development content, pre-service teacher education curricula, or classroom practice, each of which is an empirical question this document-based analysis cannot answer. The coding is interpretive, and the three-document scope leaves out other materials that may treat the competency differently. A mixed-methods evaluation of NEP 2020 that included college teachers in Karnataka reports that teachers believe they need further capacity building and training (Kulal et al., 2024), and a case study of Delhi school teachers likewise reports a need for further training and support in using assessment data (Killimangalam et al., 2023); both underscore the practical value of examining this specific competency's translation into practice directly. What the present analysis does establish is that the textual foundation for prioritizing this competency is in place, and that the gaps identified give teacher education and professional development specific tasks to address.

Recommendations

Because the analysis shows a competency that is progressively specified but neither defined nor linked to a route of preparation, the recommendations below focus on translating the priority into practice and on addressing the gaps identified, rather than on revising the policy texts.

- Teacher education institutions designing pre-service curricula, particularly under the four-year Integrated Teacher Education Programme (ITEP), could use NPST's Assessment Data indicators directly as learning outcomes for assessment-methods coursework. Because NPST's first stage already expects teachers to use assessment data to identify common issues and alternative conceptions (indicator 8.2.1), a concrete starting point is a course unit in which student teachers interpret a set of anonymised class assessment results, identify common errors and alternative conceptions, and propose a reteaching plan, with the unit assessed in the language of the indicators. This is consistent with Mandinach and Gummer's (2016) call for teacher preparation programmes to integrate data literacy into their curricula.
- In-service CPD content delivered through NISHTHA and the DIKSHA platform could be mapped explicitly against NPST's Assessment Data indicators through a short audit that asks, for each

assessment-related module, which indicators it addresses, at which stage, and through what practice task. Modules that address assessment techniques but none of indicators 8.2.1 to 8.2.4 would then be flagged for revision and not counted as building this competency.

- The bodies responsible for NPST could consider issuing a short explanatory note on sub-domain 8.2 that defines "insights," clarifies the difference between indicators 8.2.3 and 8.2.4, and gives examples of the data sources intended by "multiple sources." This would address gaps identified in the analysis without altering the policy texts.
- Because the documents speak of "information" and "evidence" in one place and "data" in another, teacher educators and CPD designers could adopt a single working vocabulary and a worked definition of interpretation (for example, moving from a result, to a claim about learning, to a decision about teaching), so that coursework, CPD and school-level data routines refer to the same activity.
- Given that this paper's analysis is limited to policy text, future research examining how well NPST's Assessment Data competency is reflected in actual CPD delivery, pre-service curricula, and classroom practice would provide the empirical complement this policy-level analysis cannot offer. A content analysis of ITEP and B.Ed. syllabi and of CPD module outlines against sub-domain 8.2 would be a feasible first step, followed by studies of teachers' practice, and would help confirm whether the priority identified here at the level of policy is being realized in practice. Such studies would also take up the link between teacher professional development and data-informed teaching strategies that Killimangalam et al. (2023) identify as needing further research.

CONCLUSION

NEP 2020's repositioning of assessment as an instrument of learning depends, in practice, on a single interpretive act: a teacher's ability to make sense of assessment data and translate that sense-making into instructional decisions. This paper has traced how this competency, implied as a vision in NEP 2020, is named as a pedagogical act by NCF-SE 2023 and specified operationally by NPST, and has argued that this progression in specificity, in which each document performs the role appropriate to its place in the policy architecture, supports treating assessment data interpretation as the load-bearing competency on which the assessment reform depends. It has also shown that, in the passages analysed, no document defines the competency or links it to a route of preparation. Recognizing both the progression and the gaps has direct implications for how the competency should be prioritized within teacher education and professional development: not as one item folded into general pedagogical training, but as a structured, sequenced capacity that the policy architecture identifies as necessary and that programme designers must now define and build. The tasks that remain are to address the gaps identified in teacher education and CPD design, and to examine empirically whether a priority so clearly established in policy text is realized with equal clarity in the classrooms and training rooms where it is meant to matter.

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