

NISHTHA Beyond Professional Development Governing Pedagogy at Scale in India

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Abstract—What does it mean for a state to systematically influence what transpires inside millions of classrooms it cannot directly observe? In India, this question has acquired renewed urgency alongside the expansion of large-scale continuous professional development (CPD) initiatives, most prominently the National Initiative for School Heads and Teachers' Holistic Advancement (NISHTHA). While NISHTHA is widely described as among the largest teacher training efforts globally, reaching over nine million educators across successive phases, this paper contends that such a characterization is analytically incomplete. NISHTHA is not merely a training programme; it constitutes a broader, systemic attempt to govern pedagogy across a structurally complex and politically decentralized education system. Drawing on policy enactment theory, systems thinking, digital governance scholarship, and Foucauldian governmentality, this paper proposes the Pedagogic Governance Framework (PGF) as an integrative conceptual tool for understanding how professional development can function as a governance mechanism at scale. The PGF identifies three interconnected processes—knowledge standardization, administrative mediation, and digital monitoring—that interact through DIKSHA, India's national digital infrastructure for education, to shape teaching practice. Situating NISHTHA within comparative international evidence, the paper demonstrates that while the programme has achieved unprecedented reach, its transformative depth is mediated by structural tensions between scale and substance, uniformity and context-sensitivity, and monitoring and professional meaning. By reconceptualizing professional development as a form of pedagogic governance rather than a neutral capacity-building intervention, the paper contributes theoretical and empirical insights to ongoing debates on educational reform, digital governance, and teacher professionalism in large, diverse democracies.

Index Terms—NISHTHA; teacher professional development; pedagogic governance; DIKSHA; policy enactment; digital education governance; India; National Education Policy 2020

I. INTRODUCTION: THE GOVERNANCE PARADOX IN MASS EDUCATION

How does a state change teaching in classrooms it never enters?

This deceptively simple question sits at the heart of contemporary educational reform in large, federal democracies. Policies are authored in ministries, training modules designed by curriculum experts, and programmes launched with considerable optimism yet when a teacher faces a classroom of forty children in rural Chhattisgarh or urban Kolkata, that moment is shaped by far more than any policy document. It is shaped by professional biography, institutional culture, linguistic ecology, material constraint, and decades of internalized habit.

India's education system operates at a scale that defies straightforward governance. With over 1.5 million schools, approximately 9.5 million teachers, and more than 240 million enrolled students spanning 28 states and 8 Union Territories, each with distinct linguistic, cultural, and administrative realities, the structural distance between national policy intent and classroom practice is not merely spatial (Ministry of Education, 2023). It is, as Ball et al. (2012) remind us, constitutively social, political, and interpretive.

It is within this context that NISHTHA—National Initiative for School Heads and Teachers' Holistic Advancement must be understood. Launched in 2019 by the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) under the Centrally Sponsored Scheme of Samagra Shiksha, NISHTHA represents one of the most ambitious teacher professional development undertakings in the world. Across four successive phases, it has enrolled over nine million teachers, school heads, and education functionaries, deploying both face-to-face and digital modalities through the DIKSHA (Digital Infrastructure for

Knowledge Sharing) platform (NCERT, 2021; Ministry of Education, 2022).

Yet, scholarly engagement with NISHTHA has been limited, particularly in international literature. Existing analyses tend to describe the programme's scale and features without interrogating its structural logic (Dewan, 2009; Batra, 2005; Kumar, 2010). This paper argues that such a descriptive mode is insufficient. NISHTHA is not simply a training programme writ large. It embodies a specific theory of change, one in which professional development operates simultaneously as a vehicle for knowledge transmission, an instrument of administrative alignment, and a technology of governance.

The paper makes three interrelated contributions. First, it situates NISHTHA within a comparative international landscape of large-scale teacher PD, revealing structural commonalities and distinctive features. Second, it proposes the Pedagogic Governance Framework (PGF) as an analytical lens for examining how CPD functions as governance in complex educational systems. Third, it applies the PGF to identify productive tensions within NISHTHA and derive implications for policy, research, and practice.

II. THE INDIAN EDUCATION SYSTEM: STRUCTURAL COMPLEXITY AS THE STARTING POINT

Any serious engagement with NISHTHA must begin with the system it inhabits, a system characterized by what might be termed productive contradiction: simultaneously unified in its constitutional aspirations and fragmented in its institutional realities.

2.1 Multi-Level Architecture and Institutional Mediators

India's educational governance is constitutionally shared between the Union government and state governments (Article 246 read with the Concurrent List, Schedule VII). At the national level, the Ministry of Education (MoE) and NCERT provide policy direction and curriculum frameworks. However, implementation authority rests with state governments through their respective State Councils of Educational Research and Training (SCERTs), which in turn delegate to District Institutes of Education and Training (DIETs), Block Resource Centres (BRCs),

and Cluster Resource Centres (CRCs) (see Figure 2 below).

This layered architecture enables contextual adaptation but introduces what Fullan (2007) describes as implementation drift, the progressive attenuation of intent as it travels through institutional hierarchies. Each level of mediation represents not merely a logistical relay but a site of interpretation, prioritization, and sometimes resistance (Ball et al., 2012). A national module on activity-based learning may be transmitted as a compliance exercise at the block level and received as yet another administrative burden at the school level.

The National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020) has sought to address this fragmentation through a framework of common goals, competency-based learning, foundational literacy and numeracy (FLN), and holistic development while simultaneously decentralizing pedagogic decision-making to schools (Ministry of Education, 2020). NISHTHA is one of the principal mechanisms through which this dual logic of centralized goals and decentralized practice is operationalized.

2.2 The Teacher Workforce: Diversity and Disparity

India's teaching force is deeply heterogeneous. National assessments have consistently documented significant variation in subject knowledge, pedagogical skill, and professional motivation across states, school types, and genders (ASER Centre, 2022; NCERT, 2019). The Annual Status of Education Report 2022 revealed that only 56.4% of Class VIII students could solve a basic division problem, suggesting that years of PD investment have yet to translate into improved foundational learning outcomes at scale (ASER Centre, 2022).

Teacher qualification levels similarly vary. While the Right to Education Act 2009 mandated all teachers achieve professional qualifications by 2015, a deadline repeatedly extended, large numbers of para-teachers, contract teachers, and untrained educators continue to constitute a significant portion of the workforce in several states, particularly in rural and tribal areas (Ramachandran et al., 2018). NISHTHA's design must therefore navigate not a monolithic teacher population but a radically differentiated professional landscape.

III. LARGE-SCALE TEACHER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT: A COMPARATIVE LANDSCAPE

scale PD programmes designed to improve teaching quality at system level. Reviewing this landscape reveals both what NISHTHA shares with international counterparts and what makes it structurally distinctive.

NISHTHA does not exist in isolation. Across the globe, governments have experimented with large-

Table 1. Comparative Landscape of Large-Scale Teacher Professional Development Programmes

Programme	Period	Scale Metric Type	Scale	Modality	Pedagogical Focus	M&E Mechanism	Level
NISHTHA (India)	2019–Present	System Target (Active)	9+ million	Online (DIKSHA) + face-to-face	Competency-based pedagogy, NEP 2020 alignment	DIKSHA centralized digital analytics tracking	National
Teacher For America-TFA (USA)	1990–Present	Cumulative Footprint	~65,000	Intensive pre-service training + post-placement mentoring	Equity-focused instruction	Cohort performance and retention tracking	National
Teach First (UK)	2003–Present	Annual Ingestion Rate	~13,000/yr	University-school localised partnership	Leadership and pedagogy	Field observation and expert coaching loops	National
Indonesia Mengajar	2010–Present	Active Field Cohorts	~1,500	Grassroots residency placement	Community-responsive teaching	Structured field peer-reflection portfolios	National
Strategic Teacher Ed. Project-STEP (Pakistan)	2014–2019	Fixed-Term Project Reach	~90,000	In-service cascade training arrays	Literacy and numeracy	Pre-and post-intervention assessments	Provincial
School Development Project-SDP (South Africa)	2000–Present	Regional Program Reach	~370,000	Contextualized subject coaching clusters	Subject knowledge	Local school monitoring and site inspections	District
Erasmus+ Teacher Academies (EU)	2019–2023	Regional Multi-Year Pool	~200,000	Online + blended collaborative networks	Digital competency	Self-assessment frameworks and peer review	Transnational

Three patterns emerge from Table 1. First, no other programme approaches NISHTHA in absolute scale.

Reaching nine million educators across a single national system has few global precedents. Second,

most high-income country programmes emphasize coaching, mentoring, and collaborative inquiry rather than cascade delivery, modalities associated with greater depth of impact (Cordingley et al., 2015; Timperley et al., 2007). Third, digital monitoring as a governance mechanism is distinctive to NISHTHA among the programmes examined, reflecting both India's investment in EdTech infrastructure and a specific theory of accountability.

Comparative analysis reveals a fundamental tension: programmes that achieve scale typically do so through standardization and cascade delivery, while programmes that achieve depth typically operate at smaller scale through intensive, contextualised support (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). NISHTHA's challenge and its theoretical interest lies in its attempt to navigate this tension at unprecedented scale.

3.1 Evidence on What Works in Teacher Professional Development

A robust international evidence base has established core characteristics of effective teacher PD (Desimone, 2009; Timperley et al., 2007; Cordingley et al., 2015; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). These include: (a) subject-specific content focus; (b) active learning through inquiry and reflection; (c) coherence with curriculum standards and assessment; (d) sustained duration over weeks or months; and (e) collective participation within professional communities. The most effective programmes also embed peer learning and classroom observation within ongoing cycles of collaborative inquiry (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012).

NISHTHA's design partially addresses these criteria. Its competency-based module framework aligns with curriculum coherence; its school-level discussions create opportunities for collective participation. However, the programme's cascade delivery model, time-limited engagement, and emphasis on completion metrics over reflective depth create structural constraints that limit its correspondence with the evidence base (Dewan, 2009; Clarke & Hollingsworth, 2002).

IV. THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS: FROM TRAINING TO GOVERNANCE

Understanding NISHTHA as a governance mechanism rather than merely a training programme

requires theoretical resources from multiple intellectual traditions. This paper draws on four bodies of scholarship, each illuminating a different dimension of the phenomenon.

Table 2. Theoretical Frameworks Informing the Pedagogic Governance Framework (PGF)

Theoretical Framework	Key Scholars	Core Proposition	Application to NISHTHA/ PGF
Policy Enactment Theory	Ball et al. (2012)	Policies are re-interpreted by actors within contextual constraints	Explains variance in NISHTHA implementation across states and districts
Systems Thinking	Fullan (2007); Senge (2006)	Change emerges from interdependent elements, not linear causation	Reveals feedback loops between monitoring data and programme revision
Governmentality	Foucault (1991); Rose & Miller (1992)	Power operates through the conduct of conduct; subjects are shaped by norms	Illuminates how DIKSHA data creates self-regulating teachers
Community of Practice	Lave & Wenger (1991)	Learning is situated, social, and participatory	Highlights absence of peer learning in standardized cascade delivery
Digital Governance	Williamson (2016); Selwyn (2016)	Digital platforms reshape educational subjectivities and power relations	Theorizes DIKSHA as a governance infrastructure, not merely a tool

Theoretical Framework	Key Scholars	Core Proposition	Application to NISHTHA/ PGF
Culturally Responsive Pedagogy	Ladson-Billings (1995); Gay (2010)	Effective teaching draws on learners' cultural and linguistic resources	Exposes tension between standardized modules and local pedagogic traditions

4.1 Policy Enactment Theory

Ball et al.'s (2012) theory of policy enactment moves beyond implementation studies by emphasizing that policies are not delivered but enacted- creatively re-interpreted by actors who bring their own histories, values, and contextual constraints to bear. Schools are not passive recipients of policy; they are sites of productive complexity where national intent meets local reality (Ball et al., 2012, p. 3). Applied to NISHTHA, this perspective directs analytical attention to the multiple layers of interpretation the programme traverses, from NCERT module designers to state trainers, district officers, school heads, and ultimately individual teachers and to the productive distortions that occur at each juncture.

4.2 Systems Thinking

Fullan's (2007) systems perspective on educational change argues that reform does not follow linear trajectories from input to outcome but emerges from complex interactions among institutional elements, professional cultures, and feedback loops. Change in large systems is non-linear, contextually contingent, and frequently unintended in its consequences (Fullan, 2007, p. 4). This framework challenges technocratic assumptions embedded in NISHTHA's design, the notion that standardized modules, delivered through administrative hierarchies and tracked digitally, will produce predictable improvements in classroom practice. Systems thinking foregrounds instead the role of local agency, informal networks, and emergent adaptation.

4.3 Governmentality and Digital Governance

Foucault's concept of governmentality—the conduct of conduct—offers perhaps the most theoretically

generative lens for examining NISHTHA's logic. In Foucauldian analysis, governance does not require direct coercion; it operates through the production of norms, the creation of subjects who internalize these norms, and the deployment of knowledge-power assemblages that render populations visible and thereby manageable (Foucault, 1991; Rose & Miller, 1992).

Williamson (2016) and Selwyn (2016) extend this analysis into contemporary digital education, arguing that platforms such as DIKSHA do not merely deliver content but reconfigure professional subjectivities, data practices, and accountability relations. When teacher engagement with training modules becomes trackable, certifiable, and administratively reportable, a new form of professional visibility is created—one that operates independently of pedagogical quality and potentially displaces attention from the harder-to-measure question of whether teaching has actually improved (Selwyn, 2016).

4.4 Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

The framework of culturally responsive pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Gay, 2010) provides a critical counterpoint to NISHTHA's standardization logic. Ladson-Billings (1995) argues that effective teaching must be grounded in students' cultural referents, linguistic resources, and community knowledge. Applying this to teacher professional development, Batra (2005) and Jhingran (2005) have argued that India's diverse linguistic and cultural ecologies demand PD that is not merely translated into regional languages but fundamentally reconceived from local epistemic traditions. The tension between NISHTHA's necessarily standardized national framework and the culturally embedded nature of effective pedagogy is therefore not merely logistical but deeply epistemological.

V. THE PEDAGOGIC GOVERNANCE FRAMEWORK (PGF)

Building on these theoretical foundations, this paper proposes the Pedagogic Governance Framework (PGF) as a structured analytical instrument for conceptualizing how professional development operates as a governance mechanism. The PGF identifies three interconnected processes—knowledge standardization, administrative mediation, and digital

monitoring—that interact to produce systemic effects on teaching practice (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. The Pedagogic Governance Framework (PGF): A Process Architecture

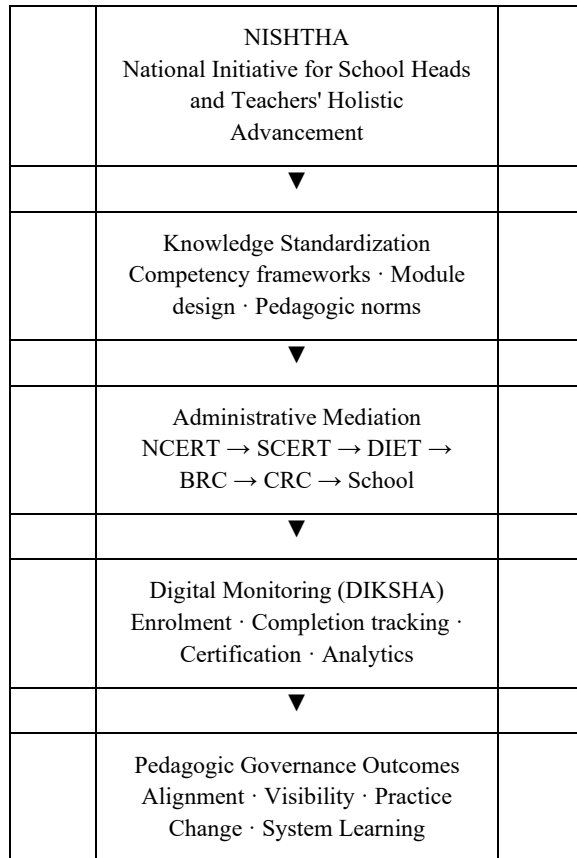


Table 3. PGF Analytical Dimensions: Processes, Actors, and Tensions

PGF Dimension	Operationalization	Key Actors	Tensions and Trade-offs
Knowledge Standardization	Curriculum design, module architecture, competency frameworks	NCERT, MoE, Academic experts	Creates shared pedagogical vocabulary; risks decontextualization
Administrative Mediation	Cascade delivery through SCERTs, DIETs,	State bureaucracies, district functionaries	Enables reach; introduces interpretive drift and

PGF Dimension	Operationalization	Key Actors	Tensions and Trade-offs
	BRCs, CRCs		hierarchical distortion
Digital Monitoring	DIKSHA platform, completion tracking, participation data	NIC, EdTech vendors, platform administrators	Enhances visibility; risks substituting compliance for learning
Pedagogic Alignment	Feedback loops, policy revision, community of practice	All stakeholders iteratively	Determines long-term sustainability and cultural embedding

5.1 Knowledge Standardization

Knowledge standardization is the foundational process through which the PGF operates. It involves the codification of pedagogical norms—what good teaching looks like, what competencies teachers should demonstrate, which instructional approaches are valued—into structured learning modules that can be delivered at scale. In NISHTHA, this process is operationalized through 18 initial modules addressing areas such as learning outcomes, competency-based learning, learner-centred pedagogy, school safety, personal-social qualities, and inclusive education.

Knowledge standardization performs a normative function that goes beyond content transmission. By defining the pedagogic vocabulary that teachers engage with activity-based learning, formative assessment, differentiated instruction, it shapes the conceptual terrain within which professional reflection occurs. This is what Foucault (1991) would recognize as a productive exercise of power: not the suppression of teacher thought but its productive channelling.

At the same time, standardization carries inherent risks. Mohanty (1990) and Kumar (2010) have argued that India's curriculum frameworks have historically privileged particular epistemic traditions, rooted in urban, upper-caste, Hindi-medium sensibilities, while marginalizing tribal, Dalit, and vernacular knowledge systems. The extent to which NISHTHA's modules genuinely incorporate diverse pedagogic traditions, or merely pay lip service to inclusion while reproducing

dominant norms, remains an empirical question deserving systematic investigation.

5.2 Administrative Mediation

Knowledge standardization creates the content of governance; administrative mediation creates its distribution infrastructure. NISHTHA operates through India's established administrative cascade—from NCERT at the national level through SCERTs, DIETs, BRCs, and CRCs to individual schools (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. NISHTHA Administrative Cascade: Organogram of Pedagogic Governance

	Ministry of Education (MoE) / NCERT — National Level	
	↓	
	State Councils of Educational Research and Training (SCERTs) — State Level	
	↓	
	District Institutes of Education and Training (DIETs) — District Level	
	↓	
	Block Resource Centres (BRCs) — Block Level	
	↓	
	Cluster Resource Centres (CRCs) — Cluster Level	
	↓	
	Schools & Teachers — Classroom Level	

This cascade structure enables remarkable reach- no other mechanism could feasibly engage nine million educators across India's geographic and linguistic diversity. However, policy enactment theory alerts us to the productive complexity introduced at each administrative layer. State functionaries translate national modules through the lens of state priorities and political pressures. District trainers interpret content through their own professional histories and subject specializations. Block and cluster coordinators navigate competing administrative demands alongside

facilitation responsibilities. And teachers themselves receive not the programme NCERT designed but a version of it shaped by multiple layers of mediation. Ramachandran et al. (2018) document how India's administrative cascade functions as a site of both enablement and distortion, with 'training' frequently becoming a bureaucratic performance rather than a professional exchange. The experience of sitting through a training session to receive a certificate rather than engaging with ideas to improve practice is widely reported across teacher development literature in India. Addressing this structural dynamic requires not merely better module design but a fundamental rethinking of the incentive structures and professional cultures that shape how training is received.

5.3 Digital Monitoring through DIKSHA

The third dimension of the PGF—digital monitoring—represents NISHTHA's most structurally novel feature and, arguably, its most theoretically significant. DIKSHA (Digital Infrastructure for Knowledge Sharing), launched in 2017, serves as NISHTHA's primary delivery and tracking platform. By 2022, DIKSHA had registered over 3.3 billion content plays and hosted learning content in 36 languages (Ministry of Education, 2022).

Within NISHTHA, DIKSHA performs several governance functions simultaneously. It tracks enrolment, module completion, quiz performance, and certification across individual teachers, schools, districts, and states. This generates an unprecedented dataset of professional development engagement, one that enables both accountabilities reporting and, in principle, system learning.

Table 4. DIKSHA Platform Governance Indicators in NISHTHA

Indicator	Definition	Reported Value	Limitation
Participation Rate	% of target teachers enrolled on DIKSHA	National avg: ~78% (MoE, 2022)	Does not capture active engagement or module quality
Module Completion Rate	Modules completed /	Varies: 55–92%	Completion ≠ comprehension; gaming of

Indicator	Definition	Reported Value	Limitation
	modules enrolled	across states	quizzes reported
Time-on-Platform	Average hours per module	~4.2 hours (MoE, 2022)	Passive viewing may inflate time metrics
Certification Rate	% receiving completion certificate	>4.2 million certified (NCERT, 2021)	Certificate generation automated; not tied to classroom observation
Re-engagement Rate	Teachers who access multiple module batches	~34% (estimated)	Suggests voluntary continuation; indicator of sustained interest
State-wise Variance	SD in completion rates across states	Range: 38%–97%	Reveals infrastructure, motivation, and facilitation disparities

However, as Selwyn (2016) and Williamson (2016) caution, the datafication of educational processes is not a neutral act. Data systems reflect and reinforce particular theories of value: what gets counted shapes what gets done. When administrative attention focuses on completion rates and certification figures, the deeper questions of pedagogical quality, professional reflection, and classroom impact may be systematically displaced. Several district administrators and school heads interviewed in related research reported using DIKSHA data primarily for upward accountability reporting rather than for professional dialogue or programme improvement (Ramachandran et al., 2018).

VI. NISHTHA: IMPLEMENTATION PHASES AND EVOLVING ARCHITECTURE

NISHTHA has evolved significantly since its launch, expanding in scope, modality, and target population

across four successive phases. Understanding this evolution is essential for assessing the programme's adaptive capacity and policy coherence.

Table 5. NISHTHA Implementation Phases: Scope, Modality, and Key Challenges

Phase	Period	Target Group	Scale	Modality	Key Challenges
NISHTHA 1.0	2019–2020	Elementary teachers (Grades 1–8)	42 lakh teachers	Face-to-face; 18 modules; 30 days	Disrupted by COVID-19
NISHTHA 2.0	2020–2022	Secondary teachers (Grades 9–12)	~25 lakh teachers	Online via DIKSHA; self-paced modules	Pandemic pivot; digital equity challenges
NISHTHA 3.0	2021–2022	ECCE/Pre-primary educators	~25 lakh Anganwadi workers	Online + on-site blended	First coverage of pre-primary sector
NISHTHA FLN	2022–Present	Foundational Literacy & Numeracy	~25 lakh teachers (Grades 1–5)	DIKSHA; aligned to NIPUN Bharat	Direct link to NEP 2020 FLN goals

The forced pivot to online-only delivery during the COVID-19 pandemic (2020–2022) compressed NISHTHA's timeline dramatically but also exposed structural inequalities in digital access. ASER 2021 data indicated that approximately 26% of students in rural India had no smartphone access in their households, while teachers in many tribal and remote districts lacked reliable internet connectivity (ASER

Centre, 2021). NISHTHA 2.0 and 3.0 were thus delivered in conditions of profound digital inequity, with completion data for some states reflecting administrative pressure rather than genuine engagement.

The launch of NISHTHA FLN in alignment with the NIPUN Bharat mission (National Initiative for Proficiency in Reading with Understanding and Numeracy) represents the programme's most direct articulation yet between PD and learning outcome goals. By targeting Grades 1–5 teachers with content specifically designed to build FLN competencies, NISHTHA FLN moves toward the evidence-based principle of content-focused, curriculum-coherent PD (Desimone, 2009).

VII. PRODUCTIVE TENSIONS: WHERE THE GOVERNANCE FRAMEWORK STRAINS

The PGF's conceptual power lies not only in mapping what NISHTHA does but in illuminating the structural tensions that shape what it can achieve. These tensions are not design failures; they are inherent to the project of governing pedagogy at scale in a diverse democracy. Identifying them precisely is the first step toward navigating them productively.

Table 6. Core Tensions in Pedagogic Governance: Evidence, Analysis, and Proposed Resolutions

Tension	Binary	Evidence	Proposed Resolution
Scale vs. Depth	Breadth of reach vs. quality of engagement	Millions complete modules; few show transformed practice (Dewan, 2009; Clarke & Hollingsworth, 2002)	Complementary pathways: short-cycle PD for awareness + school-based coaching for depth
Uniformity vs. Context	Standardized content vs. diverse classroom realities	Modules in Hindi/English alienate teachers in vernacular contexts (Jhingran,	Modularized localization: national framework + state-level contextual adaptation

Tension	Binary	Evidence	Proposed Resolution
		2005; Batra, 2005)	
Monitoring vs. Meaning	Data-driven accountability vs. intrinsic motivation	DIKSHA data used for administrative compliance rather than reflective practice (Selwyn, 2016)	Formative data use: shift from surveillance to professional dialogue
Governance vs. Autonomy	Systemic control vs. teacher agency	Top-down design limits teacher professional identity (Freedman & Appleman, 2009)	Co-design of modules with practising teachers; recognition of local knowledge
Speed vs. Sustainability	Rapid rollout vs. lasting change	Pandemic acceleration compressed timelines; learning loss not addressed (ASER, 2022)	Staggered implementation; longitudinal evaluation frameworks

Figure 3. Intersecting Domains of Scale, Governance, and Teacher Agency in NISHTHA

SCALE	SCALE $\cap$ DEPTH	DEPTH
• Massive reach • Uniform modules • Cascade delivery • Digital tracking	• Contextualised PD • Reflective communities • Sustained follow-up	• Classroom coaching • Mentoring • Action research • Teacher agency

GOVERNANCE	GOVERNANCE $\cap$ AGENCY	TEACHER AGENCY
• Compliance monitoring • - Standardized norms • - Administrative cascade	• Co-designed modules • - Participatory review • - Professional dialogue	• Local adaptation • - Curriculum judgement • - Cultural knowledge

Figure 3 illustrates how the three domains central to NISHTHA's governance logic—scale, governance, and teacher agency—intersect in productive and contested ways. The zones of intersection (scale $\cap$ depth; governance $\cap$ agency) are analytically crucial: they represent the spaces where NISHTHA's transformative potential is both concentrated and most fragile. Sustainable reform requires not choosing between these poles but constructing institutional conditions that hold them in productive tension.

7.1 The Scale–Depth Tension

The most fundamental tension in NISHTHA's design is between scale and depth. Clarke and Hollingsworth's (2002) interconnected model of teacher professional growth emphasizes that meaningful change in teaching practice requires extended engagement, personal reflection, experimentation, and feedback—a process that resists compression into modular online formats. Timperley et al.'s (2007) landmark synthesis similarly found that effective PD requires a minimum of 30–100+ hours of engagement, substantially more than most NISHTHA modules provide.

Yet the imperative to reach nine million teachers across India is not merely political; it reflects a genuine equity concern. Teachers in remote, under-resourced schools have historically been excluded from intensive PD opportunities available to their urban counterparts. NISHTHA's digital modality, however imperfect, democratizes access to pedagogical ideas that were previously inaccessible to many. The challenge is not to abandon scale but to complement it with mechanisms that enable depth—school-based professional learning communities, peer mentoring, and classroom observation cycles that extend the impact of centralized modules into sustained local practice.

7.2 The Uniformity–Context Tension

India's linguistic and cultural diversity represents both the richest resource for contextually responsive pedagogy and the greatest challenge for standardized PD. With 22 scheduled languages, over 120 languages spoken by more than 10,000 speakers each, and pedagogic traditions ranging from Indigenous tribal knowledge to classical Sanskrit learning, the aspiration to a single national PD framework inevitably involves epistemic choices about whose knowledge counts (Jhingran, 2005; Batra, 2005).

NISHTHA has made significant efforts at linguistic accessibility—modules are available in multiple regional languages—but translation is not the same as localization, and localization is not the same as genuine epistemological inclusion. Designing PD that not only acknowledges but actively builds on teachers' own cultural knowledge systems and community expertise is a more radical and more demanding agenda than module translation.

7.3 The Monitoring–Meaning Tension

Perhaps the most theoretically significant tension is that between DIKSHA's monitoring function and the conditions necessary for professional meaning-making. Research on teacher learning consistently emphasizes that professional growth requires psychological safety, space for doubt and experimentation, and communities of trust within which teachers can share vulnerability and take intellectual risks (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Lave & Wenger, 1991).

When every click, quiz score, and module completion is tracked and reported to administrative superiors, the conditions for such learning are potentially compromised. Teachers may perform compliance rather than engage in authentic inquiry. Selwyn (2016) terms this dynamic 'datafication anxiety'—the substitution of performative engagement with digital systems for genuine professional development. Addressing this tension requires distinguishing between data for accountability (directed upward) and data for learning (directed toward the professional herself), and designing DIKSHA's analytics accordingly.

VIII. REFRAMING SUCCESS: WHAT SHOULD WE EVALUATE?

If NISHTHA is understood as a training programme, the evaluative framework is relatively straightforward: participation rates, module completion, certification, and, ideally, pre-post assessments of teacher knowledge and practice. These metrics are readily quantifiable and politically visible.

If NISHTHA is understood as a governance mechanism, however, a richer and more demanding evaluative framework becomes necessary. The relevant questions shift:

- Has NISHTHA created a genuinely shared pedagogical language across the system—one that enables productive professional dialogue between teachers in Gujarat and teachers in Meghalaya?
- Has it strengthened the professional identity and autonomous judgment of teachers, or primarily their administrative compliance?
- Has it enabled the system to learn—to revise its approaches based on data about what is working and for whom?
- Has it contributed to measurable improvements in student learning outcomes, particularly in foundational literacy and numeracy?
- Has it reduced inequalities in pedagogic quality between advantaged and disadvantaged school contexts?

These questions are harder to measure but essential to ask. The absence of robust longitudinal evaluations of NISHTHA's impact on student learning outcomes is a significant gap in the evidence base—one that undermines the system's capacity for genuine learning and that reflects a broader weakness in India's educational research infrastructure (Kumar, 2010; Ramachandran et al., 2018).

IX. IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY, RESEARCH, AND PRACTICE

9.1 Policy Implications

The PGF analysis generates several actionable implications for NISHTHA's continued evolution. First, the programme would benefit from a more explicit theory of change—one that articulates how standardized national modules, mediated through administrative cascades and monitored digitally, are

expected to translate into improved classroom practice and student outcomes. Articulating this theory would enable more focused evaluation and more targeted programme revision.

Second, the monitoring infrastructure of DIKSHA should be reoriented from compliance tracking toward professional learning. This involves designing analytics that support teacher self-reflection, peer dialogue, and formative feedback rather than primarily generating data for upward accountability. States such as Kerala and Tamil Nadu, with more established traditions of teacher professional communities, may offer useful models for integrating digital monitoring with local professional culture.

Third, the uniformity–context tension demands a structural response beyond translation. A modular architecture that provides a national competency framework while enabling state-level contextual adaptation—co-designed with practising teachers, community members, and subject specialists—would more genuinely honour India's epistemic diversity while maintaining system coherence.

9.2 Research Implications

The field urgently requires longitudinal, mixed-methods research that tracks NISHTHA's effects on teaching practice and student outcomes over time and across diverse contexts. Existing studies are largely descriptive and cross-sectional. Randomized controlled trials or rigorous quasi-experimental designs—while challenging in the Indian context—would provide more credible evidence of impact. Ethnographic and discourse-analytic approaches would illuminate the interpretive processes through which teachers make sense of NISHTHA's content. Comparative research linking NISHTHA to international large-scale PD programmes—including analysis of what distinguishes programmes that achieve both scale and depth—would enrich both theoretical understanding and practical policy learning.

9.3 Practice Implications

At the school and classroom level, the most significant practical implication of the PGF analysis is the need for sustained, school-based professional learning communities that extend and deepen NISHTHA's centralized content. Research consistently demonstrates that PD has the greatest impact when it

is embedded in teachers' everyday professional contexts, supported by school leadership, and connected to collaborative inquiry into specific student learning challenges (Cordingley et al., 2015; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012).

School heads—who in NISHTHA are explicitly included as a target group—are positioned to play a critical facilitative role in creating such communities. Investment in school leadership development as a complement to teacher training would strengthen NISHTHA's systemic impact significantly.

X. CONCLUSION: GOVERNING PEDAGOGY IN A COMPLEX DEMOCRACY

NISHTHA invites us to see educational reform differently—not as a discrete intervention but as a form of continuous governance. By examining the programme through the lens of the Pedagogic Governance Framework, this paper has argued that professional development at scale performs three interlocking functions: it standardizes pedagogical knowledge, mediates it through administrative structures, and renders teacher engagement visible through digital infrastructure.

These functions are neither inherently transformative nor inherently constraining. Their effect depends on how they interact with the professional cultures, institutional capacities, and material conditions within which they are received. NISHTHA's unprecedented scale is an achievement that deserves recognition. But achievement of scale, without sustained attention to depth, context, and professional meaning, risks producing the appearance of reform while leaving the deep structures of pedagogical practice unchanged.

The central contribution of this paper—the Pedagogic Governance Framework—is offered not as a critique of NISHTHA but as an analytical instrument for deepening engagement with what large-scale professional development is actually doing in complex educational systems. By distinguishing between training (the acquisition of knowledge and skills) and governance (the shaping of professional subjectivities, practices, and system relationships), the PGF opens space for more honest, more ambitious, and ultimately more productive conversations about how educational change happens at scale.

The question with which this paper began—how do you change teaching in a classroom you never see? —

does not admit of a simple answer. But reframing it through the lens of pedagogic governance suggests that the most powerful lever is not the module, the platform, or the certificate. It is the professional community—the web of relationships, conversations, and shared commitments within which teachers continuously remake their practice. NISHTHA's greatest unrealized potential may lie precisely in its capacity to seed such communities across India's vast and diverse educational landscape.

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