

NISHTHA: An Initiative for Teacher Professional Development in India

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Abstract:

The National Initiative for School Heads' and Teachers' Holistic Advancement (NISHTHA) marks a major shift in how teacher professional development has been organised in India's school education system. Launched in 2019 under Samagra Shiksha, it was conceived as an integrated, large-scale capacity-building programme to improve classroom practice, strengthen school leadership, and ultimately raise student learning outcomes. Its design brought together curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, inclusion, health and well-being, school leadership, and educational technology within a common professional-learning framework, rather than treating teacher training as a set of unrelated short programmes. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated an important change in delivery, the program at elementary-stage moved from face-to-face training to online mode through DIKSHA in October 2020. The framework subsequently expanded into stage-specific versions addressing secondary education, foundational literacy and numeracy, and early childhood care and education. The present paper offers an overview of the program, its evolution from 1.0 to 4.0 versions, the structure and intent of the courses, the institutional arrangements for course development and delivery, and the monitoring and professional support mechanisms. The paper also considers later extensions reported by the Ministry of Education, showing that NISHTHA has continued to evolve beyond its original four-stage architecture.

Keywords: NISHTHA, Teacher Professional Development, DIKSHA, School Leadership, Learning Outcomes, FLN, ECCE, Inclusive Education, Educational Technology.

1.0 Introduction

School education depends not only on the curriculum, textbooks, and infrastructure but also on the professional knowledge, skills, competencies, and day-to-day practices of teachers and school heads. In India, this recognition has gradually shifted attention from expanding access to schooling towards improving the quality of learning that students actually experience inside classrooms. NISHTHA emerged in this context as a national effort to make teacher professional development more coherent, relevant and closely connected with classroom practice.

NISHTHA (National Initiative for School Heads' and Teachers' Holistic Advancement), is a national in-service professional development programme of the Government of India that seeks to enhance the knowledge, skills and professional capacities of teachers and school heads. It was introduced as a national mission to improve learning outcomes through an integrated approach to teacher training. NISHTHA was launched on 21 August 2019 by the then Union Minister of Human Resource Development, Shri Ramesh Pokhriyal, under Samagra Shiksha, the Centrally Sponsored Scheme for

school education. It was conceived in response to the need for a more coordinated and comprehensive approach to in-service teacher education, as earlier training arrangements were often delivered through separate components and lacked a common professional framework across the school system.

In its initial stage, NISHTHA focused on teachers and Heads of Schools at the elementary level, along with faculty members of SCERTs and DIETs, and academic personnel associated with Block Resource Centers (BRCs) and Cluster Resource Centers (CRCs). NISHTHA followed a customized cascade mode of training to reach a large number of teachers and school heads across the country. Under this approach, the National Resource Group (NRG) oriented Key Resource Persons (KRPs) and State Resource Persons–Leadership (SRPs-L), who were identified by the States and Union Territories. These resource persons then provided training directly to teachers and school heads at the block level. The model removed the intermediate master-trainer level, making the training process more direct and reducing the chances of communication gaps as the training moved from one level to another. It was planned on a large national scale, with an intended coverage of around 42 lakh participants.

Initially, the NISHTHA training was delivered through face-to-face mode. The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted face-to-face training, making it difficult to continue the programme at the planned scale. Therefore, NISHTHA was adapted for online delivery through the DIKSHA platform, coordinated by NCERT, so that the remaining teachers and school heads could continue their professional development. The online programme used various forms of digital interaction and learning resources. It was also extended to teachers in several school systems and organisations, including CBSE, KVS, NVS, CTSA, CISCE, AEES, Sainik Schools and Eklavya Model Residential Schools (EMRS). In this way, NISHTHA evolved from a large-scale face-to-face teacher-training initiative into a technology-supported national professional-development programme. The first online NISHTHA programme for Key Resource Persons begun in Andhra Pradesh in July 2020, and the elementary-stage NISHTHA courses were launched on the DIKSHA platform on 6 October 2020. This transition allowed professional learning to continue despite school closures and provided a wider, more flexible means of reaching teachers across different parts of the country. The online model also enabled the recording of participation, completion and assessment data, creating a stronger link between professional learning and programme monitoring. The digital form of NISHTHA enhanced its role as a continuing professional development mechanism by combining structured learning resources with technology-enabled access, participation and progress tracking. Its online implementation was supported through digital content and systems for registration, resource sharing, monitoring and assessment. In this regard, NISHTHA represents an important shift in Indian school education from fragmented, occasional training towards a more integrated, continuous and practice-oriented model of teacher professional development. It also provided a national platform through which professional expectations could be communicated consistently while allowing implementation across India's diverse educational settings.

A distinctive feature of NISHTHA was its integrated design. Earlier teacher-development arrangements often separated training for teachers, school heads, teacher educators and educational administrators. The Samagra Shiksha framework observed that such segmentation could weaken the coherence and effectiveness of professional development. NISHTHA therefore sought to bring key actors and related professional concerns within a common framework, while still allowing States and Union Territories to adapt the programme to local contexts.

The programme's development also reflected the growing importance of continuous professional development under the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. NEP 2020 places strong emphasis on

continuous teacher learning, competency-based education, foundational literacy and numeracy, inclusion, technology integration and professional autonomy. NISHTHA consequently evolved rather than remaining a fixed training package. The framework was extended to secondary education, foundational literacy and numeracy, and early childhood care and education, creating a stage-sensitive professional-development architecture.

NISHTHA can be understood as more than a teacher-training course. It is a system-level professional-development framework that links national educational priorities with teachers' classroom practice, school leadership and digital learning infrastructure. Its broader purpose was not simply to provide teachers with additional subject knowledge, but to improve the quality of classroom teaching by strengthening professional understanding, pedagogical practice, academic leadership and the capacity to respond to learners' varied needs. Its core premise is straightforward, improving children's learning requires strengthening the adults and institutions responsible for creating learning environments, and that strengthening must be sustained, contextualized and connected with evidence from schools.

1.1 How NISHTHA Program Works

NISHTHA operates through a combination of national planning, resource-person preparation, state coordination, digital delivery, academic support and monitoring. The exact arrangements differ by stage and implementation period, but the underlying chain is broadly consistent.

Implementation stage	Key Activities
National planning and course development	NCERT and partner institutions establish the common training architecture, develop or curate course resources, prepare implementation guidance and organise national-level resource groups.
Resource-person preparation	National Resource Persons orient Key Resource Persons and State Resource Persons. These resource persons become the link between national course design and teacher-level professional learning.
State adaptation and contextualization	States/UTs identify academic and technical teams, translate material where required, add local context, review resources and prepare the state delivery calendar.
Course delivery	Face-to-face training was central to the initial model. The online model uses DIKSHA and related digital systems to provide structured courses, self-learning resources, interactive sessions and assessments.
Academic support and mentoring	Resource persons and mentors provide guidance, answer questions, support course completion and help teachers connect course ideas with school and classroom practice.
Monitoring and reporting	Enrolment, progress, completion and assessment data are tracked. State and national teams use reports to identify participation gaps, follow up with participants and review implementation.

Table: 1

2.0 Rationale for the NISHTHA Program

The rationale for introducing NISHTHA stemmed from a combination interrelated factors including: learning challenges, changing expectations of teachers, growing classroom diversity, expansion of educational technology, and the need to align teacher capacity with emerging national policies. The program therefore attempted to address not one isolated problem but a cluster of connected needs within school education.

Strengthening Student Learning Outcomes

Improving student learning was the most immediate reason for enhancing teacher professional development. The National Achievement Survey (NAS) 2017, conducted across Classes III, V and VIII, assessed about 2.2 million students in 1.10 lakh schools across 701 districts displayed a significant decline in average performance as students progressed to higher elementary grades. The average percentage of correct answers was 68% in Language, 64% in Mathematics and 65% in EVS in Class III. In Class V, the corresponding figures were 58%, 53% and 57%; and in Class VIII, average performance was 57% in Language, 42% in Mathematics, 44% in science and 44% in Social Science. These results suggested that progression through school was not a guarantee for mastering expected learning outcomes.

The concern was further exacerbated by the report put forward by ASER (2018), showing that only 44.2% of children enrolled in government schools in rural India in Standard V were able to read a Standard II-level text. The figure had been 53.1% in 2008, indicating that the learning challenge was a persistent one rather than a temporary fluctuation. ASER also reported that only 22.7% of Standard V children in government schools could solve a basic division problem in 2018. These findings showed a substantive system-level gap in foundational reading and numeracy that required stronger classroom support and better teaching-learning practices.

Taken together, the assessment evidence formed a strong case for moving beyond fragmented training towards sustained, integrated teacher development. If learning outcomes were to be improved, teachers needed practical support to understand them, diagnose learning gaps, select appropriate pedagogy, utilise assessment evidence, and adapt to learners' needs. NISHTHA placed this connection between teacher capacity and student learning at the core of its design.

The Changing Role of the Teacher

The modern teacher is required to do much more than imparting subject matter knowledge. NISHTHA addresses a broader professional role, including understanding learners, constructing inclusive pedagogy, drawing on assessment evidence, applying technology, addressing well-being, facilitating discussion, encouraging critical thinking and helping learners grapple with real-world challenges. The role of fostering critical thinking is especially important as instruction increasingly needs to help learners grapple with interpreting information, tackling unfamiliar problems, communicating effectively and applying knowledge – as opposed to rote learning.

In addition, such an approach implies that teachers need to be continuous learners themselves. The notion of continuous professional development is integral to NEP 2020, which advocates sustained opportunities for teachers to update themselves. NISHTHA provided a mechanism for such professional learning to be organised nationwide while being sensitive to classroom needs.

Diversity, Inclusion and Equity

Indian classrooms are socially, linguistically and educationally diverse. Teachers may work with learners who differ in home language, socio-economic background, prior educational experience, learning pace, disability and social context. The professional challenge is therefore not simply to teach the average child but to design learning environments in which different learners can participate and progress.

NISHTHA responded to this need by treating inclusion as a classroom responsibility rather than a specialist issue. Its training materials emphasised flexible pedagogy, respect for learner differences, accessible resources and ways of adapting teaching for children with special educational needs. This approach is consistent with the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 and with the broader equity and inclusion objectives of Samagra Shiksha.

The programme also recognised the importance of gender sensitivity, child protection and safe school environments. Teachers need to understand legal and institutional provisions concerning child rights, protection from sexual offences and disability inclusion because these are directly connected with students' right to participate in a safe and supportive educational setting. These responsibilities require professional awareness that may not have been sufficiently integrated into the pre-service preparation of all teachers trained in earlier periods.

Developing Reflective Thinking, Creativity and 21st-century Competencies.

Another critical need is to prepare teachers to promote the learning that demand questioning, reasoning, creativity, problem-solving, communication and application of knowledge. NISHTHA materials focused on activity-based and learner-centered processes such as discussion, inquiry, art integration, experiential activities, educational games, reflection and subject-specific investigative approaches, these provide children with opportunities to question, test ideas, make connections and articulate their reasoning. At the same time, teachers themselves need to develop reflective and adaptive professional thinking to be able to move out of a fixed teaching routine, read their classroom responses and modify their practices in accordance with their learners and context.

Technology and Digital Teaching

The rise of digital learning created a further need for teacher capacity building. Technology can extend access to learning resources, support visual and interactive teaching, provide accessible materials and help teachers organise assessment and feedback. At the same time, digital tools are effective only when teachers understand how to select and use them pedagogically. NISHTHA therefore treated ICT integration as a teaching-learning concern rather than as a purely technical skill.

The pandemic made this need immediate. Teachers had to reach learners through online classes and other alternative modes at a time when physical training and face-to-face classroom support were disrupted. The movement of NISHTHA to DIKSHA demonstrated the value of having a digital professional-learning infrastructure that could support teacher development at scale and allow self-paced access to learning resources.

Supporting Children's Health, Well-being and Safety

Quality education also relies on children perceiving school as a safe and supportive environment. Teachers and school heads need awareness of physical health, hygiene, emotional well-being, stress,

school safety, child protection and appropriate responses to difficult situations. NISHTHA included health and well-being, safe and healthy school environments, personal-social qualities and child-protection provisions because teachers are often among the first adults in school to detect changes in a child's behaviour, participation or well-being. It is not to make teachers into specialist counsellors but to enhance their capacity to respond to problems and connect children with the appropriate support.

Strengthening Assessment and Evidence-Based Classroom Decisions

Teaching also requires effective and continuous assessment of students' learning. Assessment should help teachers understand what students have learned, identify areas where they are facing difficulties, and decide what kind of support or teaching strategy is needed. NISHTHA therefore emphasised learning outcomes, competency-based assessment and School-Based Assessment (SBA) as important aspects of teacher development. NISHTHA promotes assessment as an integral part of the teaching-learning process, with greater focus on students' competencies, progress and learning needs, instead of only examination results.

This encourages teachers to use assessment evidence while planning and improving classroom instruction. Regular assessment helps teachers identify learning gaps at an early stage, and provide appropriate support according to students' individual needs. Hence, NISHTHA promoted shift from assessment being viewed mainly as a final evaluation to assessment being used as a continuous tool for improving teaching and learning outcomes.

Stage-Specific Professional Needs

A single model of teacher development cannot fully address the needs of every stage of schooling. Teachers of young children need strong knowledge of early language, play, development and school readiness; teachers at the primary stage need expertise in foundational reading, writing and numeracy; secondary teachers work with adolescents and increasingly need complex subject knowledge; and school heads need leadership and organisational capacities. The subsequent stage-wise development of NISHTHA reflects this recognition.

The FLN (Foundational Literacy and Numeracy) emphasis became particularly urgent with the launch of NIPUN Bharat in 2021, which set the national goal of ensuring that children attain foundational literacy and numeracy by the end of Grade 3. NISHTHA FLN was therefore positioned as a teacher-capacity response to a system-wide learning priority rather than as a stand-alone literacy campaign.

Similarly, the extension towards ECCE recognised that the quality of later schooling depends partly on children's experiences in the early years. The NISHTHA ECCE framework emphasised trained personnel, developmentally appropriate pedagogy, play and activity, school readiness, family participation and early support for children who may need additional assistance.

Awareness of National Programs, Policies and School Responsibilities

Teachers and school heads operate within a wider policy environment. Their work intersects with Samagra Shiksha, school safety provisions, inclusion measures, assessment reforms, vocational education, libraries, sports, environmental activities and other school-improvement initiatives. NISHTHA included professional learning that helped educators understand these system-level responsibilities so that policy intentions could be reflected in school practice rather than remaining only at the administrative level.

3.0 Major Objectives of NISHTHA

- To enhance students' learning outcomes, foster an inclusive, congenial, and friendly classroom environment, and provide teachers with the knowledge and skills to recognise and manage students' physical, social, emotional, and psychological needs.
- To create a safe, healthy, and stress-free learning environment, integrate ICT in the teaching-learning process, focus on continuous evaluation of the students, promote activity-based learning, and keep all teachers up to date.
- Encouraging and motivating teachers as well as students to take new initiatives and bring a drastic change in the education sector.
- Motivate and equip instructors to encourage student's critical thinking, creativity, and other essential 21st-century skills.
- To train teachers on how to accommodate the needs of all the students and enlighten all teachers and heads to learn how to overcome all these problems effectively.
- Promote inclusive education by being aware of all students' social and emotional needs.
- Build competencies, abilities, and skills of all govt teachers and heads from pre-primary to the senior secondary levels.

4.0 Evolution of NISHTHA

NISHTHA evolved in stages. The first version concentrated on the elementary level, and the later versions broadened the framework to other stages and specific national priorities. The key milestones are summarised below. Dates and coverage figures are presented as reported in official programme documents and may refer to the implementation period of the particular version rather than to a current live dashboard.

Versions	Focus	Roll out date	Structure	Primary participants	Reported scale
NISHTHA 1.0	Elementary Education	2019	18 courses	Teachers and school heads of 1 st -8 th grades Teacher-education and academic support personnel.	Approx. 42 lakh initial capacity-building plan. Around 24 lakh covered.
NISHTHA 2.0	Secondary and senior secondary	29 July 2021	12 generic + 56 subject-specific modules	Teachers and school heads of 9 th -12 th grades.	About 10 lakh teachers/school heads covered across 33 states/UT.

NISHTHA 3.0 (FLN)	Foundational Literacy and Numeracy	7 September 2021	12 courses/modules	Teachers and school heads working from pre-primary to primary stage	Nearly 25 lakhs teachers and heads covered.
NISHTHA 4.0 (ECCE)	Early Childhood Care and Education	29 July 2022	6 courses	Master trainers supporting Anganwadi workers and pre-school teachers	36 States/UTs reported in programme documentation

Table: 2

The four versions should be viewed as connected responses within one professional-development framework. The underlying purpose remains consistent - improving educators' capacity and, through that capacity, improving the quality of learning and school experience - but the content becomes more stage-sensitive as the program expands.

NISHTHA 1.0: Elementary Stage

NISHTHA 1.0 was the foundational version of the programme and focused on teachers and school heads working in elementary education. Its broad purpose was to strengthen classroom practice and school leadership so that learning outcomes improved and classrooms became safer, more inclusive and more engaging. The 18- modules course was framed covering generic professional concerns, subject pedagogy, school leadership and policy-related responsibilities within one training package.

S.no.	Courses / Modules	Core Objectives
1	Curriculum and Inclusive Classroom	Connects curriculum with learner diversity, learning outcomes and inclusive classroom practice, encourages flexible teaching that responds to individual needs.
2	Developing Personal-Social Qualities and Creating a Safe and Healthy School Environment	Builds teachers' understanding of personal-social development and ways of creating friendly, safe and supportive school environments.
3	Art Integrated Learning	Uses visual, performing and literary arts as pedagogical resources to make learning experiential, creative and connected across subjects.
4	School-Based Assessment	Focuses on assessment as part of teaching-learning, including learning-outcome-based activities, questions and child-centred evidence of progress.
5	Health and Well-Being in	Addresses physical, emotional and social well-being and

	Schools	supports teachers in recognising and responding to students' needs.
6	Integration of ICT in Teaching, Learning and Assessment	Develops teachers' capacity to select and integrate digital tools and e-content into classroom teaching and assessment.
7	Initiatives in School Education	Builds awareness of major school-education initiatives and of the responsibilities of teachers and school heads within the wider system.
8	Pedagogy of Environmental Studies (Primary Stage)	Strengthens EVS pedagogy through observation, experience, discussion and activities connected with children's surroundings.
9	Pedagogy of Mathematics	Promotes mathematical thinking through activity-based approaches, problem-solving and connection between concepts and everyday experiences.
10	Pedagogy of Languages	Focuses on language as a resource for learning, multilingual realities, language pedagogy and assessment of language development.
11	Pedagogy of Science (Upper Primary Stage)	Encourages inquiry, investigation, observation and use of everyday contexts to make science learning meaningful.
12	Pedagogy of Social Sciences (Upper Primary Stage)	Strengthens teaching of history, geography and social-political themes through contextualised and participatory pedagogy.
13	School Leadership: Concepts and Applications	Develops school heads and teacher-leaders as academic leaders who can guide improvement, collaboration and school transformation.
14	Pre-School Education	Introduces developmentally appropriate approaches for early learning, including play, routine, language, numeracy and family involvement.
15	Pre-Vocational Education	Helps teachers connect classroom learning with work, practical activities and awareness of vocational possibilities at the upper-primary stage.
16	Relevance of Gender Dimensions in the Teaching-Learning Process	Builds awareness of gender bias, stereotypes and participation patterns so classroom processes become more equitable and sensitive.
17	COVID-19 Scenario: Addressing Challenges in School Education	Supports understanding of educational continuity and changing school responsibilities in the context of the pandemic and wider school-system initiatives.

18	Understanding Rights, Child Sexual Abuse and the POCSO Act, 2012	Builds awareness of child rights, protection and the responsibilities of school personnel in creating a safe learning environment.
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Table: 3

The table 3 shows that original face-to-face phase has reached 17,74,728 teachers and head teachers and 23,137 State Resource Group members across 33 States/UTs within about eight months, according to programme documentation. The subsequent online phase was designed to reach the remaining elementary-stage teacher population and was delivered through DIKSHA.

NISHTHA 2.0: Secondary and Senior Secondary Stage

NISHTHA 2.0 extended the framework to secondary and senior secondary education. The move was important because adolescence brings different developmental needs, secondary subjects demand more specialised pedagogy, and school leaders face increasingly complex academic and organisational responsibilities. The package therefore combined common professional concerns with subject-specific pedagogy. Official government records describe 12 generic courses and 56 subject-specific modules, giving 68 modules overall across the full secondary package.

S.no.	Generic courses	Core objectives
1	Curriculum and Inclusive Classrooms	Strengthens curriculum understanding and inclusive classroom practice while linking policy, curriculum, pedagogy and learners' diverse needs.
2	ICT in Teaching-Learning and Assessment	Supports purposeful integration of digital tools, resources and assessment practices in secondary education.
3	Developing Personal-Social Qualities for Holistic Development of Learners	Helps teachers understand and foster personal-social qualities, communication, emotional awareness and holistic development.
4	Art Integrated Learning	Uses art as a meaningful medium for conceptual understanding, engagement, creativity and interdisciplinary learning.
5	Understanding Secondary Stage Learners	Builds understanding of adolescent development, learner diversity, motivation and classroom relationships.
6	Health and Well-being	Addresses physical, mental and emotional well-being and the teacher's role in supporting healthy learning environments.
7	Integrating Gender in Schooling Processes	Examines gender bias, stereotypes, participation and equitable schooling processes.

8	School Leadership: Concepts and Applications	Develops academic and organisational leadership, collaborative learning and school improvement planning.
9	Vocational Education	Connects schooling with skills, employability, practical learning and the changing demands of work and technology.
10	School-Based Assessment	Promotes assessment approaches linked with competencies, evidence of learning and meaningful classroom practice.
11	Initiatives in School Education	Orients educators to major school-education initiatives and the responsibilities attached to their implementation.
12	Toy-Based Pedagogy	Uses toys and games, especially culturally relevant and indigenous resources, to support experiential, creative and competency-based learning.

Table: 4

The subject-specific component was organised around seven pedagogy tracks: English, Hindi, Sanskrit, Urdu, Mathematics, Science and Social Science. Together these tracks contained 56 subject-specific modules. The purpose of the subject component was to translate the common professional principles into effective pedagogy for the actual disciplines taught at the secondary stage.

Subject track	Indicative emphasis	Contribution to the common framework
English	Language development, comprehension, communication and literature-based pedagogy	Applies learner-centred, competency-oriented approaches to language learning.
Hindi	Language learning, expression, comprehension and classroom interaction	Connects language pedagogy with multilingual and inclusive classroom realities.
Sanskrit	Language structures, comprehension and contextualised language teaching	Strengthens subject-specific pedagogy within the common professional framework.
Urdu	Language development, literacy, expression and multilingual learning	Supports subject pedagogy while recognising linguistic diversity.

Mathematics	Conceptual understanding, reasoning, problem solving and mathematical thinking	Moves teaching beyond routine procedures towards competency and application.
Science	Inquiry, explanation, evidence, experiments and application of concepts	Links subject knowledge with experiential and investigative learning.
Social Science	Interpretation, context, evidence, society and democratic understanding	Promotes critical engagement with social realities and disciplinary thinking.

Table: 5

NISHTHA 3.0: Foundational Literacy and Numeracy

NISHTHA 3.0 was developed in the context of the national push for foundational literacy and numeracy. It was delivered online through DIKSHA and was linked directly with the objectives of NIPUN Bharat. The package comprised 12 modules and was intended for teachers and school heads working with children at the pre-primary and primary stages.

The importance of this version lies in its understanding that foundational learning is cumulative. Children who have difficulty reading with understanding, expressing ideas or handling basic numeracy in the early grades may face increasing difficulty as the curriculum becomes more demanding. Teacher development at this stage therefore needs to focus strongly on how children learn, how foundational skills develop, how assessment can identify learning gaps, how multilingual classrooms can be supported and how parents and communities can contribute to learning.

S.no.	Modules	Core objectives
1	Introduction to the FLN Mission	Builds a clear understanding of the foundational literacy and numeracy mission and its place within school education reform.
2	Shifting Towards Competency-Based Education	Moves teaching and assessment from coverage of content towards demonstrated competencies and meaningful learning.
3	Understanding Learners: How Children Learn	Strengthens teachers' understanding of child development, learning processes and learner differences.
4	Involvement of Parents and Communities for FLN	Emphasises family and community participation in supporting early literacy and numeracy.
5	Understanding Vidya Pravesh and Balvatika	Connects school-entry preparation with developmentally appropriate foundational-stage learning.
6	Foundational Language and Literacy	Develops classroom approaches for oral language, reading, writing and comprehension.

7	Multilingual Education in Primary Grades	Supports teaching in linguistically diverse classrooms and values children's home languages as learning resources.
8	Learning Assessment	Uses ongoing evidence and simple assessment processes to understand learning progress and identify needs.
9	Foundational Numeracy	Strengthens number sense, operations, reasoning and meaningful early mathematical experiences.
10	School Leadership for Foundational Literacy and Numeracy	Positions school heads as academic leaders who can support FLN-focused planning and classroom improvement.
11	Integration of ICT in Teaching, Learning and Assessment	Shows how digital tools can support foundational learning, teacher practice and assessment.
12	Toy-Based Pedagogy for the Foundational Stage	Uses play, toys and hands-on activity to make foundational learning engaging and developmentally appropriate.

Table: 6

NISHTHA 4.0: Early Childhood Care and Education

NISHTHA 4.0 extended the programme architecture to Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE). The programme was designed around the understanding that the early years are foundational to later learning and Anganwadi workers and pre-school teachers need professional support in developing and applying appropriate pedagogy. The official primer describes six courses intended for master trainers who would, in turn, support Anganwadi workers and pre-school teachers.

No.	Courses	Core objectives
1	Significance of the Early Years	To explain why and how the early years of a child are critical for physical, cognitive, language, social and emotional development and clarifies the educational role of early-childhood personnel.
2	Planning for Children's Play and Learning	Focuses on safe, stimulating physical and learning environments and developmentally appropriate ways of planning for play and learning.
3	Play-Based Activities for Holistic Development	Uses play, activity, toys and observation to support broad developmental goals and track children's progress.
4	Partnerships with Parents and Communities	Strengthens home-school-community links and practical ways of engaging families and local communities in children's development.

5	School Readiness	Explains readiness as a shared responsibility involving children, schools and families rather than pressure on children alone.
6	Birth to Three Years: Early Identification for Intervention of Special Needs	Raises awareness of early developmental concerns and the importance of timely identification, referral and support.

Table: 7

Implementation guidance for ECCE shows a sequential, self-paced digital model. Courses were released in batches on DIKSHA, supported by video, text, interactive and reflective activities, portfolio tasks and assessments. State teams translated, contextualised and reviewed the resources before courses were made live in state tenants. The guideline also specifies an assessment threshold of 70% for course certification.

5.0 Course Structure and Development of Modules

The course structure of NISHTHA has been designed in a simple, effective and systematic manner for teachers to understand the content and relate it to their classroom practices. Each course comprises learning material, videos, activities, assignments and assessment. The teachers are required to study the content related to the given module, view the related videos and participate in the activities and tasks given in the course. The activities are aimed at engaging the teachers in reflective and experiential exercises to understand the relevance of the ideas presented in the training to their teaching practices. An assessment or quiz was conducted at the end of each course, and participants were generally required to score 70% or above to complete the course and receive a certificate. Online courses were uploaded in DIKSHA, thus enabling teachers to learn at their own pace and access the digital resources.

The NISHTHA modules have been developed by a collaborative initiative of various organizations. NCERT and NIEPA played a major role in the development of training content with the inputs and consultations from the States and UTs, CBSE, KVS, NVS, school heads and other educational organizations. There were other organizations which also contributed to the development of modules such as – Kaivalya Foundation, Tata Trusts, Azim Premji Foundation, Sri Aurobindo Society, etc. The modules developed were in the form of standardized learning units, but the content could be modified as per the requirements of different stages and educational setups. The modules comprised theoretical inputs, examples, activities, reflection and application to classroom practices. The use of technology has also been integrated into the program through digital resources and the Learning Management System (LMS) for registration, accessing the content, assessment and monitoring

6.0 Evolving Framework

The four versions discussed above represent the major stage-wise architecture of NISHTHA, but the framework has continued to evolve. Recent Ministry reporting records further work in areas such as NISHTHA Inclusive Education, NISHTHA Educational Technology and NISHTHA Kaushal. 2024-25 report of the Ministry of Education uncovers that an Inclusive Education pilot has been completed, Educational Technology Level 1 program has been launched, and Level 2 is initiated in pilot form. This

indicates that NISHTHA is better understood as an evolving professional-development program than as a program that ended with the completion of the first four versions.

7.0 Conclusion

NISHTHA represents one of the most comprehensive national efforts in India to strengthen the professional capacity of teachers and school heads through an integrated framework. It responds to the need for improved learning outcomes and a more coherent model of professional development. Its distinctive contribution is to bring together classroom pedagogy, assessment, inclusion, well-being, technology, school leadership and awareness of educational initiatives within one national architecture. The development of NISHTHA 1.0, 2.0, 3.0 and 4.0 shows how the framework adapted to different stages of education and to emerging national priorities. The move from face-to-face training to DIKSHA-based delivery broadened the possibilities for scale, flexibility and monitoring, while the stage-specific versions recognised that professional needs differ across early childhood, foundational, elementary and secondary education.

The significance of NISHTHA lies in a simple but important principle that educational improvement depends on the capacity of the people who make learning happen every day. Training cannot by itself solve every challenge in school education, but sustained, relevant and well-supported professional learning can strengthen teachers' ability to respond to diverse learners, use evidence, adopt appropriate pedagogy and create better learning environments. The continuing development of NISHTHA indicates that teacher professional development is increasingly being treated as an essential part of quality school education rather than as a peripheral activity.

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