



# Redefining Performing Arts Pedagogy in Secondary Teacher Education: A Curriculum Reflection from Manipur University

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## ABSTRACT

Exploring the transformative potential of performing arts—particularly drama, music, and theatre—in teacher education, this study reimagines pedagogical practice through the lens of constructivist, experiential, and culturally responsive approaches. Grounded in key policy frameworks such as NCF 2005, the NCERT Position Paper (2006), and NEP 2020, it makes a strong case for integrating drama and theatre into B.Ed. programmes. Using Manipur University as a case study, the research highlights the continued marginalization of these art forms, despite their deep cultural roots and pedagogical relevance. The findings illustrate how theatre-based micro-teaching can foster emotional intelligence, enhance communication skills, and support inclusive classroom practices. To embed the arts more meaningfully into teacher preparation, the study proposes structured drama-theatre modules, performance-based assessments, and targeted faculty development. Placing performing arts at the heart of teacher education, it envisions educators who teach not just with skill, but with creativity, empathy, and soul.

**Keywords:** Performing Arts Pedagogy, Drama in Education, B.Ed. Curriculum, Micro-teaching, Teacher Identity, Culturally Responsive Teaching

## 1. Introduction

In the evolving landscape of teacher education, the performing arts—encompassing music, dance, drama, and theatre—are no longer luxuries but necessities. They are not simply tools of aesthetic expression; they are pedagogical powerhouses that shape empathetic, adaptable, and emotionally intelligent educators. As Rabindranath Tagore aptly stated:

Literature, music and the arts are all necessary for the development and flowering of a student to form an integrated total personality (NCERT, 2006, p. 7).

This vision becomes increasingly relevant in the 21st century, where teaching demands not just subject expertise but the capacity to connect, inspire, and engage learners across diverse contexts.

Performing arts, particularly theatre, offer immersive and embodied learning experiences that are unmatched in their ability to transform teacher education. As Dr. Anonna Guha (2019)—an academician and performer—notes, artistic engagement enhances memory, fosters empathy, and builds confidence: qualities critical to effective teaching. Similarly, Dr. Tushar Guha (n.d.), founder of the Nrityanjali Institute, underscores the pedagogical value of voice modulation, gesture, and non-verbal communication—all fundamental elements of theatre that strengthen a teacher's classroom presence.

Within this dynamic, micro-teaching emerges as a fertile ground for innovation. Traditionally designed to develop instructional skills in a scaled-down classroom setting, micro-teaching can be radically enriched by theatre-based strategies. When combined with dramatic techniques such as role-play, improvisation, and movement, micro-teaching becomes a space for expressive and embodied learning. This synthesis nurtures vocal dynamics, body language, classroom management, and spontaneity—supporting both cognitive and affective domains of teacher development.

Despite policy advances—particularly the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, which calls for holistic, multidisciplinary, and experiential learning—the actual integration of performing arts into teacher education remains uneven and underdeveloped. At institutions like Manipur University, the two-year B.Ed. curriculum

includes *Art and Aesthetic Education* and offers *Music Education* in limited settings. Yet, structured modules in drama and theatre are notably absent. Ironically, student-teachers participate in vibrant local performance traditions such as Shumang Leela, but these engagements are relegated to co-curricular spaces and disconnected from pedagogical training.

This paper contends that such marginalization of performing arts in teacher education contradicts both policy aspirations and cultural potential. It argues that drama and theatre should be central—not supplementary—to the preparation of reflective, inclusive, and emotionally intelligent educators. Grounded in national policy frameworks, supported by micro-teaching innovations, and rooted in the rich performative culture of Northeast India, this paper advocates for a transformative approach to teacher education. One that prepares educators not just to teach content, but to embody compassion, communicate with conviction, and nurture creativity in every learner.

## **2. Conceptual Framework and Theoretical Underpinnings**

The integration of performing arts—including theatre, drama, music, and dance—into teacher education is grounded in interdisciplinary theories that emphasize the emotional, cognitive, cultural, and embodied dimensions of teaching and learning. This section outlines the key frameworks that support the pedagogical value of performing arts, with a particular emphasis on theatre and drama, and their relevance to micro-teaching and teacher preparation.

### **2.1 Constructivist and Experiential Learning Theories**

Performing arts-based pedagogy draws significantly from constructivist learning theories, as articulated by Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky (1971), who emphasized that learners actively construct knowledge through experience and social interaction. Theatre and drama, as forms of experiential learning, allow teacher trainees to embody characters, explore roles, and reflect on real-world classroom scenarios in meaningful ways. David Kolb's experiential learning model (1984)—which cycles through concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation—provides a strong rationale for incorporating performance-based techniques into teacher education.

In micro-teaching contexts, activities such as role-play, improvisation, and dramatic monologues provide opportunities for student-teachers to practice lesson delivery while developing confidence, adaptability, and reflective thinking—what Donald Schön (1983) terms “reflection-in-action.” This alignment strengthens both pedagogical skill and personal insight.

### **2.2 Multiple Intelligences and Arts-Based Learning**

Howard Gardner's *Theory of Multiple Intelligences* (1983) supports the inclusion of performing arts in teacher training by valuing intelligences that traditional curricula often overlook—particularly bodily-kinesthetic, musical, interpersonal, and intrapersonal intelligences. Engaging with theatre activates these intelligences, helping teacher trainees to recognize diverse learner profiles and to craft more inclusive, multimodal classroom practices.

When incorporated into micro-teaching, theatre-based exercises enhance non-verbal communication, spatial awareness, and emotional articulation, making student-teachers more responsive to the dynamic needs of 21st-century classrooms.

### **2.3 Emotional Intelligence and Teacher Identity Formation**

Emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1995) is increasingly recognized as critical for effective teaching. Performing arts—particularly theatre—cultivate self-awareness, empathy, and emotional regulation by placing participants in emotionally charged, ethically complex, or socially situated roles. These experiences prepare future educators to navigate real classroom dynamics with greater emotional maturity and cultural sensitivity.

Moreover, engagement with theatre contributes to teacher identity formation, a process shaped by performative, reflective, and relational experiences (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). By stepping into multiple roles—both literal and metaphorical—teacher trainees begin to envision themselves not only as instructors but as facilitators, communicators, and change-makers.

### **2.4 Culturally Responsive Pedagogy**

In multicultural contexts such as Northeast India, culturally responsive pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995) becomes indispensable. Theatre traditions rooted in local folklore, indigenous rituals, and regional storytelling forms offer rich pedagogical tools for contextualized teaching. Integrating these into the B.Ed. curriculum affirms students' identities, bridges home and school cultures, and builds community trust.

By engaging with local performance forms—such as Shumang Leela (courtyard theatre) in Manipur—teacher trainees not only learn about dramatic expression but also gain insights into social narratives, intergenerational knowledge, and linguistic diversity. These culturally grounded approaches align well with the National Education Policy 2020's emphasis on experiential and inclusive learning.

## 2. Historical and Policy Context of Performing Arts in Indian Teacher Education

### 2.1 Ancient and Indigenous Foundations

Indian education has traditionally been holistic, as exemplified by the Gurukul system, where intellectual, moral, and spiritual learning were interwoven through oral traditions, music, chanting, recitation, and dramatic enactment. The Nāṭyaśāstra (circa 200 BCE–200 CE), a seminal Sanskrit treatise attributed to Bharata, positioned drama not merely as entertainment but as a pedagogical and moral force. It provided a comprehensive framework for integrating performance into education—a practice deeply embedded in India's cultural psyche.

### 2.2 Colonial Era: Marginalization and Resistance

The colonial education system imposed by the British emphasized textual literacy and Eurocentric curricula, marginalizing indigenous art forms. Drama and oral storytelling were sidelined as non-scientific or impractical. However, visionaries like Rabindranath Tagore resisted this narrowing of educational purpose. At Santiniketan, Tagore blended music, drama, dance, and visual arts into everyday learning. For him, theatre was a space to explore identity, nurture empathy, and express creativity—central elements of a humane education.

Although the Sadler Commission (1917–19) supported liberal education, it offered little policy impetus for integrating the arts into teacher preparation. Thus, despite progressive ideals, performing arts remained largely absent from mainstream curricula.

### 2.3 Post-Independence Education Commissions

After independence, national education bodies began to re-acknowledge the arts. The Secondary Education Commission (1952–53) emphasized the *release of creative energy*, the *dignity of labour*, and *craft-based learning* as crucial for student development. The Kothari Commission (1964–66) further argued for creative expression as essential in a scientific and modernizing age. It lamented the lack of trained art educators and recommended the establishment of Bal Bhavans, university art departments, and national surveys on art education.

Subsequently, a committee under K.G. Saiyidain (1966–67) called for art education from the pre-primary stage and proposed the establishment of art education departments in teacher training institutions. Yet, implementation remained uneven due to curricular rigidity and limited institutional capacity.

### 2.4 Curriculum Reforms and Contemporary Policies

The National Curriculum Framework (NCF) 2005 marked a paradigm shift by grounding education in constructivist and inclusive pedagogies. It emphasized that performing arts are essential for intellectual and emotional development. Building on this, the NCERT Position Paper on Arts, Music, Dance and Theatre (2006) strongly advocated integrating these disciplines throughout the curriculum—not as isolated activities but as central to holistic education.

Following this, the National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE) introduced curriculum frameworks in 2009 and 2014, mandating *Art and Aesthetic Education* in teacher education. However, by decentralizing curriculum design to individual universities, these reforms led to inconsistent outcomes. In many institutions, *drama and theatre* were reduced to minimal exposure or limited to theoretical modules, treated more as co-curricular add-ons than pedagogical tools.

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 further builds on these visions. It promotes art-integrated, experiential learning across educational levels and supports Integrated Teacher Education Programmes (ITEPs) that include local, folk, and performance traditions. NEP 2020 aligns with global best practices that view drama-based pedagogy as essential for cultivating collaboration, communication, and critical thinking in future educators.

### 2.5 Persisting Gaps

Despite a progressive policy trajectory, the structured, practice-based integration of performing arts into teacher education remains limited. The lack of institutional support, trained faculty, and clearly designed curricular models means that the potential of drama and theatre remains largely untapped. What is needed now is not just policy intent but curricular transformation—one that places performing art at the core of teacher training, fostering educators who are not only knowledgeable, but also empathetic, expressive, and culturally grounded.

## 4. Current Scenario at Manipur University

At Manipur University, the two-year B.Ed. programme includes *Arts and Aesthetic Education* under the Enhancing Professional Capacities (EPC) component, intended to foster creativity, sensitivity, and artistic expression among teacher trainees. However, this paper remains largely theoretical in its delivery and lacks dedicated modules for specific disciplines like drama or theatre, which are central to both cultural expression and educational innovation.

While Music Education is available as an optional paper under Performing Arts, it is offered in only a few affiliated institutions, making access highly uneven. A review of the optional subjects available across 15 affiliated secondary teacher education institutions in 2024 reveals a concerning trend: Guidance and Counselling is offered in 71% of institutions, Art Education in 57%, and Environmental Education in 50%. In contrast, Performing Arts (Music) is offered in only 14%, while drama and theatre are entirely absent from formal course offerings. These figures underscore the systemic underrepresentation of performing arts within the B.Ed. curriculum, despite their pedagogical and policy relevance.

Ironically, teacher trainees enthusiastically engage in dramatic performances and cultural events, such as music competitions, theatre acts, and festivals, organized within campus life. Manipur's rich heritage in folk performance traditions, including "Shumang Leela"—a unique courtyard theatre form rooted in community storytelling—attests to the deep cultural relevance and pedagogic potential of drama and theatre. Yet, these are typically categorized as co-curricular or extracurricular, rather than being acknowledged and developed as formal components of teacher training.

This separation between cultural engagement and curricular structure reflects a missed opportunity to transform teacher education into a space of experiential, expressive, and culturally grounded learning. The absence of structured modules in drama and theatre limits teacher trainees' ability to develop competencies in voice modulation, non-verbal communication, emotional intelligence, and creative classroom management—skills that are fundamental to effective teaching.

Moreover, an analysis of the semester-wise course distribution within the B.Ed. programme reveals an imbalance in academic load. Semester I is densely packed with foundational and theoretical courses, offering little scope for practical engagement. In contrast, Semesters II and III are relatively lighter, while Semester IV is fully devoted to school internship. This distribution presents an opportunity: Semesters II and III could be effectively utilized to introduce practice-based modules in theatre, drama, and other performing arts, allowing time for rehearsal, peer collaboration, and performance-based assessment.

Embedding structured drama and theatre modules—rooted in indigenous forms and aligned with NEP 2020's emphasis on experiential, multidisciplinary education—would enhance teacher preparation both culturally and pedagogically. Such reforms would not only bridge the gap between Manipur's lived cultural realities and institutional practice but also equip future educators with the expressive, empathetic, and communicative capacities required in today's diverse classrooms.

## 5. Curriculum Structure and Possibilities for Integration

The NCERT Position Paper on Arts, Music, Dance and Theatre (2006) presents a compelling framework for integrating performing arts meaningfully into teacher education. It advocates a dual-purpose model—one that recognizes the arts both as independent disciplines and as pedagogical tools to enhance learning across subjects. This perspective aligns seamlessly with the NEP 2020's vision for holistic, multidisciplinary, and experiential education.

According to the position paper, teacher education must go beyond theoretical exposure and develop practical competencies in arts integration. It calls for nurturing creativity, aesthetic awareness, cultural appreciation, and expressive skills through structured engagement in music, dance, theatre, and puppetry. Notably, it emphasizes that pre-service teachers should be equipped to use performing arts, such as drama, role-play, and music, to teach subjects like language, science, and social studies.

In terms of assessment, the paper recommends a shift away from traditional examinations toward process-based evaluations—such as reflective observation, peer feedback, and performance portfolios. These tools are particularly suitable for practice-oriented modules like the proposed 100-mark course on "Creative and Performing Arts in Education", which could be embedded within Semesters II and III. This approach would also enhance micro-teaching by providing student-teachers the opportunity to practice communication, non-verbal expression, and emotional engagement in a supportive, performative setting.

Importantly, the NCERT document reimagines the role of teacher educators—not as mere knowledge providers, but as facilitators of creative and contextual learning, helping trainees connect pedagogy with cultural identity and real-world expression.

Complementing this perspective, the Curriculum Framework for the NCTE Two-Year B.Ed. Programme (2014) outlines three essential curricular domains:

1. Perspectives in Education,
2. Curriculum and Pedagogic Studies, and
3. Engagement with the Field.

Within this structure, the Enhancing Professional Capacities (EPC) component plays a pivotal role in promoting interdisciplinary and reflective practices, including visual and performing arts, storytelling, and community-based engagement.

Manipur University's B.Ed. Regulation 2017 generally aligns with the NCTE framework and includes relevant regional components such as Health, Yoga, and Physical Education as a core course. However, despite Manipur's rich artistic traditions, structured engagement with performing arts remains limited and inconsistently implemented across affiliated institutions.

Currently, EPC 2: Art and Aesthetic Education is a mandatory 50-mark paper aimed at fostering sensitivity and creativity. While it provides a foundational understanding of the arts, it does not offer focused training in specific performing arts like dance, drama, or theatre. Additionally, Performing Arts (Music) is available only as an optional subject under Curriculum and Pedagogic Studies in a minority of institutions (approximately 14%), whereas dance and theatre are entirely absent from formal curricular offerings.

This curricular shortfall exists despite the fact that teacher trainees across Manipur University's affiliated colleges actively engage in drama, music, and cultural performances during institutional events. These are typically considered co-curricular rather than being formally assessed or pedagogically utilized—a missed opportunity given the expressive and educational potential of such activities.

An analysis of the semester-wise course distribution reveals an imbalance: Semester I is overloaded with theoretical and foundational papers, leaving little room for experiential learning. By contrast, Semesters II and III are relatively lighter, and Semester IV is fully devoted to school internship. This structure opens the possibility for strategic reallocation, whereby performance-based modules—especially in drama and theatre—could be introduced in Semesters II and III, allowing time for rehearsal, collaboration, and micro-teaching integration.

### Proposed Structural Reform

To bridge the gap between cultural practice and professional preparation, the following reforms are recommended:

- Introduce a dedicated 100-mark course titled “*Creative and Performing Arts in Education (Visual Arts, Music, Dance, and Drama)*”, to be positioned either as a core paper under Perspectives in Education or as an expanded EPC module. This course should combine both conceptual understanding and discipline-specific practical training.
- Retain EPC 2: Art and Aesthetic Education as a foundational 50-mark paper that focuses on appreciation, critique, and reflective engagement, while the newly proposed course would focus on hands-on, performance-based learning.

A recent review of 15 affiliated secondary teacher education institutions in the region reveals a complete absence of drama and theatre in their programs. This significant gap highlights the pressing need for curricular reform and enhanced institutional support. Strategically embedding structured performing arts modules in Semesters II and III would not only align with NEP 2020's emphasis on experiential, art-integrated, and culturally responsive pedagogy, but also help empower future teachers with the creativity, empathy, and expressive capacity necessary for engaging diverse learners in complex classroom realities.

## 6. Conclusion and Recommendations

### Conclusion

This paper has explored the limited integration of performing arts within the B.Ed. curriculum at Manipur University, despite their strong alignment with the holistic and experiential vision advocated by key policy frameworks such as the NCTE 2014 Regulations and the NEP 2020. While the programme currently includes *Art and Aesthetic Education* as an EPC course and offers *Music Education* as an optional subject in select institutions, formal training in dance and drama remains absent. This marginalisation stands in contrast to the growing recognition of performing arts as pedagogical tools that cultivate empathy, communication, and cultural sensitivity—qualities central to effective teaching.

In a culturally vibrant region like Manipur, where teacher trainees actively participate in dramatic and cultural performances, there exists both a compelling need and an untapped opportunity to reposition performing arts from the periphery to the pedagogical core of teacher preparation. The semester-wise flexibility within the current B.Ed. structure further supports the scope for meaningful curricular redesign, particularly in Semesters II and III.

Moreover, integrating performing arts into micro-teaching sessions can significantly enrich the professional preparation of secondary school teachers. Through role-play, improvisation, and performance-based reflection, student-teachers can develop classroom competencies such as voice modulation, non-verbal communication, questioning techniques, and emotional engagement—skills often underdeveloped in conventional training models.

A transformative shift in curriculum, faculty preparedness, and institutional support is therefore timely and essential—not just to fulfil the NEP 2020's vision but to nurture reflective, inclusive, and resilient educators for 21st-century classrooms.

### Recommendations

Based on the key insights discussed, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Curriculum Integration

- Introduce a 100-mark paper titled *Creative and Performing Arts in Education (Visual Arts, Music, Dance, and Drama)* as a core course or expanded EPC module, ensuring balance between “art as subject” and “education through art.”
  - Embed micro-teaching and interdisciplinary applications of performing arts (e.g., using drama to teach historical empathy or science concepts) as recommended by NCERT (2006).
2. Performance-Based Assessment
    - Implement non-traditional evaluation methods such as portfolios, performance reviews, peer reflections, and faculty observations, aligning with NCERT’s advocacy for process-oriented assessment in the arts.
  3. Faculty Orientation
    - Organize workshops that orient faculty toward experiential, process-driven arts pedagogy, shifting from lecture-based instruction to a more facilitative, mentor-oriented role.
  4. Cultural Relevance
    - Design modules that integrate indigenous art forms (e.g., Shumang Leela), reinforcing the NCERT Position Paper’s emphasis on contextual and inclusive pedagogy rooted in local culture.

By adopting these recommendations, teacher education institutions—especially in culturally rich but underrepresented regions like Manipur—can take concrete steps toward realising the NEP 2020’s call for holistic and inclusive education. Embedding performing arts into the core of micro-teaching and secondary teacher preparation is not merely an aesthetic or extracurricular addition; it is a strategic pedagogical imperative for equipping future teachers with the emotional intelligence, creativity, and cultural literacy required for today’s diverse classrooms.

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