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Teacher Education in Singapore

Teacher Education Institute

The National Institute of Education (NIE), Singapore is the national teacher education institute in Singapore. Since its establishment as the Teacher Training College in 1950, NIE has since developed into one of the leading teacher education institutes in the world. NIE is an autonomous institute of the Nanyang Technological University (NTU). NIE also plays an important role in providing education research and research based-pedagogical curriculum and direction to the Ministry and its schools. Working in partnership with the Ministry of Education (MOE) and schools, NIE is an integral part of the education service in Singapore.

NIE provides all levels of teacher education, from initial teacher education programmes to professional development programmes for in-service teachers and executive leadership programmes for Principals, Departmental Heads and other school leaders. NIE's initial teacher education programmes prepare teachers for all government schools ranging from primary schools to Junior Colleges in Singapore. NIE administers postgraduate programmes that lead to the award of higher degrees (i.e., Master of Arts, Master of Science, Master of Education, Master of Teaching, Ph.D. and Doctor in Education). In addition, NIE also provides the *Management and Leadership in Schools (MLS)* and *Leaders in Education (International) (LEPI)* for overseas education leaders, as well as the joint *Master of Arts in Leadership and Educational Change* programme between NIE and Teachers College, Columbia University.

Initial Teacher Education

There are various pathways for qualified candidates to complete initial teacher education at NIE to fulfil their ambition to be teachers in Singapore. NIE's initial teacher education programmes include the Diploma in Education, Bachelor of Science (Education), Bachelor of Arts (Education) and the Postgraduate Diploma in Education (PGDE) (see Table 1). The Bachelor of Education programme is designed to help primary school teachers to achieve their goals of completing a degree.

The two-stage admission process of student teachers into NIE's initial teacher education programmes ensures stringent selection of qualified candidates. The first level is the short-listing of candidates based on NIE's university admission criteria. The short-listed candidates

are then individually interviewed by MOE as part of the selection process. NIE faculty members are also involved as members of the interview panels for the degree programmes. The interview panels assess the candidates' communication skills, interest in teaching, goals and aspirations, and willingness to learn. All successful candidates are then employed by MOE. Before they enroll at NIE for their initial teacher education training, all successful candidates are required to successfully complete a teaching stint in schools as untrained teachers. The purpose of the teaching stint is to further assess the suitability of the candidates to be teachers and also to allow the candidates to have a better understanding of what is involved to be teachers. MOE provides all student teachers enrolled at NIE with monthly salaries/stipends and tuition waivers. On average, the total intake for NIE's initial teacher education programmes is about 2000 student teachers per academic year (AY) (e.g., 2019 for AY2012-13, 2066 for AY2011-12, 2320 for AY2010-11).

Table 1
Type and duration of NIE's Initial Teacher Education Programmes

Programme	Level for Teaching	Duration
Diploma in Education	Primary / Secondary	2 years
Bachelor of Arts (Education) Bachelor of Science (Education)	Primary & Secondary	4 years
Bachelor of Education	Primary	3 years Part-time + 0.5 year Full-time
PGDE (Primary) PGDE (Secondary) PGDE (Junior College)	Primary, Secondary Junior College	1 year (2 years for Physical Education)
Diploma in Special Education	Special Education/ Allied Educators	1 year

NIE's Model of Teacher Education for the 21st Century (TE²¹)

NIE's Model of Teacher Education for the 21st century (TE²¹) revolves around the Values, Skill and Knowledge (V³SK) model which focus on three value paradigms:

- *Learner-centredness* puts the learner at the centre of teachers' work and the teacher must be aware of learner development and diversity, believe that all youths can learn, care for one another, strive for scholarship in content teaching, know how people can learn best, and learn to design the best learning environment possible.
- *Developing a strong sense of teacher identity* refers to upholding the highest standards in teaching and being a teacher and possessing a strong drive to learn in view of rapid changes in the education milieu and to being responsive to students' needs.

- *Service to the profession and community* focuses on teachers' commitment to growing beginning teachers within their profession through active collaborations and striving to become better practitioners in order to benefit the teaching fraternity as a whole.

To prepare teachers who are ready for the challenges of nurturing and mentoring their students in the 21st century, teachers should possess skills such as reflective skills and thinking dispositions, pedagogical skills, people- and self- management skills, administrative and management skills, communication and facilitative skills, technological skills, innovation and entrepreneurship skills, as well as social and emotional intelligence. Knowledge necessary for 21st century competent teachers are of self, pupil, community, subject content, curriculum and pedagogy, educational foundation and policies, global and environment awareness as well as multicultural literacy. These requisite skills and knowledge are closely aligned with MOE's desired outcomes of preparing students to be collaborative learners, confident persons, active contributors and concerned citizens.

NIE's TE²¹ serves as the philosophical framework for guiding the review, enhancement and delivery of the courses within the initial teacher education programmes. In addition to the V³SK model, clarity in terms of beginning teachers' competencies is articulated in NIE's Graduand Teacher Competency (GTC) framework. It represents a holistic integration of the V³SK model and the MOE competencies framework for beginning teachers, using the three performance dimensions – professional practice, leadership and management, and personal effectiveness.

NIE believes that values are the key characteristics of a true teacher. Both the formal curriculum and experiential learning such as service learning are effective in promoting the essentials of values. To ensure that values are central in the teacher preparation programmes, all student teachers participate in two core mandatory programmes: the Group Endeavours in Service Learning (GESL) and the Meranti Project (a personal and professional development 2-day non-residential workshop). GESL provides hands-on opportunities for student teachers to engage with a community partner of their choice and to contribute towards furthering the cause of that community and in so doing, helps student teachers to hone values such as teamwork, resilience, empathy, service to the community to name a few. Service learning has been used as a pedagogical tool at NIE since 2004 to develop teachers who will be able to lead, care, and inspire the young people and forge trusting partnerships with the community. As of 2012, a total of 17200 student teachers have completed GESL and contributed more than 71000 hours in serving the community.

The Meranti Project facilitate student teachers to develop better self-awareness; clarify their role in nurturing National Education; understand how to better work with diversity in the classroom; develop strategies for coping; and affirm their choice of teaching as a career. At the same time, NIE student teachers use their *Teaching and Learning e-portfolio* e-portfolios to document their growth as learners and teachers, translating their reflections into words, interaction with other users, gathering feedback from their tutors and peers, and for reflection and conversation about their growing understandings of what constitutes good teaching in relation to the V3SK and GTC. This collaborative learning platform facilitates student teachers' consolidation of their learning and reflections on their development as a teacher.

A key component within teacher education is the practicum. This is where student teachers applies what they have learnt in the classroom. Enhancements to the practicum structure have proven effective, with teacher mentors from schools supporting the introduction of *Focused Conversations (FC)* which allows student teachers to share with their school mentors about their learning in NIE, issues encountered during the practicum on classroom management and motivating pupils, and about their learning in school towards developing teaching competencies. A Reflective Practice framework is also incorporated in the practicum model to foster the development of the reflective teacher.

NIE has also transformed the physical infrastructure in NIE, such as the collaborative tutorial rooms, the model Primary English Language classrooms and Teachers' Language Development Centre, to support the new pedagogical approaches designed to achieve the desired teaching and learning outcomes. The collaborative tutorial rooms are equipped with technology-driven learning tools and designed with learning spaces that allows student teachers to conduct collaborative activities.

Challenges and opportunities for internationalisation of Teacher Education

NIE is aware that global and cultural awareness is critical for student teachers. Teachers must be able to work in harmony with students, co-workers and parents from diverse cultures and nationalities. As such, NIE encourages our student teachers to participate in overseas service learning journeys and complete exchange semesters at overseas universities. In addition, the formal curriculum also helps to expose student teachers to global issues and raise their understanding of the common challenges and focus across national boundaries. NIE will continue to work with relevant partners to increase the internationalisation of teacher education.