

Assuring Quality in Teacher Education: Some Emerging Concerns, Issues & Future Directions in the present Changing Knowledge Era

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Abstract

There is a growing concern of assuring quality at all levels of education in the present educational scenario. The quality of education we provide to our children depends on the quality of education of teacher we inject into the education system, which in turn depends on the quality of teacher education programme. Quality is not just the quantum of knowledge imparted to students but also the effectiveness with which they are able to apply that knowledge in meeting the challenges of tomorrow. Quality in teacher education programme also depends on the quality of teaching. For this there is an urgent review of curriculum of teacher education programme. The quality of pre-service and in-service education needs to be upgraded. It has been rightly said by the Education Commission (1964-66) that, "Of all the different factors which influence the quality of education and its contribution to national development, the quality, competence and character of teachers are undoubtedly the most significant". Since the dawn of independence, the Indian teacher education has undergone drastic changes. The major observable change is the mushrooming of educational institutions. Though, these are in compliance with growing needs of increasing student enrolment and student graduates, these institutions, especially self-financing ones, lack the true spirit of education that is development of individual work. Thus, quantity is overpowering quality. Quality of education and especially, teacher education has deteriorated to an alarming extent. The present paper discusses the need of teacher education programs to be innovative and various practices that can be included. It has been recognized that the present teacher education program should be structured and modified in a way that enables them to respond dynamically to the new problems and challenges in the field of education, then only teacher can help in national development. The present paper also highlights the need of quality, quality control, quality assurance, and assessment of quality, quality concerns and the steps which are to be taken for maintaining quality standards.

Key Words: NAAC, Professional Development, Quality Assurance, Quality Control, Quality Concerns, Quality Indicator, Quality, Teacher Education Programmes

Introduction

Since time immemorial education is envisaged as the most effective way of enlightenment for all, which will lead to better and high quality of life. Teachers have the highest influence on the evolution of society. They not only give knowledge but also generate love for pursuit of knowledge. They act as mentors, torchbearers in creating social cohesion, national integration and a learning society. They not only disseminate knowledge but also create and generate new knowledge. No nation can even marginally slacken its efforts in giving necessary professional inputs to its teachers and along with due status to their stature and profession. Teacher education has gained all the more importance, in today's context, with an explicit aim of "Quality Education for All".

The quality of a nation depends on the quality of its citizens; the quality of its citizens depends more than other features on the quality of its teachers imparting education. The task of bringing qualitative change in institutional efficacy of the teacher education system is a challenge. Educationists the world over have agreed that the training of the teachers is of utmost importance in any educational endeavour. The Vedas call it a divine exercise no wonder the teacher was defied. “*Acharya Devo Bhava*” says the *Upanishads*. From the Vedic times, ashrams and gurukuls have insisted on the primacy of the teacher and the utmost importance of teacher training.

It may be noted that right after the independence, the demand for teachers both at elementary and secondary levels had increased considerably. There is a mushroom growth of teacher education institutions, especially the self-financing ones, all over the country with little attention to their quality. Quantity resulted in dilution of quality in all spheres of education including teacher education. The observations of Education Commission (1964-1966) that, “the quality of training institutions remains, with a few exceptions, either mediocre or poor”, may be considered to be true even today.

Objectives of the Present Study

The present study was undertaken with the following broad objectives:

- 1.) To study the policies and programmes related to teacher education.
- 2.) To study few issues and concerns related to improving the quality of present teacher education system.
- 3.) To study how quality assurance could be achieved through NAAC and its quality indicators.
- 4.) To study the factors that make the present teacher training programmes ineffective and inadequate.
- 5.) To give certain suggestions regarding improving the quality of present teacher education programmes.
- 6.) To study challenges faced by the teacher education and teacher education programmes in future.

Methodology of the Study

Keeping in view of availability of the resources and feasibility of the present research paper, the author conducted his research studies on the basis of secondary sources of data. Secondary data has been collected from various books, Journals, research articles etc. The methodology of the study also includes the thoughts and writings of various authors in the stream of academic, research & corporate industry. Thus, the author utilized all resources available and carried out extensive studies for the present research paper.

Policies and Programmes Related to Teacher Education

Educational policies and programmes have been reviewed in the light of the goals of national development and priorities set from time to time. The Education Commission (1964-1966) recognized the importance of professional development preparation of teacher for the qualitative improvement of education. The Parliament and University Grants Commission appointed several committees for examining the matter and the first National Policy on Education was brought out in 1968. The NPE recognised the continuity and inseparability or pre and in-service teacher education and recommended permanent educational mechanisms for it. This policy was followed by Programme of Action (POA, 1992) which gave the details

about the concretization of policy into action. The National Commission on Teachers (1983) studied in depth the problems of teachers and the status of teachers in society. Its main recommendations were enhancing the period of training, change in selection procedure of teachers, pedagogy of teacher education, enrichment of courses and practical work. The National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE) was set-up by a resolution of Government of India in the NCERT which later became a statutory body responsible for the coordination and maintenance of standards in teacher education in 1995. The NCTE came out with a Curriculum Framework for Teachers Education in 1998 to provide guidelines for the content and methodology of teacher education. The courses were rehashed with a view to improve teacher education.

Quality Issues and Concerns in Teacher Education

In view of the changing ethos, new concerns for quality have surfaced in the academic programmes of teacher education. It is now being increasingly realized that there must be a balance between “quality” and “quantity” that drives the educational development. Some of the glaring concerns in respect of quality in teacher education may be briefly discusses as following:

1. Concern for Promoting Academic Excellence

The institutions of teacher education whether in the form of college of education or department of education are being rightly conceptualized as a centre of excellence. In the past few years, the drive for quality has been combined with the drive for equality and justice. In the process of striking balance between the issues of equality and excellence, the later has been neglected in the most brutal way. The teachers produced from the teacher education institutions have been looked with suspicion in respect of quality of their competence, knowledge, preparedness, will power and visioning. The quality at the level of inputs, process has not been attended too properly and consequently the managers of teacher education have been averse to evolving realistic parameters for judging, evaluating and maintaining the norms of quality in these areas. The teachers have not been given exposure to viable programmes of quality assurance in this regard.

2. Concern for Professional Development

Teaching is considered to be a noble profession. It is one of those occupations which confer special privileges and obligations on those who practice it. The professional development of the teacher is mainly concerned with the competencies, commitment and value-frames associated with teacher work whereas in the present scenario, teaching work is confined only to lectures and dictating notes. For the professional development, the teachers should be dedicated towards their profession and should be sensitive to their day-to-day problems.

3. Concern for Raising the Economic Status

To keep quality teachers in teaching profession, salary and other conditions must be sufficiently attractive as compared to other types of employment requiring comparable levels of training. It is true that an academic profession is not well paid as other top professions. Thus, attraction of outside employment in a government position or in the private sector is very strong and such job invariably pay better than an academic post. This results in brain-drain to the western countries as they pay high salaries and better living condition to good

quality teachers. Thus, if the economic status of teachers is enhanced it will certainly motivate teachers to be true to their profession.

4. Mismatch between Supply and Demand

There is imbalance in supply and demand between regions and geographical areas as well as between subject specializations which have made it further acute by unemployment of quality teachers. It is surprising to note that for one vacant post of a teacher at least more than hundred applicants apply for the post. Besides, a number of these professionally trained graduates are on a long wait for job and remain unemployed. The situation is becoming much more distressful when we find that even the apex level institution such as NCTE has not been able to effectively regulate the demand and supply of the respective seekers of teaching positions at school education.

5. Concerns for Linkages and Co-ordination

The present teacher education scenario is marked by absence of linkages and co-ordination between the teacher education institution and teachers employed at various levels of education. The institutions associated with teacher education work in complete isolation which can be considered as a bottleneck in ensuring quality in teacher education. The training institutions and the practicing schools lack co-ordination on account of which proper training is not provided to the trainees teachers.

6. Concerns for Restructuring Teacher Education Curriculum

The courses offered in the teacher education programme are of general nature and are not relevant for the professional development of the teachers. The curriculum of teacher education courses should be flexible, and address to the needs of the elementary, secondary and senior secondary education and should incorporate other neglected aspects like aesthetic, physical and yogic education, etc.

7. Concerns for Management of Teacher Education

Management aims at deriving maximum benefits from minimum inputs. The scarce means and resources which can be alternatively deployed for improving teacher education should be carefully utilised. The teacher who has to manage the system needs to be properly educated. One of the objectives of educational management is to improve the quality of teacher education by inducting new concepts of quality such as that of TQM.

8. Concerns for New Trends in Teacher Education

The rapidly developing format of communication technology in the today's world demands a use of hi-tech system in the field of teacher education. The methods and strategies used for transacting the curriculum should adopt a multimode approach. The approaches should be incorporated with the traditional lecture methods usually employed and transacting the curriculum. The new trends in the field of teacher education such as the use of computers, internet, teleconferencing, Edu-Sat, Information Technology etc. should be encouraged.

Quality Assurance through National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC)

All over the world, since 1980, expansion of the system of higher education was coupled with mounting criticisms about the quality of education. As a result of this establishment of quality assurance agencies has become phenomenon worldwide. India joined this trend in 1994 by establishing NAAC on the recommendation of NPE 1986. The primary objective of establishment of NAAC is to assess and accredit institutions of liberal

arts, sciences and other disciplines in order to help these institutions to work continuously to improve the quality of education, through self-evaluation of performance of an institution and/or its units based on self-study and peer review through defined criteria. Accreditation is the certification given by NAAC, which is valid for a period of five years. The process of assessment followed by NAAC is in accordance with the internationally accepted practice with certain modification to suit the Indian context. For quality assurance of teacher education institutions, the NAAC and NCTE have entered into a memorandum of understanding (MoU) for executing the process of assessment and accreditation of all teacher education institutions coming under the provision of the NCTE. The three-stage process for assessment and accreditation is as follows:

- Preparation of the Self-appraisal Report by the teacher education institution for submission to NAAC.
- Validation of the Self-appraisal Report by peers visiting the institution; and
- The final decision of NAAC based on the Self-appraisal Report and the recommendations of the team of peers.

Quality Indicators

In order to assess the quality of teacher education institutions, certain quality indicators are to be considered. NAAC (2004) has identified seven core indicators for quality teacher education as follows:

- a) Curriculum planning and design, which includes goal orientation, curriculum development, programme options, academic flexibility and feedback mechanism.
- b) Curriculum Transaction and Evaluation which includes admission process, catering to diverse needs, teaching-learning process, teacher quality, evaluation of teaching, evaluation of learning and examination reform.
- c) Research, Development and Extension, which includes promotion of research, research output, publication output, consultancy, extension activities, participation in extension and linkages.
- d) Infrastructure and Learning resources which include physical facilities, maintenance of infrastructure, library as a learning resource, computers as learning resources and other facilities.
- e) Student support and Progression which includes student profile, students progression, student support and student activities.
- f) Organization and Management which includes goal orientation and decision making, organization structure, powers and functions of functionaries, perspective planning, human power planning and recruitment, performance appraisal, staff development programmes, resource mobilization and financial management.
- g) Healthy Practices which include total quality management, innovations, value-based education, social responsibilities and citizenship roles, overall development and institutional ambience and initiatives.

Suggestions for improving the Quality of Present Teacher Education programmes

There is an urgent need to rectify the weakness prevailing in present teacher education programme in order to develop quality and competence among prospective teachers so that they may be able to fulfil their changed roles and responsibilities effectively and successfully:

1. The entrance test for selecting B.Ed students should test the aptitude for teaching, Intelligence, reasoning, general awareness, knowledge of the subject matter followed by group discussion/interview.
2. In order to provide to provide actual school experience for teacher trainees, internship along with practice teaching may be introduced. They can learn a number of activities like maintaining students register, conducting morning assembly, involving co-curricular activities, handling indiscipline, organization of school activities and programmes. These experiences are not possible in hurriedly conducting teaching practice.
3. There is a need to pay much more emphasis on affective aspects for the purpose of developing among trainees the qualities such as empathy, healthy attitude towards profession, society and higher moral values.
4. Infra-structural facility is the basic requirement of any quality educational institution. There is urgent need to improve the infra-structure of teacher training institutions and equip them with good facilities and quality instructional material. Moreover, secondary schools be attached to teachers' training institutions as their laboratories for better coordination and cooperation.
5. The teachers' training programme must equip the prospective teacher to handle the special groups to make the concept of integrated education a success. In post PWD Act 1995 it has become more pertinent and desired.
6. There is need for comprehensive review of the curriculum of teacher education having a tilt towards practical aspects rather than theoretical dominance.
7. The system of evaluation in teachers' training must be based on continuous evaluation to make it more objective and transparent. Moreover, it will ensure regular un-interrupted attendance.
8. Effective formulation of any policy is not possible until it is supported by empirical findings. Same is true in case of teacher education. As many as 479 studies have been conducted by various institutions on Teacher Education reported by five Educational surveys edited by Buch, M.B (1974, 1979, 1987, and 1991) and NCERT (1997). It is strange that most of the findings of these research studies were not taken into consideration in formulation of Teacher Education policies for its improvement. Efforts should be made to share and disseminate the findings of studies to the policy makers.
9. Privatization has posed many challenges by accommodating the rapidly increasing number of prospective teachers. The government and regulatory bodies must ensure high quality of teachers' training. There is an urgent need to implement objective and transparent procedure while granting recognition to such self-financed institutions.
10. Use of computers and mass communication is inevitable in the present age. Therefore, educational technology must be an integral part of teachers training programmes.
11. The accreditation of the teachers' training institutions is necessary to ensure quality of teachers.
12. Special emphasis must be given to the training of students in successful and purposeful use of the methods and technologies for effective teaching learning process.
13. Training in co-curricular activities should also be emphasized in teachers' training

- institutions to train them handle such activities in actual school conditions.
14. Universal values need to be included in teachers' training programme so as to be transferred to the younger generations.
 15. The respective universities while selecting the students to the B.Ed course for affiliated colleges must take into account the teaching subjects opted for by the students and the subjects studies at graduation level.
 16. Compulsory attendance laws be strictly implemented. The NCTE and respective universities must ensure 75% mandatory attendance.
 17. A system of supervision by the university authorities can improve the functioning of teachers' training departments/institutions.
 18. Scarcity of teacher educators in teachers' training institutions is hampering the teaching, therefore, the system of recruitment of teachers be expedited by the competent authorities.
 19. Keeping in view the stress, anxiety and frustration due to several factors prevalent in our society the adolescents are more prone to antisocial and deviant behaviour. In certain cases, a difficult paper or failure in examination may lead them to commit suicide. In such a situation, it seems pertinent that the prospective teachers must be trained in guidance and counselling to manage such students as well as their parents.
 20. The burgeoning population of India negates all the developmental measures. This is a serious problem and needs to be tackled in a more comprehensive manner. Teachers' have to play a positive role in helping students to realize the gravity and manage the problem in future as responsible citizens. Therefore, teachers' training programmes must incorporate population education to equip prospective teacher as torch bearer of family planning and population control.
 21. The report of World Health Organization (WHO) portrays a gloomy picture of the health status of Indians. Illiteracy, ignorance, poverty, lack of awareness and non-availability of health services to the poor living in the slums and rural areas are the serious problems of the Indian society. Teachers and educational institutions can play an important role in this regard.

Future Challenges and Directions

Though the above stated initiatives are widely acknowledged, they are not yet sufficient to professionalize teachers. A large number of teachers are not involved in curriculum renewal exercises. Therefore, the following issues need to be focussed on continuous basis so that they can actively act as curriculum planner, designer, implementer and researcher.

1. Even after sixty four years of Independence, we have not able to develop a well defined policy to continuously update the teacher. The schemes and projects implemented so far can at best be labelled as sporadic efforts in the absence of a clear-cut policy framework. There is an urgent need to evolve a long-term training policy for teachers to make them updated and professionally competent continuously. The policy should define the broad parameters of teachers' professional growth such as dimensions of staff development-the nature, periodicity, context and methodology of in-service training.
2. The studies on DIETs conducted by NIEPA/NCERT have revealed that many states like Mizoram, Arunachal Pradesh, and Manipur do not organize in-service training programme. The school teachers are not satisfied with the quality of programmes. The coverage of in-service training programme is quite inadequate even in smaller districts. Therefore, DIET and

its In-service Education Field Interaction and Innovation Coordination (IFIC) branch are to be made functional and strengthened. Without its strengthening, the objectives will not be realized.

3. The identification of training needs is important; in order to plan need based training programme and put time, money and other resources to best possible use. Therefore, training needs of different target groups in terms of content, process, teaching-learning material, availability of physical facilities and also availability of competent resource persons should be identified at different levels by conducting baseline surveys.

4. The cascade model followed in PMOST(Programme of Mass Orientation of School Teachers) and SOPT(Special Orientation Programme for Primary Teacher) can continue to be used for training the teachers. However, efforts should be made to minimise the transmission loss in terms of content and process by using quality material and trained key resource persons and reducing the tiers. Distance mode including teleconferencing may be used to minimise the loss of training and also for larger coverage.

5. Networking and coordination of various institutions working in the area of teacher education at national, state, district and sub-district level should be strengthened and action plan of each institution in terms of training details be prepared at various levels.

6. A large number of resource persons drawn from state and district level organizations like SCERTs, IASE, CTE, DIETs, Resource group and NGOs need to be trained.

7. Formalisation of in-service education in terms of accreditation of teachers needs to be considered. These courses should carry credits and on completion of training the teachers may become eligible for certain credits. Acquisition of credits may be considered in professional and advancement of their career.

8. Short term and long term courses may be organised for the professional development of teachers. The tenth plan also suggested one month course to be organised compulsory for teachers in summer vacations. As many as 20 days in-service education for all teachers every year has been suggested in SSA programme. A permanent mechanism for in-service training for teachers should be evolved.

9. The ICT (Information and Communication Technology) to be used for in-service education for wider coverage of teachers. The resources of these institutions can also be shared by way of networking through ICT. It will also break the isolation of the institutions.

10. Teachers have to shift to adoption of culture specific pedagogy instead of uniform pedagogical practices. The methods followed by community to educate children in its way of life be taken into cognizance and blended with pedagogy during training programme.

11. There has been a lot of focus on primary education during the last twenty years, the issues related to pre-primary, upper primary and secondary education have not received the same attention. There is a need to have systematic planning to bridge the gaps by way of strengthening these institutions.

12. A large number of Para-teachers are appointed and working in both formal and non-formal system of education. They are mostly untrained and unqualified. For such teachers, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) has suggested to provide 60 days refresher course for untrained teachers and 30 days orientation for freshly trained recruits. A comprehensive plan needs to be developed. Both cascade and distance on-line modes may be followed in developing the mechanism of training them.

13. There is a need for training material in terms of print and non-print as per the objectives of target group and framework of training programmes. The material should cover the latest issues and concerns merged in National Curriculum Framework for School Education, 2000. It should provide scope for interaction with the trainees. The material should include activities for developing needed skills among the trainees. The material can be in terms of self-learning or training packages. Material may be tried out in actual situation before use.

14. Monitoring and evaluation should be made an integral part of in-service training programme to know the strength, weakness and outcome of the programme with corrective measures for optimizing the effectiveness of the programme.

15. The follow up activities should be planned in the training programme itself. A regular two way communication between the trainees and trainers through newsletter, reports, seminar, and workshops could be maintained. Visits to the field may be planned.

Conclusion

Both the policy makers and the teacher educators should strive to promote appropriate concerns in order to ensure quality rich teacher education system. Needless to mention that the teacher is a king-pin for effective implementation of new educational plans and programmes which are being continually designed in the 21st century world.

Thus, teacher education is undergoing rapid changes in keeping pace with the demands of learning and expectations of learners, community and society as a whole. Various efforts have been made to improve teacher education. But gaps can still be seen. Teacher education must aim to build a national system of Teacher Education based on India's cultural ethos, its unity and diversity synchronizing with change and continuity. It should facilitate the realization of the constitutional goals and emergence of the new social order. It should prepare professionally competent teachers to perform their roles effectively as per needs of the society. It should also aim to upgrade the standard of teacher education, enhance the professional and social status of teachers and develop amongst them a sense of commitment. The importance of teacher training is also reflected in the Supreme Court judgement. A piece thereof may be quoted here. "Teachers should be subjected to rigorous training with rigid scrutiny of efficiency. This training needs to have greater relevance to the needs of the day. The ill trained or substandard teachers would be detrimental to our educational system if not a punishment to our children. The government and the university must, thereof, take care to see that inadequacy in the training of teachers is not compounded by any extraneous consideration".

The job of the teacher training institutions is to instil quality training through quality education, preach universal brotherhood, develop a sense of patriotism, encourage them to be innovative and acquire holistic knowledge. Teacher training institutions should be open to all, irrespective of caste, creed, religion, sex or status. Politicians with questionable ethics, unscrupulous money launderers, self-proclaimed religious leaders, uncommitted, self-serving socialites and pseudo-intellectuals, should be kept out of field. Then the quality of teacher education will improve and we can scale high in higher learning.

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