

PERSPECTIVE OF TEACHER EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

Teacher education as a whole needs urgent and comprehensive reform. There is need to bring greater convergence between professional preparation and continuing professional development of teachers at all stages of schooling in terms of level, duration and structure. Considering the complexity and significance of teaching as a professional practice, it is imperative that the entire enterprise of teacher education should be raised to university level and that the duration and rigour of programmes should be appropriately enhanced. Both at the elementary and the secondary levels, the initial teacher preparation is brought with a number of problems, some of them are common while others are specific to a stage of education.

INTRODUCTION

At the heart of teacher education is the question 'What value does teacher education add to the prospective teacher's ability to face challenges of facilitating the development of critical and creative students and subsequently adults?' Reform of teacher education has been one of the abiding concerns in the reports of major Education Commissions and Committees on education. The Education Commission (1964-66) discussed at length various issues related to teacher education. It recommended professionalization of teacher education, development of integrated programmes, comprehensive colleges of education and internship. The National Commission on Teachers (1983-85) recommended five-year integrated courses and internship. The National Policy on Education (NPE) (1986) recommended the overhaul of teacher education to import a professional orientation and referred to the same concerns voiced by the earlier Committees. Its recommendations led to the launch of the Centrally Sponsored Scheme of Teacher Education incorporating the establishment of DIETs, CTEs and IASEs. The NPE Review Committee (1990) and the National Advisory Committee on Learning without Burden (1993) have also drawn attention to the need for qualitative reform of teacher education and suggested various measures. The Review Committee recommended adoption of the internship model for teacher education involving a brief theoretical orientation followed by a 3 to 5

years period of supervised teaching in a school under mentor teachers. The Advisory Committee in its report Learning without Burden drew attention to the need for the involvement of teachers in curriculum and textbook preparation and training teachers in fostering learning through activity, discovery, observation and understanding. These policy recommendations have been taken into consideration while preparing the present draft of the National Curriculum Framework for Teacher Education. Elementary Teacher Education

Initial training of elementary teachers continues to suffer from isolation, low profile and poor visibility in view of it being a non-degree programme. In professional discussions teacher education is viewed as unitary undifferentiated category with B.Ed., and D.Ed. providing the frame of reference. The special significance of initial primary teacher education ("elementary education being a fundamental human right" and its crucial significance to individual and national development) is over-looked and its concerns are summed under more general problems. The Curriculum Frameworks provide guidelines that are too general and do not address the stage-specific training needs of elementary teachers. The Curriculum Framework for Quality Teacher Education (1998) was perhaps the first to have provided stage-specific guidelines. The post-NPE 1986 establishment of DIETs has been the most important development in bringing the issue of elementary teacher education to the national stage.

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There is a grave need to upgrade initial teacher education by enhancing the entry qualification and duration of training making it equivalent to a degree programme and locating the management and control of elementary teacher education within Universities. This is necessary as the plus two entry level does not equip prospective teacher with basic knowledge of the subjects to teach at the elementary level, particularly classes 3 to 8. Neither does the short duration of the course equip them with the necessary pedagogic knowledge and professional repertoire for understanding children's psycho-social needs and facilitating their learning. A number of degree programmes for the preparation of elementary teachers are available both within and outside the country, that can provide a way forward. The Bachelor of Elementary Education (B. El. Ed.) Programme of the University of Delhi is a case in point (Bhargava & Pandey, 2011).

Upgrading elementary teacher education calls for participatory curriculum planning involving all stakeholders, modular organization of curriculum in terms of critically engaging with theory and bringing practice within its perspective and a professional approach to teacher education processes. For accomplishing all this, there is a need for a longer duration programme, either a four-year second Bachelor's degree model. A transition to the new models will need to be done within a definite time frame - say, five years - keeping in mind the time required for preparation of teacher educators as well. However, the current two-year D.Ed. model after twelve years of schooling may continue in the interim, attempting to modify and intensify the programme with the vision and elements presented in this document.

Another instance of neglect of elementary teacher education is the non-recognition of the need for specially qualified teacher educators in elementary education. It has been taken for granted that the existing arrangements for teacher preparation at different-stages would do as well for teacher educators : B.Ed. for elementary teacher educators and M.Ed. for secondary teacher educators. The logic that seems here is that one's higher position in the educational hierarchy

would entitle-one to train others working at the lower levels, irrespective of whether one is equipped with relevant repertoires. Other than the activity of teaching children in elementary school, all other functions related to this sector of education are attended to by people who have been trained for and taught only at the secondary level due to lack of appropriately trained personnel in elementary education. The difficulty is exacerbated by the absence of degree and post-degree programmes in primary/elementary teacher education. At present, elementary teacher educators in their bid to upgrade their professional qualifications pursue M.Ed. The IASE brief includes the training of elementary teacher educators which they do by running M.Ed. programmes. However, it is evident that the M.Ed. programme in its current form cannot meet the requirements of elementary teacher education as it is designed primarily on the requirements of secondary education. The preparation of teacher educators for the elementary stage needs the inclusion of a variety of scholarship from the sciences, social sciences, mathematics and the languages (Bhargava & Taj, 2013).

Education as an area of interdisciplinary knowledge is normally an application of a few core disciplines, but a praxis and a context where theories and practical wisdom are generated continuously. It is important to facilitate development of a discourse in education through more purposive and deliberate focus in creating explanatory terms and vocabulary. And this process has to inform and be informed by teacher education. Since traditionally, it was secondary teacher education. Institutions that developed into university departments of education, elementary education and early childhood education have been neglected as distinct areas of knowledge with their own distinct concern concepts and methodological perspectives. It is important to strengthen all areas within education as distinct but integrated discourses through research as well as through documenting praxis in school settings as well as field-level educational initiatives. This scattered corpus of experience and knowledge needs to be brought together to evolve a coherent vocabulary, researched and documented knowledge-base

and informed perspectives for all areas of education as well as education in its entirety (Bhargava & Sarika, 2012).

Secondary Teacher Education

There is also a dire need to critically review the secondary teacher education system. The one-year second Bachelor's degree (B.Ed.) model seems to have outlived its relevance. With the proliferation of B.Ed. colleges, particularly with privalization and commercialization, B.Ed. programmes which keep struggling to make this programme meaning to overcome the structural constraints that the short duration of the programme poses. While the second Bachelor's degree model may still be relevant, it is imperative that this needs strengthening in terms of intensity, rigour and duration.

Secondary teacher education institutes continue to exist as insular organisations even within the university system where many are located. This precludes the larger academic debates on equity, gender and community to enter the day-to-day discourse of teacher educators. Institutes of teacher education have become breeding grounds of academic stagnation and resistance to change. The training of teachers happens in insular, intellectually impoverished environments that are severed from ground realities as well as the aims of education they espouse. Such an intellectual isolation actively discourages educational theorisation and the growth of disciplinary and inter disciplinary enquiry (Begum & Bhargava, 2010).

It is desirable within a finite time frame that the existing one-year second Bachelor's (B.Ed.) degree programme is structurally transformed to a two-year one, with deeper and more protracted engagement with school-based experience and reflective and critical engagement with theory. In the transitory phase, however, the existing one-year programme can work towards better utilization of the time available, greater emphasis on school internship and emphasis on reflective practice based on perspectives on the learner and her context, contemporary society, basic concepts of education and curricular and pedagogic alternatives, (Curricular areas an suggested ideas to make this operational are provided).

Systemic Concerns of Teacher Education

The proliferation of sub-standard private teacher education institution and the current state of teacher education programmes are both serious impediments to fulfilling the objectives of the NCF and the Right of Free and Compulsory Education. The programmes have come under severe criticism for not addressing the needs of contemporary Indian schools and not preparing teachers who can impart quality education in schools. Their practice is based on certain assumptions which impede the progress of ideas and professional and personal growth of the teacher. They train teachers to adjust to a system in which education is seen as transmission of information. They take the school curriculum and textbooks as 'given' and train teachers to adjust to the needs of the existing school system through fastidious planning of lessons in standardized formats and fulfilling the ritual of delivering the required, number of lessons (NCERT, 2005).

The NCF has described the current concerns of teacher education as follows :

1. Experiences in the practice of teacher education indicate that knowledge is treated as 'given', embedded in the curriculum and accepted without question; there is no engagement with the curriculum. Curriculum, syllabi and textbooks are neer critically examined by the student teacher or the regular teacher.
2. Language proficiency of the teacher needs to be enhanced, but existing programmes do not recognize the centrality of language in the curriculum.
3. Teacher education programmes provide little scope for student teachers to reflect on their experiences.
4. Disciplinary knowledge is viewed as independent of profesional training in pedagogy.
5. Repeated 'practice' in the teaching of a specified number of isolated lessons is considered a sufficient condition for professional development.
6. It is assumed that links between learning theories and models and teaching methods are automatically formed in the undertanding developed by student teachers.
7. There is no opportunity for teachers to examine their own biases and beliefs and

- reflect on their own experiences as part of classroom discourse and enquiry.
8. Theory courses have no clear link with practical work and ground realities.
 9. The evaluation system followed in teacher education programmes is too information-oriented, excessively quantitative and lacks comprehensiveness.
 10. Apart from conceptual and pedagogical aspects, existing programmes need to develop certain attitudes, dispositions, habits and interests in a teacher. The present evaluation protocol has no place for evaluating these aspects.

The above observations provide distinct pointers for addressing issues on the different aspects of teacher education curriculum reform.

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