

**EDITORIAL**

**IMPROVING STRATEGIES FOR TEACHER LEARNING**

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Teacher learning is a lifelong activity that starts from his/her school days and continues throughout the life. The techniques through which a teacher was taught during his/her school days, plays effective role in the techniques he/she uses in his/her own teaching (Schwille, Dembele and Schubert 2007, P. 27). Some individuals are born teachers and do not need much training for learning skills of teaching. Their sincerity paves the path for self-learning and sometimes, such self-made teachers have been found more effective than formally trained teachers. However, in case of majority, teacher learning is facilitated by training programmes delivered before entry into teaching profession and also while continuing in teaching profession. They need appropriate knowledge and skills, personal characteristics, professional prospects, and motivation if they are to meet the expectations placed on them (Delors 1996, p.142). Teacher education has been given importance throughout the world. Training provides certain skills; but whether to utilise these skills or not depends on the professional values and the attitude of the concerned teacher. Teacher learning through participation in initial training programmes or through continuing education programmes is a complex activity. Formulating strategies for teacher training has become problematic because of lack of consensus on what constitutes a qualified teacher. Teacher education scenario is like the Bermuda triangle (Cochran-Smith 2003). Teaching is an art as well as science, so also teacher training. Cultural roles and identities of teachers, details of definition of teacher quality and details of initial teacher training programmes including nature of practical training vary from one country to another. Within a nation, these also vary from one State to another. "Teacher preparation has become a controversial issue all over the world." (Bray 2007, P.11). This is also true for teacher education scenario in India.

Knowledge Commission (2008) stated that both pre-service and in-service training of school teachers is extremely inadequate and also poorly managed in most States. "Pre-service training needs to be improved and differently regulated in both public and private institutions, while systems for Inservice training require expansion and major reform that allows for greater flexibility." Initial (pre-service) teacher training programmes in India vary from State to State. Variations are prominent in respect of aspects like: (a) state subsidy for tuition fee, degree of scope for private initiative, (b) scope for self-financing programmes by examining bodies including universities, government institutions and private managements, (c) involvement of universities through their Departments of Education, (d) admission criteria for teacher education courses on the basis of performance in common admission test / career marking etc., (e) selection of teacher trainees in B. Ed. programmes for secondary school teaching on the basis of number of eligible faculty members available in an institution for teaching a method subject, (f) amount of fees, (g) qualifications necessary for the head of the teacher training institution / department and for the faculty members, (h) level of content knowledge of a faculty member for teaching a method subject or for supervising lessons during internship / practice teaching, etc. Some of the aspects on which universities inside a State / UT also vary include (a) total marks for a course, (b) number of papers for theory and practical, (c) titles of papers and the aspects covered by them, (d) lesson planning formats, (e) amount of time devoted for observation of a lesson delivered during internship / practice teaching period and for the purpose of evaluation of teaching performance, (f) specialisation of the faculty member required for observing a lesson, (g) number of spells in which

internship is organised, (h) types of records maintained by teacher trainees for their practical examination, (i) number and categories of practical work other than teaching, (j) marks distribution for theory and practical, (k) percentage of internal assessment, (l) manner of assessment of theory papers, (m) amount of time given for observation of teaching of school teachers and types of schools covered for the purpose, (n) degree of involvement of school teachers in supervision of teacher trainees, etc. Some of the aspects on which institutions, affiliated to an examining body within a State / UT vary include (a) dress code for teacher trainees and faculty members, (b) organization of daily morning assembly that includes prayer and other activities, etc., (c) duration of stay of faculty members in the institution in a working day, (d) quality and quantity of various types of teaching aids including multimedia and power point presentation.

As part of various efforts to improve quality of teacher training, a number of developed countries have prescribed Standards for school teachers and school leaders (heads of schools). In USA, professional standards for teachers and school leaders vary from State to State. Its New Jersey State has 10 different sets of standards and each standard has three components: (a) knowledge, (b) disposition and (c) performance. In UK, since September 2007, the Training and Development Agency for Schools has come out with six types of standards for teachers. In India, quality of teacher training can be improved by working out and prescribing national level as well as state level standards for teachers and leaders working in various stages of school education. This will improve teacher education curriculum for various stages of school education.

Teacher performance is strongly influenced by teacher motivation. There can be various strategies to improve level of teacher motivation. One such strategy is creating an advanced level scale for efficient teachers. A number of developed countries such as UK have advanced skills teachers. Such strategies should also be introduced in India to initiate teacher motivation for self-improvement. The selection process for advanced level teachers needs to be more rigorous and scientific and should also include evaluation of video recorded lessons. The teachers selected through national level tests can be posted in schools under Central Government schemes.

The Centrally Sponsored Scheme of Teacher Education of the MHRD has been instituted to support efforts of the governments of various States and UTs for improving quality of initial training as well as for providing continued professional development of teachers. The scheme provides assistance to 38 Institutes of Advanced Study in Education (IASEs), 86 Colleges of Teacher Education (CTEs) and 471 District Institutes of Education and Training (DIETs). On the eve of the XI th Plan, MHRD sent teams to the States and the UTs to evaluate the status of implementation of the scheme. The editor as member of the assessment team, came across huge wastage of funds in terms of under-utilized human and physical resources. In most of the IASEs and CTEs, the faculty members did not have adequate workload because of non-availability of funds from the concerned State governments for conducting in-service programmes. In case of one Govt. College of Teacher Education, huge over staffing gave a workload of as low as 3 periods per week per faculty member. In case of DIETs, in a State, there was no pre-service training programme. However, the faculty members were fully involved in SSA activities. There was also variation among States and UTs with regard to salary scales of the faculty in these institutions. The deterioration process is further accentuated by lack of separate cadres for teacher educators and lack of State policy of creating posts with appropriate specialisation and selecting faculty members without specifying their specialisation. Hence, there is a necessity to modify this scheme. The system of providing grants for IASEs and CTEs should be abolished. The existing ones should be managed by the respective State governments out of their own funds. The central government should establish its own IASEs and CTEs. The funding of DIETs should be transferred to SSA.

The Tenth Five Year Plan document stated that “New courses for teacher educators and curriculum developers would be developed and tried out on a pilot basis. Innovations and pilot projects in pre-service and in-service teacher education will be supported.”( Planning Commission 2002, Art. 2.2.58). There is an urgent necessity to develop special courses for teaching in special schools. Navodaya Vidyalayas have been set up to give education to rural talents. Teachers at such schools should have not only higher scale of pay than available for teachers in Central schools, but also better initial teacher training. Persons aspiring for posts in Navodaya Vidyalayas should undergo training through Special Two-Year B. Ed. courses to be instituted for this purpose.

A higher / senior secondary school teacher teaches only one subject in which she or he has acquired PG Degree. Making such a teacher trainee study two method subjects is wastage of time and resources. In order to teach at this level, instead of a B. Ed. degree, a Diploma of duration of 36 weeks with provision for practical training of 18 weeks may be introduced.

In certain States, teaching of Education as a subject of instruction extends from higher secondary to post graduate stage. The subject also provides training in teaching in primary schools. Hence, graduates with Education subject need to be allowed to sit for B. Ed. examination privately, after undergoing training in practical teaching under an approved guide.

Two-year Certificate/Diploma courses were instituted for training lower secondary passed students for making them primary school teachers. At present, in most of the parts of the nation, the minimum qualification for admission to these courses is higher secondary. These courses spend a lot of time on content knowledge up gradation. There is a B.Ed. (Nursery) course at Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi and a B. El. Ed. course at University of Delhi. There is provision for PGCE (Primary) in UK. Similarly, there may be provision for One Year B. Ed. (Primary / Nursery) courses in India. All types of teacher training courses should be brought under university system so that the university team visiting an institution for granting affiliation evaluates all types of physical and human resources available in the institution for various courses being offered by it.

In order to make Indian teacher training qualifications acceptable in UK and other countries, there is a necessity to make comparative studies of teacher training programmes from international perspective. For instance, in UK, duration of the One Year PGCE Course is 48 weeks that includes 24 weeks for training in practical work. Hence, there is a necessity to increase practical component in initial teacher training programmes.

Teachers need to get opportunities to upgrade their formal qualification and training. The graduate teachers who have been working with Diploma qualifications, should get opportunity to appear at B.Ed. examination as private candidates.

Qualitative improvements in initial teacher training programmes require more participation of schools in teacher training programmes. The school heads and the school teachers whose classes are utilised for practical teaching should be paid remuneration for their work in connection with giving guidance and feedback.

Generally, assessment of teaching skills is carried out by direct observation of teaching and in some cases evaluation of records. In addition to this practice, it shall be more appropriate to have continuous evaluation by involving concerned school teacher whose classes have been utilised. There may be provision for assessment of video recorded lessons, teaching performance portfolio and professional attributes questionnaire.

Many developed countries have been providing training for school leaders, so that they function better. UK has started a National College for School Leadership. Hence, the Govt. of India should take steps for training of heads of schools. To make it cost effective, the training programme may be provided through distance mode.

Programmes for continued professional development of teachers are considered more important than their initial training programmes. However, many urban teachers, especially those who earn extra money through their teaching in coaching classes, make effort at their individual level to update their knowledge and skills. However, majority of teachers, especially those who work in rural areas, need continued professional development programmes. The cost effectiveness of programmes can be improved by delivering them through distance mode. Peer feedback system may be introduced as a support system for teacher development.

In earlier days, teacher educators not only had school teaching experience before entering to a teacher training institution, but also continued to take classes in schools. In order to improve quality of demonstration lessons and supervision of practice teaching lessons, the practice of school teaching at least for one unit in a year needs to be introduced. Unfortunately, to keep themselves abreast in case of minimum qualifications of teacher educators, in certain States, a graduate spends two years (one year B.Ed. and another year M.Ed.) to become eligible to become a Lecturer in Education for teaching in B.Ed. and M.Ed. courses. This is also the UGC prescribed qualification to appear at National Eligibility Test (NET) for lecturer in Education. However, in many States, a graduate has to study for four years (one year B.Ed., one year M.Ed. and two years another PG) to become eligible for the post of lecturer in Education. UGC failed to make all the States accept its Guidelines. While UGC norms do not differentiate between minimum qualification for a lecturer in Education to teach B.Ed. or M.Ed. course, NCTE norms have made the difference. As per NCTE, a postgraduate with a B.Ed. can also be a lecturer in Education for B.Ed. courses. NCTE itself has also violated its prescribed norms and standards. For instance, NCTE has recognised a Govt. College of Teacher Education for B.Ed. course, although the principal and most of the faculty members of the institution do not have even B.Ed. degree. A decade of functioning of NCTE has not enabled creation of separate cadre for teacher educators in many States. The universities do not bother to adhere to UGC guidelines for minimum number of teaching days in an academic session. They also do not adhere to NCTE guidelines for minimum number of teaching days in a session. B. Ed. qualification is yet to be made compulsory for higher secondary school teaching in a State, where the size of a general higher secondary class is 128, which is more than the double of the maximum strength for a class prescribed in many States.

It may be noted that attempts to have teacher education programmes centrally recognised failed in Australia (Chadbourne 1997). The Australian Teaching Council set up in 1994 was abolished in 1997 as the Government decided in favour of decentralisation and deregulation. USA has a number of non-government agencies for accreditation. According to Murray (2005), a large number of good teacher education institutions in USA have not got them accredited. Accreditation is also not a requirement for the State's teaching licensing regulations and for the hiring decision of the school districts. In India, a decade of functioning of NCTE is a story of success and failures. Its important success includes extending duration of B.Ed.(distance Mode) from one year to two years. During the decade of its existence, NCTE has modified several times its norms and standards for teacher education courses. Its latest revision has created confusion in the field, especially in case of faculty qualification that contradicts UGC Norms. Functioning of National Council for Teacher Education as a statutory body, brought in another quality supervisor in addition to already existing quality supervisors in form

of examining bodies and education departments of the governments of the States and the UTs. In order to improve quality of functioning of NCTE, it may be appropriate for the Central Government to undertake modification of NCTE Act so that its General Body may consist of only experts having professional qualification and experience in teacher education. The Act needs to free NCTE from its regulatory role, as it is not possible for a central agency in a large country to regulate teacher education programmes on the basis of a common standard, disregarding cultural and socio-political and economic diversities existing in States. The Act may suggest academic activities for NCTE which may include (a) Formulating standards for (i) teacher educators for different stages of teacher education, and (ii) heads of schools and school teachers of various central level organisations, (b) Formulating guidelines for developing state level standards for heads of schools and school teachers for various stages of school education, (c) Developing and operationalising resource centres for teacher education at national and regional levels, (d) Providing guidelines to the States and the UTs for their resource centre activities, (e) Identifying and disseminating innovative and excellent programmes of teacher education, (f) Maintaining a register of teacher educators including index of experts in various fields, and (g) carrying out comparative studies on teacher education.

## CONCLUSION

There is a necessity for the Central Government to have a Standing Committee for co-ordination among various statutory bodies involved in improving quality of teacher learning. The statutory bodies need take into account the place of education in the Constitution. If the Central Government is keen to improve quality of teacher learning, it should impart model initial (pre-service) teacher training programmes through its own teacher training institutions and should provide high quality continued professional development programmes for teachers through distance mode. It should carry out modification in NCTE act to make it function as a Resource Centre for teacher learning.

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