

AJEE

ANWESHAN: JOURNAL OF EDUCATION

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Systemic Reform of Teacher Education in India: Issues and Challenges

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**Dr.Elizabeth Gangmei

Abstract

Over the last decades, teachers have often been identified as 'key' players for the improvement of education system, as such teacher education programme continued to be a major concern globally as well as in India. It is also well acknowledged that teacher education system is the fulcrum which must support tapping and nurturing manpower potentiality in the field of education. Moreover, it is generally agreed that knowledge societies demand teachers who can think critically, reflective practitioner, and work collaboratively, which is the product of a robust system of teacher preparation. Thus, to bring changes and transformations in the system, it is pertinent to identify the issues, analysing the root cause and find ways of addressing them. Thus, the main focus of the paper is to comprehensively discuss the issues and challenges and give suggestion for effective practices in teacher education programme in India.

Keywords: teacher education, systemic concerns, issues & challenges

Introduction

Teachers are central to the enterprise of education and there is no dispute to the fact that the availability of the well trained teachers and teacher educators are vital to the school improvement efforts. As such, over the years, recommendations of policy documents and commission reports have reiterated to strengthen teacher education for preparing teachers as active agents of social change. Teachers' preparation and development is a significant contributor towards efforts to equitably improve access to quality education as observed by the Joint Review Mission – Teacher Education (JRM – TE, 2013) constituted by the Ministry of Human Resource Development. The present paper examines the teacher education scenario in India which was also addressed by UNESCO world education report,

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(1998) where it paints a deficit model of teachers which calls for transformation in teacher education. Hence it is attempted to answer the following questions through analysing the evolving documents, reports and programme of the country. What are the areas, calling for immediate attention to improve upon the existing reality? What are the hurdles preventing the system to reach the goal? Reasons for such hurdles are discussed along with possible ways of addressing.

Teacher Education – Systemic Concerns

Within the federal structure of the country, while broad policy and legal framework on teacher education is provided by the Central Government, implementation of various programmes and schemes are undertaken largely by state governments. Within the broad objective of improving the learning achievements of school children, the twin strategy is to (a) prepare teachers for the school system (pre-service training); and (b) improve capacity of existing school teachers (in-service training). Besides the university departments of education and their affiliated colleges, government and government aided institutions; private and self-financing colleges and open universities are also engaged in teacher education. There have been several national level Committees and Commissions all geared to improving the quality of teacher education in the country. National Curriculum Framework for Teacher Education (NCFTE 2009) was developed by the National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE), a statutory body that came into existence in 1995, with the main objective of achieving planned and coordinated development of the teacher education systems through-out the country. It is well reflected in the National Curriculum Framework (NCF, 2005) and NCFTE (2009) for revitalising the largely stagnant teacher education sector into a more evolved and comprehensive process of understanding learners. The 12th five-year plan (Planning Commission, 2013) has stressed on the need to strengthen teacher education to improve upon their motivation and accountability. These emphasise on the adaptation of new and innovative approaches to reap 'demographic dividend' as a potential to support the effective development of human capability and for achieving objective of equality of opportunities and equity. Endeavour of teacher education reform has to start from Teacher Education Institutes (TEIs), as in India the firm foundation for a profession of teaching is laid in the unique TEIs situated at different regions. The report of the Justice Verma Committee (JVC, 2013) has recommended that there is a need to establish a National level academic body for continual reflection and analysis of teacher education programmes, their norms and standards, development of reading material and faculty development of teacher educators. For bringing reform in the teacher education programme, following are the areas of concern:

I. Identity crisis of Professionals in the Teaching Field

The National policy of education (NPE) 1986 has meaningfully mentioned that "the status of the teacher reflects the socio-cultural ethos of the society; it is said that no people

can rise above the level of its teachers". In spite of the serious efforts in bringing reform, teacher education programme continues to train teachers to adjust to the needs of an education system in which education is seen as the transmission of information and learning reproduced from text books. The rigid routine of the system limited the scope for teachers' personal transformation to make a difference in their status. As such the profession of teaching continued to remain unrecognised and teachers are not having high status in the society. A teaching identity—is a function of action within social settings whose values embody the settings' cultural histories (Cole, 1996; Smagorinsky, 1995, 2001; Vygotsky, 1978, 1934/ 1987; Wertsch, 1981, 1985, 1991). It is vital to restore the dignity of school teaching as a profession and provide more incentives for qualified and committed teacher (NCF-TE, 2009). Certification drive is adding teachers to the system without knowledge, skill and passion for teaching profession. Teachers are considered qualified simply by virtue of graduating from unaccredited programme or completing a major in the subject that they teach. This sidesteps the real issue, for it relies on poor proxies for teaching effectiveness instead of demonstrated capacity to do the work that will help students learn. This is perilous loss for our students, observed Arbaugh et. al, (2015). The teacher education institute need to nurture candidates the will to take up their role and responsibility with commitment, accountability and vigour. The same will have to be reflected in words and action by all the teacher educators in their daily interaction with the student teachers. Until teacher educators transform to fit to their roles and establish their professional identity, the idea of building professional identity for teachers cannot take even a baby step.

II. The institutionalised intellectual isolation of the school teachers and teacher educators

One challenge that continued to hamper growth of teacher education is lack of linkages and networking among the teacher education institutions. For instances, based on the report of JRM- West Bengal (2013) field visits there exists a glaring gap between government and private institutes of teacher education. There is no link even at the professional level for academic sharing. It is important to link teacher education with institution of research and higher education and universities must be seen as providers of in service training, enabling an exposure to trends and realities that can be reflected into the preservice training. Equally important are the linkages between the states in order to use the human resources optimally (International Conference of MHRD, 2009). Justice Verma Committee (2013) has recommended that the NCTE should set up an institutional platform in close coordination and collaboration with State Government, University, University Grant Commission (UGC), Distance Education Council (DEC) etc. and take decision on standards, procedures and quality parameters, concerning to education.

There are, however, serious gaps that need to be addressed at all levels. These gaps are seen in the shortage of faculty members and resource persons, learning resources including libraries, ICT accessibility, infrastructure facilities, systems of continuous learning

and processes that encourage, motivate and empower individuals and institutions. Government and private teacher education institutes have to work in close association with the decentralised administrative bodies at the cluster, block, state and region, such as Cluster Resource Centres (CRCs), Block Resource Centres (BRCs), District Institute of Education Training (DIET), Regional Institute of Education (RIE), State Council of Education Research and Trainings (SCERT) etc. to be aware of the changes and reflect it in their programs. At the same time the TEIs must involve the community comprehensively by participation in periodic activities linking to a neighbourhood. Engage the community to develop materials which reflects their linguistic and cultural practices and heritage such as stories, folklore and art and social structure. This can be done by creating open dialogue sites for discussion by the teacher education institutes, as observed in the report of International Conference (MHRD, 2010). Linkage with schools and institutes of education will help to remove the barriers in communication, to motivate and share the ideas and experiences. Teacher educators need to be networked and better prepared for their role with continuous channels of capacity building and appropriate performance standards that include providing an academically enriched interaction to student teachers, suggested the report of International conference (MHRD 2010). The summary of recommendation of JRM-TE (2013) also highlights the need for teacher education system to have an integral link with school for experimentation, teacher training, material development, research and documentation and link with Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA). It recommends a system for linkage between institutions for communication and understanding of each other's' work and have a consistent and deep enough horizontal and vertical linkages between institutions. There is growing emphasis on the need for effective and systematic university/college of TEI - school partnership which is particularly in the pivotal position of internship (NCTE, 2014).

One of the key fallouts of the undue emphasis on sporadic, short-term training of in-service teachers has been the accentuation of the divide that already exists between pre-service and in-service teacher education, these continue to function as insular mechanisms and reduction structure, despite the fact that both co-exist in University departments for Senior secondary Education (IASEs) and are also the joint responsibility of District Institutes of Elementary Education in the country (DIETs). IASEs were mandated to work concertedly on elementary education as well.

III. Dearth of Professionally Qualified Teacher Educators at different stages of education

The process of developing professionally competent and qualified teacher educators have to take the onus of preparing teachers in alignment with NCFTE (2009) and RTE Act (2009). In the present scenario of preparing teacher educators, there are no established mechanisms to create a stage specific professional cadre of teacher educators, especially for the pre-primary and the elementary stage NCTE (2014). One of the major concerns in

the area of teacher preparation is the isolation of preschool teacher educators and elementary teacher educators from academia. There is no accrediting body for preschool education either at the level of teacher preparation or to monitor the existing preschools. This results in lack of professionally recognised teachers and teacher educators at the formative stage of education. Moreover, the existing programmes of Teacher Education have become in many Universities programmes of liberal studies in education and are woefully inadequate in facilitating a deeper discourse in education and an opportunity for inter-disciplinary enquiry. These offer little scope for professional development and research in key areas of school education such as curriculum enquiry and design, pedagogic studies, epistemological concerns and issues related to school and society. As a consequence, the dominant ethos of teacher education remains confined to a positivist approach drawn from classical schools of thought in educational psychology and having little contact with a large number of innovative experiments that have mushroomed across India since the 1980s. The quality of pedagogical inputs in teacher education programmes and the manner in which they are transacted to realise their intended objectives depend largely on the professional competence of teacher educators (NCFTE 2009). In most teacher education programmes in India there is very limited exposure to recent research on human learning, new progressive ideas elaborating teaching and learning methods and materials (MHRD Report on International conference, 2009).

An important issue to be addressed is the need for induction training to the newly appointed teachers at the teacher education institutes based on a well-planned mentoring system and support. Review of induction system in England (Totterdell et. al., 2004) found that induction improves teaching effectiveness and promotes new teachers' sense of wellbeing. The existing institutional capacity for induction of teacher educator is extremely disproportionate to the needs of specific states. Currently there is paucity of talented faculty with disciplinary specialization. Teacher educators with a post graduate degree in science, mathematics, social sciences and languages need to be attracted to undertake research in education. In the light of the above discussion the M Ed programme should become two-year duration with adequate provision to branch out into specializations (JVC, 2012) and this has been brought to reality by NCTE (2014) from the academic session 2015-16.

Continuing professional development policy framework should be prepared by the stakeholders who encompass strategic planning of activities, engagement in material development, planning of short and long duration programmes school based training programmes in the lines of their professional demand (MHRD Report of the International Conference 2010). It is important to mention the values and principles underlying the training frameworks with a view to ensuring the presence and coherence of certain basic values and principles behind both education policies and interventions (Alliaud & Feeney, 2015). JRM –TE (2013) recommends capacity building around issues of quality and inclusion as per RTE Act (2009), change in mind set and attitude towards marginalized

groups, beliefs about children, learning, hierarchy and professional commitment to empower teacher educators.

IV. Stagnation in the Design and Practice of Teacher Education

The design of teacher education which is being practiced now is still aligned with the traditional ideology. The innovative teacher preparation is yet to find a strong footing in the way we prepare the teacher and teacher educator. The National Curriculum Framework (2005) addressed the design and practice of current teacher education programme which is based on certain assumptions, which impede the progress of ideas and the professional and personal growth of the teacher by elaboration on the idea that disciplinary knowledge is 'given', which the trainees 'acquire' through general education and which is independent of professional training in pedagogy. The need to integrate general and professional education, recommended by the Education Commission (1964-66) and reiterated by the Chattopadhyaya Commission (1983-85) is yet unaddressed to the great detriment of at least one generation of over hundred million learners. It is assumed that repeated 'practice' in the 'teaching of isolated lessons' is a sufficient condition for professional training to be a teacher. It is also assumed that links between theories of child development and learning, instructional models and methods of teaching specific subjects are automatically formed in the understanding developed by teacher-trainees. Both national and international experience challenges these contentions. Teacher education programmes therefore must make a conscious effort to design courses to provide greater 'space' to generate a deeper understanding of such linkages.

Most teacher education programmes fail to empower the teacher as an agent of change as they do not provide spaces for student teachers to reflect on their own experiences and assumptions as part of classroom discourse and enquiry. This is a fundamental change in direction that can be facilitated as NCF-2005 emphasised in the curriculum renewal exercise. Justice Verma committee (JVC) has also noted that there is restriction of classroom engagement with pedagogy as mere technique (2012, Vol 1). Following issues have to be addressed to improve the design and practice of teacher education.

- *Change the existing pattern of training-* DIETs, CTEs, IASEs and SCERTs have to be restructured to enable hands on experience of school teachers and other practitioners such as the BRCs and CRCs. The mechanism of teacher education has to adapt to the needs, culture and aspirations of the educationally neglected sector. Encourage flexibility and diversity rather than uniformity across teacher education programmes and institutions for the conduct of pre service teacher education. TEIs have to be given the autonomy to formulate innovative models for pre service course structure, content and design to try it out. Hands on experience on text book analysis, choosing and designing for classroom (JVC 2013 p 16) have to be practiced in every institute of education.

- *Curricular reform*–Curriculum reform intersects with the recalibration of teacher professionalism through policy reform. The curriculum has faced severe criticism over the years and is in the process of a complete revamping (Chennat, 2014). The reform in curriculum can be brought in by starting with the existing curricula clearly reflecting the changing needs of the school system in congruence with recent changes in policies and new practices. Curriculum studies could offer sound scaffolding for the process of teacher development given the lack of formal epistemological underpinning in the training of teachers (JVC, 2012). At the same time, the success of curriculum reforms largely rests on the shoulders of teachers, since they are the ones who put reform ideas into practice. Successful implementation of reforms depends on teacher's ownership of and their knowledge about reform ideas (Huizinga et. al., 2014). Teaching instruction needs to be problem oriented and not discipline or theory oriented; approaches such as simulations, role play and action researches would be more appropriate for the professional development of teachers (JVC, 2012). An exploration of how a layered understanding of subject knowledge frames pedagogic encounters and influences rarely enters into the process of preparing teachers. In the curriculum emphasis on development of creativity, life skills, social sensitivity and constitutional values, continuous and comprehensive evaluation and reflective practices must be engrained in every process of teaching, be it theoretical or practical. These have to be tackled along with addressing social development of the area concerned.
- *Internship* -Internship programmes in general are supposed to facilitate 'the transition from student status in a profession's pre service education programme to the status of a full- fledged member of the profession' (Ratsoy et. al., 1987). The conceptual knowledge students gain through the perspective courses, the skills acquired through the pedagogy courses are practically implemented in the internship phase. As such, preparation of efficient professionals is incomplete without a sound exposure and hands on experience in the real situation. In reality, the internship programme is carried out by pupil teachers in a mechanism of completing prescribed task. Thus, syllabus and text books are taken as 'given' and trainees are expected to 'adjust' to the needs of the existing school system and plan lesson in standardised formats. There is a lack of coordination between the trainees and the school teachers in developing an overall plan of transacting specific parts of the syllabus or linking their lesson plan with the ongoing classroom transaction (MHRD, Report of International Conference on Teacher Development and Management, 2010). Report of the working group on teacher education for the 12th five-year plan has suggested that Teacher of the schools (with whom trainees are attached) need to be trained in the concept of 'effective

mentoring', to observe and assess student – teachers' performance. This requires frequent consultation and communication between teacher educators and school teachers on a regular basis. The changing landscape of teacher education with increased emphasis on the quality of field experiences has led to a broadening of the cooperating teacher's role (Clarke et. al., 2014; Kahn, 2001).

- *Teacher performance assessment*—There exists little reflection on evaluation procedure adopted for assessing the prospective teacher in teacher education program. Apart from conceptual and pedagogical aspect, a preservice teacher education programme need to develop and further enhance certain attitudes, dispositions and habits and discerning capacity in a developing teacher. There is a need for performance assessment of teacher for two purposes; (a) Quality assurance and accountability (assessment of teaching) and (b) professional development and the improvement of teaching (assessment for teaching). The model of performance assessment of pre service teachers tried out by Caughlan & Jiang (2014) focusing on the positioning of the teacher candidate and her students as well as the pedagogical relationship between the teacher educator and the candidate afforded by the texts of performance assessment instruments is worth mentioning here. Another milestone which can be added in assessment is the initiatives of NCERT in the area of teacher performance indicator encompassing both the qualitative and quantitative aspects is useful particularly for the elementary involving the teacher's self-assessment, peer assessment and supervisor/head teacher assessment (NCERT, 2013).

V. Deteriorating Standards of Teacher Education Institution

The Government of India has identified the need for building institutional capacity in the area of teacher education and has increased the investment outlay in this area in the 12th Five Year Plan. In the summary of the recommendations of JRM, it has pointed out that there should be a collective vision and outcome based plan for each teacher education institution and this must be developed through a consultative visioning process with all the TEIs and other key education stakeholders in the state. To achieve this, the following areas need to be attended with all sincerity.

Physical Infrastructure—quality of physical infrastructure is an important indicator of TEIs functioning. Huge intra-state and inter-district variations exist pertaining to infrastructure and institutional facilities across teacher training institutions, since the Centrally Sponsored Teacher Education Institutions were established in different phases under different funding patterns (JRM Report, 2013). While most of the TEIs suffer from lack of physical facilities, the institutes where it is available are not in working condition; and if it is in working condition, it is not accessible easily for using it meaningfully. Connecting and networking to share experiences and practices are prevented due to

inaccessible infrastructure. This leads to stagnation of the institute and isolation from the mass.

Work culture– ‘The larger education system in states continues to be gripped by heavy inertia’ (JRM-TE, 2013). They go further to report that more than lack of resources; institutes lack a sense of collective vision and collective motivation. Employees come and go unaware of their roles and responsibilities being ignorant of its consequences. Through work distribution, discussions and accountability the culture of owning institution has to be developed. The notion of inclusive growth should become the motivating force behind every worker. TEIs must strive for cultivating a strong belief in belongingness and accountability in the process of teacher education. It is widely recognized that teachers’ educational beliefs are strong indicators of their planning, instructional decisions and classroom practices (Bandura, 1986; Pajares, 1992). As Van Driel et al. (2001) argued, most reform efforts in the past have often been unsuccessful because of their top-down approach, which failed to take teachers’ existing knowledge, beliefs and attitudes into account.

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) –The National Mission on Education through Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has been envisaged as a Centrally Sponsored Scheme to leverage the potential of ICT, in teaching and learning process for the benefit of all the learners in Higher Education Institutions in any time anywhere (MHRD 2014). Designing and implementing successful ICT teacher preparation programmes is considered to be the key factor to fundamental, wide-ranging educational reforms (Vosniadou & Kollias, 2001; Watson, 2001; UNESCO, 2002). Until now, most teacher training programmes have been designed to raise teachers’ ICT knowledge and skill levels, and foster positive attitudes towards ICT as a teaching and learning tool (Cox et al., 1999; Kumar & Kumar, 2003; Galanouli et. al., 2004). The isolation of teachers, particularly in small schools is indeed a matter of great concern. In this connection ICT can be an aid in interactive processes which can support an effort of capacity building, connect with one another through learning network and a site for sharing their experiences through portals. For this, it is very essential for teachers to have regular access to internet. With the emerging new technologies, the teaching profession could evolve from an emphasis on teacher-centred instruction to student-centred, interactive learning environments. ICT can also be used to share information about programmes – both financial and qualitative feedback for peer and public scrutiny. A large amount of research has shown that the use of ICT in education can increase students’ motivation and deepen understanding, promote active, collaborative and lifelong learning, offer shared working resources and better access to information, and help them to think and communicate creatively (Jonassen, 2000; Webb, 2005). In practice, however, established curricula and teaching approaches still remain essentially unchanged, while technology is usually underused and poorly integrated into the classroom (Cuban, 2001; Ofsted, 2004). For instance, integration of technology in

teacher education has proved to be effective at many teacher training institutions worldwide. Case study on Pune University presents the way teacher educators (TEs) and student teachers (STs) use Web 2.0 and other technologies for projects, as a productivity tool, as a tool for communication, collaboration, administration and research (Confederation of Indian Industry, 2013).

Mentoring and monitoring –employees of the institute look up for mentors who could guide them to the right way of working, caution them of negligence of work, highlight the importance of responsibility and support them at the time of distress. Institutes can identify people of high integrity, scholarship and service orientation from the community and organise interactions with them frequently. The young employees who lack direction to set their footing will have an opportunity to learn from the old wisdom. Work culture and work ethics has to be set by example for the progressive new comers. Skill development efforts among the teachers can be possible only by mentoring. As per the suggestion of Justice Verma Committee, immediate effort to establish a National level academic body for continued reflection and analysis of teacher education programmes, their norms and standards has to be evolved. A strong focussed set of interventions will be necessary to reverse this. Otherwise the fears of NKC (2007) that the important elements of social change being ill prepared to handle the responsibility will continue to remain for decades to come.

Leadership– Globally, there is increasing pressure on schools to enact change, and the literature indicates that transformational leadership is positively associated with school leaders' effectiveness at implementing positive reforms (David & Shelleyann, 2017). Many western countries have proved that a leader can make considerable improvement in an institute. In the Indian context studies on school leadership is limited and continues to be an area which is neglected. There is lack of quality leadership across the institutions. Individuals in leadership positions, are managing the institution and not really leading the same (JRM, Report, 2013). Needless to mention human resource management is an essential factor of leadership. Educators must have the skills, knowledge, commitment to be part of the leadership team that assumes the responsibility for carrying the mantra of the transformational process (Futrell, 2010). Taking care of the small tenets of dealing with diverse persons will help in keeping abreast with the needs of the institute. Then only we can imbibe the value of collective identity for which leadership is crucial. TEIs have to be the place of genesis and spread of such a culture. Teacher leaders can also be catalysts for change, visionaries who are "never content with the status quo but rather always looking for a better way" (Larner, 2004). It is in the institute of teacher education a dynamic and vibrant leadership is born and nurtured.

VI. Continued Professional Development

Professional development could be a corner stone of systemic reform efforts designed to increase teachers' capacity to teach to high standard (Smith & O'Day, 1991). In the

Indian perspective the professional development today is still a traditional and do not takes care of contextual needs. It is suggested that professional development for greater impact has to be long term, supported with modelling and content specific (Hussain, 2013). 'Deliberations at the National and International forum have brought out the necessity for ensuring possibilities of continuous learning for the teachers and the need to sensitise them to fundamental aspects of human learning and to diversity and inclusion' pointed out the vision statement for teacher education given by the President of India (Planning Commission, 2011) in its document on restructuring and reorganization of the centrally sponsored scheme on teacher education has given clear policy directives for continuing professional development and capacity building of teacher educators across all levels of education. The document envisages faculty development to be a continuous process in order to upgrade the knowledge and skills of their faculty and ensure that the nation's children have access to quality teachers and quality education in its schools. The TEIs should create an opportunity for enhancement of academic growth and see that the official procedure is not a deterrent for perusing personal growth. Individual academic growth must be perceived as an asset of the institute. The professional development of teachers needs to be located in the larger socio-cultural, economic and political context of contemporary Indian society. Research on professional development suggests that it is most effective when it includes components that are based in the school and embedded in the job and when it increases teachers' theoretical understandings of their work (Miller, 1995). Supports for improved teaching and learning are also more effective when they are tailored to needs identified by teachers and when their approach to learning is collaborative and inquiry-based (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin 1995).

Conclusion

Only if the above issues are addressed immediately with complete dedication the system will reform with significant impact. The National Policy on Education (1986 & 1992) emphasizes the need to build vibrant educational systems and institutions (section 7, making the System Work). It points to the provision of better facilities to institutions; and creation of a system of performance appraisals of institutions. In the context of educational institutions, it is only fair that we interpret the NPE to imply that "Educational institutions need to be managed in an atmosphere of utmost intellectual rigour, seriousness of purpose and, at the same time, of freedom essential for innovation and creativity." NPE (section 10) also draws the nation's attention evolving a long-term planning and management perspective of education; decentralisation and the creation of a spirit of autonomy for educational institutions; establishing the principle of accountability in relation to given objectives and norms. The States will need academic support to redesign teacher education programmes in the light of the policy of teacher education. With the support of such a strong academic team if a plan could be worked out with target for achievement, monitoring and support, the beginning can be made.

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