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Status of practice teaching in teacher education programmes

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Abstract

Teachers are the transmitters, inspirers and promoters of man's eternal quest for knowledge. They are professionals but also humans. It is also true that "no country can rise above the level of its teachers" as has been commented in National Policy on Education 1986. Thus, it is necessary that education be treated as a profession and all the intensive preparation used in other professions must be part of education also. Averring that quality secondary school teachers will improve only when a practical plan is chalked and implemented, the author emphasized that the teacher educators should come forward and take the onus of planning and implementing this plan.

Keywords: NCFTE, Teaching practice, Lesson planning, Supervision.

Introduction

There are many courses preparing teachers for different levels of education. B.Ed is one of them. It contains two parts- theory and practice teaching, Practice teaching is the most important part of Teachers Training Course. It prepares the students to fulfill the responsibilities of teachers in real life situations. It gives practical feel and experience of class control, lesson presentation, integration of teaching skills etc. or what may be called planning, managing, organizing, leading and controlling the teaching-learning situation. We may call it the 'SOUL' of Teachers Training Program. But, perhaps it is the most neglected part of Teacher Education. NCFTE (2009) has rightly commented "Practice Teaching, which constitutes the most functional part of Teacher preparation, has suffered severe neglect and dilution in quality"

Theory dominates the curriculum and practice teaching continues to suffer from inadequacies of different kinds such as: it follows a mechanical routine operates with rigid lesson plan formats, inadequate mentoring and supervision; exhibits no original thinking, lacks variety and context specificity in teaching.

As a teacher educator for more than 5 years, I have also experienced the deterioration in Quality of practice teaching. Practice teaching suffers from weaknesses of many kinds.

- Inadequate time duration
- Irresponsible supervision of teaching
- Lack of coordination with practicing centers
- Faulty format of lesson plans
- Sheer neglect by pupil-teachers
- Careless supervision of internship

Inadequate Time Duration

We may broadly divide the practice teaching part as follows.

1. Teaching of minimum 40 lessons
2. Preparing and administering Achievement Tests in each subject taught
3. Observation of peer teaching
4. Conducting psychological tests
5. Action Research
6. Internship Activities

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- i) Organizing cultural and sports activities
- ii) Maintenance of Attendance Register
- iii) Preparing timetable
- iv) Collecting fee
- v) Writing letters to guardians and principal
- vi) Preparing scheme of examination
- vii) Preparation of Report Card of students
- viii) Maintenance of school records – Cumulative and Anecdotal
- ix) Conducting and participation in PTA Meetings and staff meetings
- x) Writing report of school experience

The long list itself speaks a lot about the time required to complete all the work mentioned. If done properly, practice teaching needs more than 3 months for various activities as follows.

- for lesson teaching
- for conducting test
- for Action Research activities
- for various internship activities

But, what do the Training Colleges or rather we do? You can count the number of training colleges, who provide even one month's practice teaching. Everything is done in a jiffy and that also haphazardly.

I ardently believe where there is a will, there is a way. If we take government schools, we can continue practice teaching even for more than two months as these schools are always short of teachers. But, sure, we will not get any facility in these schools. Sometimes we have to make even seating arrangements for our pupil-teachers. But, it is worth it because struggle gives pupil-teachers the opportunity to hone their skills and assess their teaching effectiveness. I feel it is a practical solution to the problem, though the teacher educators will have to work hard and manage a lot of things.

Irresponsible Supervision of Teaching

Teaching by pupil-teachers is the base of practice teaching. In the conventional model of teaching, pupil-teachers are guided and directed to polish their skills. This work is done by teacher educators by giving critical comments. It showed that most of the critical comments were plain statements. A small percentage was suggestive and hardly any comment was corrective. A pupil-teacher commented that 'class – control is loose' (an oft – repeated comment) but how to improve it is not suggested. The pupil-teacher if sincere might ask "how to improve?" Otherwise it remains a comment on paper only. The contents of comment are based on evaluation of mostly the quality of efforts made by pupil-teachers for the realization of the set teaching-learning objectives. Sometimes, it focuses on the evaluation of the total makeup, nature, qualities and characteristics of the pupil-teacher. But, it was never found to be referring to 'gains achieved in terms of pupil's growth.'

This situation is very common especially in private colleges of Education, where young teacher educators without any experience go to teaching centers. The experienced teacher educator does not visit the center regularly. He visits the college 2-3 times a week and there he has more important jobs to handle than this mundane task!

What can be done? Well, young teacher educators should be given training in writing critical comments under in writing

critical comments under the guidance of experienced and enior teachers. This work can be done in the colleges at the Time of simulated teaching sessions.

Lack of Coordination with Practice Teaching Centers

The National Curriculum Framework of Teacher Education 2009 envisaged "partnership model" with the school rather than a continuation of the current model of practice teaching during which the trainees merely use the school for their own formal degree requirement. This is exactly what is happening at the practice teaching centers. A fixed number of isolated lessons are taught. Some school headmasters/headmistresses insist on teaching according to their fixed curriculum portions scheduled for the specific month, when the practice teaching is conducted. Some don't bother at all. Teaching schedule is fixed by the university/college with permission from DEO/management other authorities. Many a time, half-yearly exams or term exams fall within the stipulated teaching days. The authorities prefer this as according to them, they are 'disturbed' for a lesser number of days and 'loss of studies' is minimized. The pupil-teacher is happy as he will not have to teach for 8-10 days, but the 'critical comments' will be written by the supervisor. Yes, this is the real truth behind practice teaching! If some supervisors insist that they will not write critical comments unless the pupil-teacher teaches, they are asked to write 'two pages' in the comments copy while the pupil-teacher teaches only one. So, what suffers in the end is the 'quality'.

The answer to this problem is either establishment of 'Model Schools' or adoption of a government school by each college of education. All infrastructure facilities are provided by the government and these schools are always short of teachers. The college of education can schedule their teaching and internship in such a way that the requirement of school as well as pupil-teachers can be coordinated.

Old Format of Lesson Plans

Most of the training colleges are still following the age old Herbartian model of lesson-plan. Even where the Evaluation Approach/ CCE or NCERT model is used, the instructional objectives are neither clearly stated nor are clear to pupil-teachers. This part is considered as dead portion only to be written in lesson plan copy. The evaluation of students is not based on instructional objectives. This defeats the basic purpose of teaching. Teaching is going on without any goal or purpose. That is why there is deterioration in quality.

Drastic action has to be taken to improve the situation. A constructivist approach has to be indicated. The learners should be the active participants in their own learning and not the recipients of knowledge. Their capacity to construct knowledge should be encouraged so that learning shifts away from rote methods." Learning is to be viewed as a search for meaning out of personal experiences and knowledge generation as a continuously evolving process of reflective learning"- as NCFTE puts it. Theory and field experience should be mingled so that pupil-teachers view knowledge as something constructed during learning and not something external. This will help them in integrating academic knowledge and professional learning into a meaningful whole. Instead of fixed format of lesson plan, pupil-teachers should be trained to organize learner-centered, activity – based, participatory learning experiences such as projects, drama presentation, dialogue, discussion, visits etc. These will help in integrating academic learning with productive

work. The NCFTE has proposed not more than four unit plans for each subject. Planning of the units should include a critical engagement with content from multiple sources including the school textbook, organization and presentation of subject-matter, and formulating questions specifically to:

- a) Assess knowledge base and understanding of students;
- b) Further the process of knowledge construction and meaning-making in the classroom;
- c) Assess students' learning to improve pedagogic practice and further enhances learning.

Sheer Neglect by Pupil-Teachers

This is the most common cause during my five years as teacher educator, I have noticed that same comments are written many times by the supervisors during practice-teaching. The reason in most of the cases is that pupil-teachers 'just read' the comments; they do not even remember it the next day when they enter the class. Their approach is very casual. A small number of students, who take the comments seriously, improve within ten days only. So, the attitude of pupil-teachers towards supervisor's comments is very important.

The negligent attitude and carelessness can be treated with personal care by supervisors. If there are some weaknesses common to most students, the supervisor should discuss them generally with pupil-teachers. If some slackness still persists, the particular student should be tackled separately. 'Praise' and 'Re-teach' can be used for this purpose depending on the attitude of pupil-teacher. The main reason for this slack attitude of pupil-teachers is that more than 70% of the B.Ed. students take the course as a pastime while carrying on the preparation for some competitive exams. It is another matter that such students hardly clear these competitive exams.

Careless Supervision of Internship

As such, there is lack of time for internship activities; whatever little is done is also not properly directed and supervised. No extra time is given for internship. It goes side by side with teaching. If the supervisor is organized, s/he plans the activities from the beginning and gives the pupil-teachers an opportunity to go at their own pace and learn by himself/ herself. Psychological tests are conducted for namesake. Action research is hardly based on real classroom situations. Achievement tests is the only activity which is usually prepared by all pupil-teachers, though here also, they copy from each other, as the course is fixed and almost all students teach the same content –based lesson plans.

The supervisor does not have control over all these activities as the duration of practice teaching is less than the required time for all these activities. But, he can certainly control some activities. For example 'observation of teaching' can be controlled as the supervisor puts his signature on the form; he should be strict so that only one pupil-teacher enters the class, comes out and gets his signature immediately. Likewise, other activities can also be guided properly by supervisors.

In the end, certain suggestions are given.

- Every college of education should adopt one or two government schools as per their requirement. This will not only solve their problem but also help the schools which are always short of teachers.

- B.Ed. should be made a residential course, thus compelling the students to stay together with a common aim.
- A refresher or an Orientation Course should be made compulsory every two years for teacher educators also, so that they also acquire latest knowledge of the field.
- Attendance of students should be strictly monitored.
- To attract serious and good students, placement services of teacher education institutes should be strengthened.

If we really want any improvement in the quality of secondary school teachers, we have to take strong steps. A practical plan should be chalked out and implemented in letter and spirits. The teacher educator should come forward and take the onus of planning and implementing this plan. The Government, the Management, and the Society –all should join hands to usher in quality improvement in teacher education so that the destiny of India may be shaped in its classrooms under proper guidance.

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