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Quality assurance in teacher education: A critical issue

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Abstract

Teacher education plays vital role in reforming and strengthening the education system of any country. Training of teachers has emerging global trends in education and the overall needs and aspirations of the people in India. The concept of "quality in education" is an immensely significant concern for academicians and academia globally, and lately this notion has also treaded the realm of Teacher Education in India. It is an accepted fact that there are a number of factors responsible for assuring quality in education both internal and external to an institution. This paper presents a theoretical framework the concept of Quality in Teacher Education by identifying the parameters which are central contributors towards quality of Teacher Education, major problems facing in present time and probable measures for improving quality of teacher education in India in their new roles and responsibilities of the 21st century.

Keywords: Teacher education, quality

Introduction

It is well known that the quality & extent of learner achievements are determined primarily by teacher competence, sensitivity & teacher motivation. The National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE) has defined Teacher Education as a programme of education, research & training of persons to teach from pre-primary to higher education level. Teacher education is a programme that is related to the development of teacher proficiency & competence that would enable & empower the teacher to meet the requirements of the profession & face the challenges therein. According to Goods dictionary of Education teacher education means, all the formal & non-formal activities & experiences that help to qualify a person to assume responsibilities of a number of the educational profession or to discharge his responsibilities more effectively. The purpose of teacher education is to produce teachers who have competencies in various fields. The role of teachers is no longer confined in teaching by imparting knowledge only, they need to be thorough professionals, fully equipped with high academic standard, pedagogical skills, ethical and moral values etc (Singh, 2008) ^[17]. In fact, they have to play a multi-tasking role in the context of various challenges emerging in the field of contemporary society. In this connection, the role of teacher education has also increased many folds. It has special roles to prepare future teachers who are socially responsible and conversant with unique features of cultural heritage and various socio-cultural ethos, have high commitment and the ability to lead society and nations shaping young minds of the learners. Unfortunately the programs of teacher education are alleged to be static and stagnant. In spite of many innovations in this area abroad, situation in India is not up to the mark. Here teacher educators repeat and experiment their own training, which they received earlier upon their students. The existing teacher education model is inherited mostly from British system of education and is suffering a lot due to its inability to keep pace with time adopting necessary modification in its conceptual based theory and practices (Yadav *et al.*, 2011) ^[18]. N.P.E. (1986) ^[10] and the subsequent program of actions have realized that the program of teacher education in various stages requires a thorough reconstruction in its input, process and output in order to make the system quality oriented.

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The international Commission on Education for 21st century has also recognized necessity of reshaping this program in order to enhance its quality in various aspects. Though recently there is quantitative expansion, many things are yet to be done to ensure its quality (Kapoor, 2009) [8].

Quality refers to basic & essential character, the distinguishing element or characteristics of a product, service, organization or entity. Quality is contextual. It is very difficult to give a comprehensive definition of quality. The best teacher of a particular school may be a poor teacher in some other school. However, the quest for quality has been the major concern of the entire human civilization. Quality is not an act, it is a habit. It generally signifies the degree of excellence. It is the totality of features and characteristics of the product, process or service that bear on its ability to satisfy stated or implied needs. In the educational context, quality is seen as a complex issue as education is concerned with human being. When we describe human being as product, the description cannot encapsulate all the characteristics of teachers or learners in the same way, as one would describe the quality of commodities. Hence, the definition of quality varies depending upon the individual, institution and educational situation, social and national context. Quality is a key concern of academia across the globe and several efforts in multiple directions are made by the administrators and academicians to induce this component into the teaching learning situation discussions regarding the missing quality factor in their respective education system which has rendered all efforts surrounding.

Quality Indicators

In the field of teacher education, the major quality indicators namely- curriculum design, curriculum transaction, evaluation system, research and development, infrastructure and learning resources, student support and progression, organization and management etc. have been identified by researchers. Special emphasis is also given on internship program, though it is considered under the broad category of curriculum.

Curriculum design

Curriculum in teacher education consists of two major components – theory and the practicum. Though teacher education is mostly a skill based program but conceptual understanding of those skills oriented activities might be a major concern of a teacher (teacher trainee). Therefore theory and practicum should have a justified proportion in the curriculum. Historical, Philosophical, Psychological, and Sociological aspects of education are four essential theoretical components. In addition, various contemporary issues and challenges emerging in the field of modern education should also be included there (Carr and Kemmis, 1986) [3]. The various concepts should be incorporated following the integrated approach in order to facilitate a comprehensive learning of the students. Various socio-cultural ethos and traditional features of Indian society, along with the discussion on different aspects of modern pedagogical developments might also be included. Particularly, the present status of teacher education in the context of liberalization, globalization, privatization, WTO-outsourcing will have to be considered essential also (Khanka, 2002) [9]. Simulated lesson, field survey, case studies, community outreach activities etc. should be included in practicum. Teacher education program in India

should be designed also with due concern to Indian traditional value system, as well. The curriculum of teacher education at all stages has to emphasize this traditional identity. The influence of different racial, religious, social, linguistic and regional groups in developing India's composite culture and nationhood need to be clearly discussed in this program of teacher education (NCTE, 2004) [8]. There should also be the provision of curricular evaluation following a systematic and scientific approach. While revising, opinion from experts as well as different stakeholders should be utilized properly.

Evaluation

Evaluation of student teachers at this stage need to be comprehensive and continuous (Ahmand, 2008) [1]. Due importance should be given to the opinions of supervisors and school teachers who will maintain the record of the progress of student teachers. The capacity to organize thoughts and express them coherently, taking notes from reading materials and using teaching aids and ICT carefully at the appropriate moment need to be the major concerns of evaluation (Singh, 1990) [16]. Latest evaluation techniques as peer group evaluation of trainee teachers, self-assessment, evaluation in terms of teacher educators' opinion using rating scale etc. may be introduced. Formative as well as summative mode of evaluation both are essential. The semester-end examination should be accompanied by continuous evaluation also, on the basis of which feedback may be provided to the students. Continuous evaluation should be practiced throughout the entire course of the academic program. Evaluation should be made on the basis of grades and not on marks. Emphasis should be given on the internal examination, rather external one (Mukhopadhyay, 2007) [6]. That internal examination should also ensure its strong reliability minimizing the possibility of various malpractices. Highly credible Semester based credit system should also be encouraged to ensure a better student friendly and credible evaluation system in teacher education. Criterion referenced system of evaluation may also be introduced in order to ensure a quality evaluation.

Research in teacher education

During the last five decades a large number of researches, surveys, etc. have been conducted in teacher education. Characteristics of effective teaching, curriculum evaluation, organizational climate and its impact on teachers' performance, the criterion for admission of prospective teachers and administration of education/teacher education have found to catch the attention of researchers. But planned and purposive approach has been found to be neglected. In a few universities only, teacher educators conducting/supervising researchers in various areas of education/teacher education are found (Ahmand, 2008) [1]. Researchers over emphasize certain areas and neglect others (Mukhopadhyay, 2007) [6]. There is the need for recasting the whole program/curriculum of research methodology and use of statistics in it. Statistical jargons are used without understanding their meaning and relevance. Foreign tools are used mostly without due concern to its applicability in our context (Dahiya, 2001) [5]. Many of the researches in this particular field even are found to serve neither the utilitarian purpose nor do they cater the need of academic excellence. Research reports are not going through critical peer-group scrutiny. Review has become mostly a casual and non-

serious exercise (Yadav *et al.*, 2011) [18]. Researchers are found giving more emphasis only to the ultimate findings neglecting the conceptual framework of the study. Research papers usually are found to be prepared from PhD theses already submitted in universities and therefore these research papers are going to be mere replica of the original thesis. Once the thesis is submitted, authors are not taking proper care to update it before presenting or publishing further papers with reference to the same original thesis (Khanka, 2002) [9].

Thus it is important to have long term plans for research, a proper networking and collaboration among the teacher education institutions, availability of resources in terms of grants as well as effective guidance from expert research guide etc. may result in a quality outcome.

Internship program

Internship program is the core component of teacher education. There are wide variations in this program from institutions to institution. Not only that, there is a common practice to consider this program in the form of mere teaching practical- by delivering lectures only on the method subjects. Some problems have been identified by Mukhopadhyay (2007) [6] which are as follows.

In most of the cases under the instruction of NCTE, trainee teachers practice thirty five to forty lessons on the same format without verifying the optimum number of lessons required by an average teacher trainee to achieve the peak of

his teaching competence in that particular method. Lesson plans also only emphasize on Herbartian steps (Mukhopadhyay, 2007) [6]. General apathy of teacher trainee towards this program, as well as the same of the teacher educators to supervise the practice lesson are common problems. Following measures may be adopted in this case to ensure quality. NCTE recommendation of 35-40 lessons needs to be verified with empirical evidence. Besides Herbartian styles of planning lessons, practice lessons in other forms of instruction like individualized instruction, group interaction, and problem solving through project or even media aided instructions may be practiced. Teacher educators should be adequately equipped to guide the trainee teachers in innovative instructional techniques (Kapoor, 2009) [8]. Exhaustive rating of practice teaching lessons (involving the essential skills) should be encouraged employing standardized tools and techniques. Besides teaching only the trainee teachers should also be acquainted with various other activities performed by teachers as maintaining records, organizing and assisting various co-curricular activities, student counseling, parent contacting, organizing examinations in order to acquire a holistic experience of a true internee.

Agencies of Quality Assurance

Various agencies are involved for assuring in teacher education, the significant ones are as follows:-

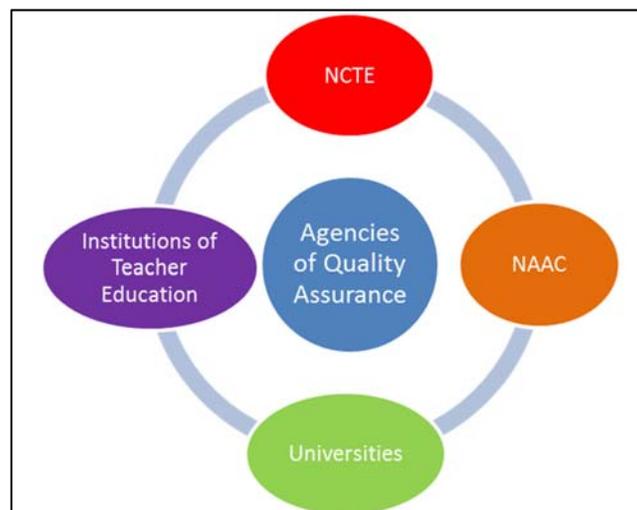


Fig: Agencies of Quality Assurance

National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE)

National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE) is an Indian government body set up under the National Council for Teacher Education Act, 1993 in 1995 is to formally oversee standards, procedures and processes in the Indian education system. This council functions for the central as well as state governments on all matter with regards to the Teacher Education. The NCTE became a statutory body by an act of Parliament in 1993. The main objective of the NCTE is to achieve planned and coordinated development of the teacher education system throughout the country. It is also involved in the regulations and proper maintenance of norms and standards in the teacher education system. NCTE has taken number of steps for raising the quality of teacher education system. It has formulated norms

and standards for twelve teacher education courses in all at pre-primary, primary, secondary, senior secondary, physical and distance education courses. It is amandatory for the existing and new institutions to seek NCTE recognition after fulfilling the NCTE norms. Further these recognized institutions have to submit the Performance Appraisal Report (PAR) annually. On the basis of the PAR, actions are taken to withdraw the recognition in case of violation of norms and standards. In 2002, the Council also developed "Curriculum Framework for Quality Teacher Education" for upgrading the quality of teacher education programmes at par with international standards.

National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC)

The National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) is an organization that assesses and accredits institutions of higher education in India. It is an autonomous body funded by University Grants Commission of Government of India headquartered in Bangalore. NAAC was established in 1994 in response to recommendations of National Policy in Education (1986) [10]. The primary objectives of establishment of NAAC is to assess and accredit institutions of liberal arts, science 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 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 the NCTE have entered into a memorandum of understanding (MOU) for executing the process of assessment and accreditations of all teacher education institutions coming under the provision of the NCTE.

Universities

The university is responsible for providing affiliation to the teacher education institutions situated in its jurisdiction. It conducts combined entrance tests and grants admissions to students against non-management seats to these teacher education institutions. It also design curriculum, coordinates for quality teaching, and conducts examination. It also prescribes norms for certification of faculties. It is also engaged in capacity building through faculty development programme and research.

Institutions of Teacher Education

Teacher education institutions create appropriate infrastructure for providing quality teacher education and grants admission against management seats. It organizes teaching as per prescribed curriculum of the affiliating university. It is also engaged in appointing faculties and overall management of the institution. It also coordinates with the affiliating university, NCTE and the State Govt. in all matters regarding teacher education.

Few Measures for Improving Quality of Teacher Education

Quality of an institution or a programme is generally considered on the basis of placement of its products. It is ascertained from quality of material and human resources. Various factors that affect quality are: finance, sincerity of faculty and students and management, skills of management, skills of teaching of faculty members, and quality of brain of students. In order to accelerate qualitative improvement in higher education, National Knowledge Commission (2009) [9] recommended establishment of 30 new Central universities, 16 in States where they do not exist and 14 as World class universities (all India admissions, course credits, regular syllabi revision, incentives for faculty, strong linkage with industry and research institutions, no affiliated colleges, outsource nonteaching functions.

The main indicator of the quality of teacher education can be visualized in terms of its products the learners achievement

both in scholastic and co-scholastic areas i.e. the performance in various subjects of study and habits, attitudes, values and life skills necessary for becoming a good citizen. The need of teacher man power planning has resulted in mushrooming growth of teacher education throughout the country. The following measures may be helpful for improving quality of teacher education:

1. To provide professional development for practicing in-service teachers by updating their knowledge and skills
2. Effectiveness of the new initiatives curricular reforms
3. Intensive use of ICT for school education and also involvement of the community
4. To adopt innovative Teaching strategies in teacher education and Improving educational administration practices
5. To evolve strategies to enhance professional competency in teacher education
6. To provide expert advice to local schools upon request
7. To analyze the future of teacher education institutions
8. To provide Infrastructure facility in teacher education
9. Teacher education and professional competence of teacher educators
10. Spreading sense of ethical values in teacher education
11. Modern and latest communication and knowledge management for quality teacher education.

Conclusion

Quality in Teacher Education is an established notion which is described vividly in terms of desirable characteristics of the activities undertaken, individuals involved, and infrastructure needed. Confronted with declining standards, primarily due to expansion of higher education system, the question of quality become critical. Teacher education system is not the exception of it. For the higher education scenario in the local context, quality is achievable if the factors influencing quality are identified and then consciously manipulating these will allow quality to be induced in the education system in our country.

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