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Teacher education: Bringing the focus back to what matters most

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Abstract

The Draft New Education Policy (2019) recommends “redesigning teacher education to improve foundational literacy and numeracy skills among children”. The recommendations albeit not clearly defined in the draft policy statement brings the spotlight back to teacher education – an area historically neglected for its limited bearings on the profession. This paper presents a background of teacher preparation in India and juxtapositions the four year Bachelor of Elementary Education programme (B.El.Ed) programme in it. The programme is departure in more ways than one and yet has met with challenges that have limited its reach.

Keywords: Teacher education, education policy

Introduction

The earliest systems of teacher training in India developed from the monitorial and pupil teacher plans. The earliest known attempt to meet problem of an adequate supply of teachers is that of Dr. Andrew Bell, who, while in Madras between 1789 and 1796, employed the monitorial system, a system of mutual instruction’ which he found in bigger indigenous elementary schools, and which came to be called the Madras System of Education. In this system, the services of older pupils were utilized to instruct the younger ones.

One of the earliest schemes for the training of teachers in India was formulated by Sir Thomas Munro, the Governor of the Madras Presidency, in his minute of 10th March, 1826. Sir Thomas held that no progress could be made by that province “without a body of better instructed teachers,” and the establishment of a central school for the education of teachers.

In Bengal, the Calcutta School Society (Archival Records) which was established in 1819 combined with its arrangements for giving elementary education an arrangement for educating teachers for the indigenous schools. These were the first beginnings of teacher preparation in this country; but their success was short-lived. Experts from the education field claim that teacher training hardly met with any consequences until the middle of the last century. Wood’s Education Despatch of 1854 was regarded as an important landmark in the history of education in modern India. Among a number of important things, the Despatch considered the question of securing properly qualified teachers for schools and desired “the establishment, with as little delay as possible, of training schools and classes for masters in each Presidency in India.”

The system, as outlined in the Dispatch, mainly consists in “the selection and stipend of pupil teachers and in securing a sufficient salary when they are afterwards employed as schoolmasters.” The Despatch stressed the need of carrying out the system in India “both in the government colleges and schools, and, by means of grants-in-aid, in all institutions which are brought under inspection.”

Following this recommendation, there was a marked increase in the provision for teacher training. For example, the Madras Presidency in 1858 had normal schools at Mayararan, Cheyur and Vellore, and subsequently normal schools or classes were established at Mangalore, Berhampore and Ellore. In the Bombay Presidency, Mr. Erskine, the first Director of Public Instruction, proposed that “selected youths in each taluka should be apprenticed as pupil teachers for three years, they should be sent up for a further course of instruction to the District Training College from which they would eventually return to their respective talukas as trained teachers.”

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By 1858, there were four normal schools in the Presidency located at Poona, Ahmedabad, Dharwar and Karachi. In Bengal, too, four normal schools for the training of 'vernacular' teachers were in operation in 1857 at Hooghly, Dacca, Gauhati and Calcutta. In the North-Western Province and Oudh, in the Punjab, and in the Central Provinces, the establishment of normal schools was somewhat delayed; but it was not long before these provinces too took up the problem of teacher training seriously. By 1882, the year in which the Indian Education Commission began its work, there was a further albeit gradual development in the provision of training for elementary school teachers; but during this period from 1854 to 1882 the arrangements for the training of secondary teachers were far from satisfactory. In the whole of India, alarmingly, there were only two training institutions for secondary school teachers – one at Madras, established in 1856, and the other at Lahore, established in 1880.

It is interesting to note that at the time of the appointment of the Indian Education Commission the question of the training of secondary teachers was still the subject of a controversy in England – a controversy which had its repercussions also in India. One school of educationists believed that further study of the subjects which a person would have to teach would be of greater value to him than any study of the methods of teaching, and that a couple of years of service under an able headmaster would avail him more than study at a training institution.

Successful training was made a condition not of initial employment but of permanent employment; so that only those who were in a position to spare the time and the money required for it and realized the value of a study of educational principles and methods felt in any degree like getting themselves trained. However, by 1902 there were six training colleges in India at Saidapet, Rajahmundry, Kurseone, Allahabad, Lahore and Jubbulpore. Of the major provinces, Bombay, was the only one that had not organized a training institution for secondary teachers; but this efficiency was remedied in 1906 after the Government of India in this Resolution of 1904 on Indian Educational Policy had recommended the extension of the system of secondary training to the provinces where it did not exist, "notably Bombay."

The Resolution referred to above noted with satisfaction that the institution of normal schools for primary teachers, which was enjoined by the Despatch of 1854, had been very generally carried out. It also stated that steps were being taken to supply courses of training especially suited for teachers in rural schools – courses which would help to arouse the interest of teachers in the study of rural life. "So that they may be able to connect their teaching with the objects which are familiar to the children in the country schools."

The period 1904-21 witnessed a great advance in respect of the facilities for the training of secondary teachers, the number of training colleges rising during the period from 6 to 13. The report of the Calcutta University Commission published in 1919 reiterate the need of substantially increasing the output of trained teachers and suggested the creation of Department of Education in the University of Dacca and Calcutta.

In 1929 the Hartog Committee, which gave special attention to the problems of primary education, had some important recommendations to make in respect of the training of

primary teachers. It recommended that steps should be taken to raise the standard of the general education of primary teachers; that the course of training itself should be made sufficiently long; that the efficiency of training institutions for primary teachers should be enhanced by their more adequate staffing. It can be said that these recommendations were not without effect on the quality of teachers produced by the training institutions. Several curricular changes were introduced specially with a view to enabling teachers to co-ordinate instruction with the environment of their pupils. Attempts were also made in some provinces to recruit more suitable candidates for training.

A development which was a direct outcome of the adoption of the scheme of basic education was the establishment of basic training institutions. As the essence of the Basic scheme is the correlation of the bulk of the instruction to the basic craft, it is apparent that Basic education requires a special type of teacher preparation which is sought to be given in the new Basic normal schools. The scheme was though gradually but increasingly adopted in the course of the last decade, the number of Basic normal schools had steadily increased; and such schools were slowly replacing the older traditional training schools for primary teachers. However as the basic scheme did not touch the stage beyond 14, the training colleges for secondary teachers remained unaffected by it.

What plagues the system?

In spite of the developments referred to above and the increased facilities for teacher education during the last decade, it would not be wrong to say that our present machinery for teacher education is both inadequate and out of date. Considering the goal of compulsory elementary education for all children in the age-group 6 to 14 that the Constitution has set the existing provision for teacher education is utterly inadequate in extent.

Moreover, there was little or no co-ordination in the efforts of the different agencies working in this field. Lack of co-ordination also characterizes the work of different grades of teacher education level. No liaison or collaboration of any sort among the various teacher education institutions working at these different levels. They tend to work in isolation oblivious of their common objectives or problems. These inadequacies provide a major problem in educational reconstruction.

Radhakrishnan Commission 1948 has noted that "even at any single level there is evidently a strange lack of community of purpose and of co-ordination of efforts in teacher education institutions in the different parts of the country". For example, the post-graduate level of teacher education has little difference in the nature of theoretical courses given by training colleges at the B.T. stage (also called the B.Ed., L.T. and Dip. Ed. in some universities). But there appears to be wide differences in the kinds and the extent of practical training obtained in the various training colleges. Naik J.P, (1943) in the History of Education in India during British Rule pointed to another direction in which greater interest and greater effort is needed which was in better co-ordination between the teacher education institutions on the one hand and the schools for whom they prepare teachers on the other.

The Radha Krishnan Commission 1948 has recognized this difficulty that teacher education institutions particularly have to face; and it has therefore suggested that Government

should “make it a condition of aid, or even recognition, to suitable schools that they shall play their proper part in the practical training of the recruits whose services they subsequently intend to use.” One of the ways in which the Commission feels that a better co-ordination between the training colleges and the schools was by recruiting an increasingly large proportion of the staff of the training college from the ranks of teachers in the schools. The conduct of educational research is evident since the institution of the M.Ed. course in some universities has, in a way, helped to make the staff of the training colleges where this course is offered, research-minded. The Association of Training Colleges was established with this objective. The Central Institute of Education in Delhi is where the first attempt at educational research at an all-India level was carried out in order to take necessary lead on the matter. The number of training colleges and basic training schools increased. A second development has been an increase in the provision for the training of teachers in subjects like Economics, Commerce and Home Science. Another useful development was that training college took over the in-service training of teachers. More colleges were brought under the scheme. Training colleges holds a key position in the plans for the reorganization, development of education. The quality of school teaching depends not only on a teacher’s innate aptitude but also on right understanding, insight, interest, ideal and attitude which is the function of teacher education institutions to impart to their students. A. Makedon (1990) espoused teaching as both an art and a science. The idea that some persons are born teachers is only a half-truth. So is the other idea that teachers can learn by experience and do not need formal training.

Bachelor of elementary education – introduction to a new paradigm

Two hundred teachers were interviewed in a doctoral research study to understand the impact of teacher preparation on a teachers’ career. The majority of them being B.El.Ed graduates (128) a programme conceptualized at the Maulana Azad Centre for Elementary and Social Education (MACESE), CIE to address the need for professionally qualified elementary teacher educators and teachers in 1994. The programme came into being after accepting that teacher training needed an impetus to impart energy and direction to teacher preparation programmes. There was an urgent need to prepare teachers differently as reflective practitioners for elementary school teaching. The programme was a departure from the existing teacher’s education programme like the B.Ed. which treated knowledge as prescribed in the school curriculum as a ‘given’ (Kumar 2001, Batra 2005) ^[1]. Fenstermacher (1986 cited in Schulman 1987:13) explains the role of teacher education as “more than just training to behave in prescribed ways. It involves reasoning and performing skilfully”. Reasoning as both a thinking process about what is getting done and an adequate base of facts, principles and experiences from which to add meaning to the teaching learning process.

The B.El.Ed Handbook for Delhi University affiliated colleges emphasizes the importance of university research for primary teachers as essential to develop subject expertise and keen sense of critical reflection in order to teach effectively. The programme integrated pedagogical knowledge with the teachers’ general education in a phased

manner. Undergraduate studies in different disciplines were to be combined “with an understanding of educational theory and pedagogical experience” (Kumar 2001:4) The programme was offered in colleges of general education to allow the students to develop knowledge of teaching and education along with their chosen subjects of humanities and social sciences (not Science or Language).

Structure of the programme

The structure of the programme was focused on a qualitative shift in the role of the teacher as someone who has merely been giving answers to students’ queries. The teacher for once was not supposed to ‘know all’ or to possess all the knowledge, which was to be doled out to the ignorant students, instead “the students were allowed to develop from a position of dependence to one of autonomy” (Batra 2001:11) ^[1]. The programme prepares student teachers to view knowledge problematically to be constructed within the specific social context. Such an approach values students’ viewpoint and involves them in the creation of knowledge providing them with a sense of ownership.

The programme offers both compulsory and optional theory courses, compulsory practicum and a comprehensive school internship experience. The practicum papers in the course structure are designed to enable the students to reach out to over 60 schools and 600 teachers (of the New Delhi Municipal Corporation, Municipal Corporation of Delhi and Delhi Administration Schools) in the NCT of Delhi through the school contact and school internship programmes which helps to integrate theoretical framework with field reality. The colleges also look beyond the university faculty for inputs from other institutions for practicum papers like craft, storytelling and theatre. Students are also involved in setting up resource centers in the schools. This unique feature of the programme has been appreciated by other universities as well. The duration of the programme allows students to develop a critical understanding of varied educational issues. Students are required to develop a school resource center during the four-year period and also visit institutions engaged in innovative practices in education. Students also undertake research projects and learn professional skills through arts, crafts, storytelling and music (NCF 2005).

The B.El.Ed. programme is being offered by 8 undergraduate colleges of Delhi University. The professional avenues that are open to the graduates include placements in government and private schools or postgraduate studies in psychology, languages, history and social work. Some of the students are also pursuing research in education in universities and have qualified the UGC NET. It can clearly be stated that the B.El.Ed. programme prepares an individual from being a school pass out to being a full-fledged professional who is enthusiastic to take up her role. The course structure and quality of teaching when compared between Delhi University and other teacher education institutions fetches far many unique features to be considered as only fleeting for how B.El.Ed. graduates perceive themselves. The rigour that the course offers makes the student teachers believe that they have a purpose as teachers’. It hones their aspirations to be teachers’ and gives them the know how whereby they can utilise their skills for the benefit of students.

V.K Raina stressed that teaching was not a willing service here and one did not need to have any orientation or aptitude to join them. He pointed out that a major factor that brought

teaching down on a professional scale was that till 1970s there was a non-emphasis on any pre service training for those who wish to join it and later a boom in the correspondence courses that literally churned out 40-50,000 teachers in a single academic year. Thus anybody who had the slightest inclination time and money or even those who succumbed to parental pressure irrespective of their academic record could join teaching.

Further while the standard of accomplishment expected in other profession is gradually increasing in teaching they have remained static or have slid down in the face of the poor working conditions which prevails in the schools. Thus even a representative of the intellectual class the teachers' status has been corroded further by the high standards of proficiency required in other professions. As compared to other professions like engineering, medicine, management and law even the best practices teachers find themselves to be inadequate and non-comparable. Thus the Indian teacher continues to occupy a much lower position in the hierarchy of professions. The meagre pay itself decrees a low social status for teachers at school level. Women who join the course do so for reasons other than any interest in teaching. It is either because their parents have convinced them that teaching is the most suitable job for them or it's a half day job with plenty of holidays where they can balance their home and family life smoothly which prompts them to pursue it.

Teachers' sense of efficiency, that is, their belief in their ability to have a positive effect on students' learning is one of the few teacher characteristics identified to be consistently related to and effecting student achievement. The B.El.Ed programme is a huge value addition to this construct. But there are also significant limiting factors. After more than two decades only a limited number of colleges offer the programme implies its failure to generate mass interest in revamping teacher preparation courses proving to be an isolated pilot programme in a country in dire need of complete overhaul of the teacher education system. In addition since the programme is provided only in women colleges it has been unable to break the stereotype of teaching suitable only for women. Graduates of the programme are also severely restricted in higher education prospects as they cease to be eligible for Masters in Maths or Science.

Nevertheless the programme needs to be lauded for an attempt to provide the profession its due recognition and if not in its entirety at least in its structure and orientation of the programme - its framers and students contribute to developing a position paper for teacher education institutes elsewhere in the country for wider reach, impact and lasting benefits to the thousands of students who chose to become teachers every year. It's extremely relevant that infusing new ideas and their integration with the teacher training programmes is the need of the hour to actualize goals, fulfil dreams and shape lives of the younger generation meaningfully in order to reap a rich demographic dividend. Teachers are by far the only crucial factor in an individual's life that decides his/her learning experience. There is not a single individual who can say that his/her teacher was not instrumental in shaping not just the mind, intellect but also character.

Conclusion

Teaching profession has a huge responsibility, having world class teachers is the only pre requisite for a satisfying schooling experience that not only achieves the desired learning outcomes but infuses the passion for lifelong learning in an individual. "There is not a country in the world that has become a super power without a sound teaching system and it is unlikely that India will be able to do so" said Amartya Sen (2015) [5]. This paper advocates for teacher education to be identified as a fundamental element that equips teachers' to teach future generations.

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