

“RETHINKING QUALITY EDUCATION: GENESIS AND IMPLICATION OF PROFESSIONAL TEACHER STANDARDS”

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Abstract

A teacher's standards depend upon the nature of training programme s/he attends. Effective teacher educators and the training programme bring out effective teacher. The status of teachers as well as teaching has been declining for a long time. In theory, teachers are reflective practitioners- professionals who are 'domain experts' in both subject content as well as the 'how' of teaching. Their role as professionals allows them to adapt to the needs of the classroom as they teach, innovating with teaching practice, pedagogical approaches, the design of teaching-learning material and similar such issues which collectively determine the quality of teaching and learning in the classroom. The NCF-2005, conceptualizes a very different role for the teacher i.e. someone who has agency and professional capacity for exercising autonomy and needs to devote time and resources to study and reflect on her or his own practice and on the world surrounding the schools. To compete as a successful teacher in the 21st century a teacher must adopt these skills so that they don't lag behind the pace of the changing world. However, there are several constraints as well. There is a need that the teacher educators as well as teachers keep the desire for learning burning within them and become acceptor and not receptor of the change in order to keep pace with the changing time. The present paper focuses upon the above mentioned aspects effectively.

Historically, the first formal stride in the field of teacher education in India can be traced back to nineteenth century when under the East India Company, some private agency namely, the Calcutta School Society (estb. 1819), the Native Education Society of Bombay and the Madras School Society, in the then three presidencies, formally made attempts towards teacher education. However, it must be kept in mind that these efforts in teacher education for working teachers were in the nature of private initiatives. Later, Wood's Despatch of 1854 brought

significant recognition to teacher education. After the wood's Despatch, normal schools for training of primary school teachers were established in each presidency and the official acceptance of teacher training was made formal to become an integral part of the Indian education system. As a sequel to the Indian Education Commission's (1882) recommendation, six training college came into existence¹. These colleges started a training programme known as '*Licentiate in Teaching*' that was equivalent to a degree. The first emphasis on improvement of quality, and not quantity was made by the Viceroy, Lord Curzon through his government of India Resolution 1904. Morley-Minto reform of 1909 was another milestone and as a consequence the government of India passed another resolution in 1913. It declared that

'...eventually under the modern system of education, no teacher should be allowed to teach without a certificate that he is qualified to do so'.

In the post independence period, University Education Commission under the chairmanship of Dr. S. Radhakrishnan in 1948 observed that the high school and intermediate standards were undoubtedly low and university standards cannot be improved unless the quality of teaching in schools and intermediate improves. It can be raised only if large number of first rate graduates becomes school masters. During the period of second half of the decade, commencing from 1950 and the beginning of 1960, many important committees were set up. Subsequently, the Government of India appointed the Education Commission under the chairmanship of Prof. D. S. Kothari (1964) which has in its purview all stages of education. The Commission examined the various aspects of teacher education in India and observed that a sound programme of professional education of teachers is essential for quality improvement in education. The commission recommended that, on the whole, a comprehensive improvement is urgently needed in teacher education. The National Policy Statement on Education (1968) visualized that

'...of all the factors which determine the quality of education and its contribution to national development, teacher is undoubtedly the most important. It is on his personal qualities and character, his educational qualifications and professional competencies that the success of all educational endeavors must ultimately depend. Teachers, must therefore, be accorded an honoured place in society.'

Their emoluments and other service conditions should be adequate and satisfactory having regard to their qualifications and responsibility.'

Teacher education right from the beginning had remained a matter of concern. There is no denying the fact that the status of teachers as well as the teaching has been declining for a long time, and that the institutionalized training of teachers has never received sufficient attention to keep pace with the need. Both the dimensions of the crisis have rarely been addressed, in spite of a substantial effort made by the Cahttopadhyaya Commission to create a focus on teacher and training². The National Policy on Education (1986, POA 1992) says that

'... Teacher education is a continuous process and its pre-service and in-service components are inseparable'³.

It must not be forget that the continuation should be seen in context of changing nature of society upon which the impact of global change can not be overlooked. Unless the changes in the components of teacher education are brought in, the quality improvement in the field of education can not be thought of. The government of India has made several attempts to raise the standard of school education through several reforms including raising enrolment at primary and upper primary level, governance mode in education, community participation, changes in the conditions of employment for teachers, the nature of curricula and so on. However, the government has failed in her effort to focus attention on teacher education (both in-service and pre-service) and the nature of institutional support they require to fulfill its role adequately.

The quality of education in any educational institution depends upon the capabilities of teachers who teach them⁴. A survey covering 25 OECD countries presents the general consensus in research points out that, '*raising teacher quality is perhaps the policy direction most likely to lead substantial gains in school performance*'⁵. This brings the issue of teacher training and selection, ongoing academic support, governance and management. Professional training of teachers is crucial in determining the quality of education and has been recognized as an unavoidable fact from the Kothari Commission (1964-66) to New Education Policy (1986). NCF 2005 says

*'...the hope of revitalizing school education in India...will probably meets with little success, if the central agency of the teacher remains unrecognized'*⁶.

The teacher earlier was one of teller who ensured that whatever was told has attentively been heard and memorized by everyone, even if they may not understand or conceptualized it. In theory teachers are reflective practitioners- professionals who are '*domain experts*' in both subject content as well as the '*how*' of teaching. Their role as professional allows them to adapt to the needs of the classroom as they teach, innovating with teaching practice, pedagogical approaches, the design of teaching-learning material and similar such issues which collectively determine the quality of teaching and learning in the classroom. The NCF, however, imagine a very different role for the teacher i.e. someone who has agency and professional capacity for exercising autonomy. The kind of teacher that the NCF demands needs to be given time and resources to study and reflect on her own or his own practice and on the world surrounding the schools. This is the kind of teacher that the new NCF based syllabus and textbooks require. However, the existing teacher education programmes '*fail to empower the teacher as an agent of change...*'⁷. The necessary skills to observe and document, listen and examine, debate and judge, are incorporated in the so called 'content' of knowledge. The teacher who works with the new set of textbooks should have these skills and also be aware what it means to cultivate these skills in every child, not just the smarter one.

The expertise required of teachers of two kind: the first, disciplinary and subject knowledge in conformity with the school curriculum and second, the skills required in transacting the curriculum and the effectiveness of dealing with children in the schools and classrooms. Since subject knowledge at the elementary school level was seen to be fairly limited, the training for teachers at this level focused primarily on pedagogic techniques and classroom management. The quality and content of both B. Ed. and D. Ed. degrees offered across institutions have been criticized, highlighting the need for undertaking revision in the content and delivery. A key problem associated with the content of teacher education courses is that teachers are both perceived as and trained to be transmitters of information from text books, rather than as professionals who can teach students to think, find answers and understand concepts on their own- a conceptualization which provides impetus to poor quality of schooling⁸.

In India, B. Ed. degree is an essential qualification for teaching in any recognized school. Many reports have advocated the importance of attracting capable and interested men and women to the teaching profession, rather than allowing teaching to be relegated to the bottom rung of potential employment avenues⁹. But the fact is that the degree has remained only a

formality for elite schools and rarely a defining factor in the appointment of teachers in elite institutions. Here the background of teacher in terms of class, facility with English, or the schools and colleges they may have attended are equally important. Market forces have grabbed the teacher education sector, treating it as a source of money. It has generated multiple negative impacts on the teacher education programme. UNESCO report on EFA notes:

*'...both in developing and developed countries, there is a temptation to lower teacher training standards'*¹⁰.

The B. Ed. remains the most widely taught programme in institutions of education today. The relationship between universities and departments or schools of education has not been an easy one in most of the countries. The experience of the OECD countries also recognizes concerns about the content and delivery of teacher training courses, including issues pertaining to the field experience component of courses, which is often '*short and disconnected from coursework*', and a disconnect between trainees and teacher educators on account of diverse backgrounds and orientations¹¹. The structure of the programme has remained unchanged over decades and if changes comes in it only comes in the content of the course. The courses are usually divided into the academic and the professional components. The first are known as the foundation courses whereas the second which is given more attention and is the professional component includes pedagogy courses related to teaching discipline in the schools and practical teaching experience in the schools. The supremacy of the professional side of the programme has almost side lined the hall mark of critical thinking among the pupil teachers which is supposed to be the hallmark of a good teacher. The content of B. Ed. programme should be restructured to ensure its relevance to the changing needs of school education... the emphasis in these programmes should be on enabling the trainees to acquire the ability for self-learning and independent thinking¹².

Teaching requires teachers to transform their knowledge into suitable tasks which lead them to learning. The whole system of teacher education functions on the basis of observation and interaction between the teacher educator and teacher trainees. Simply the teacher being an expert in a subject is no guarantee that the teacher can help others learn the subject. Effective teaching takes place when the learning experience structured by the teacher matches the needs of the learner and develops the individual pupil's knowledge, skills and attitude in such a way that

pupil learns applying past knowledge as appropriate and laying the foundation for the next stage of learning. The entire edifice of teacher education depends upon the effective skillful teaching that facilitates skill in teaching.

Therefore, the whole teacher education programme should be seen in tandem and not in isolation. The examination system habituated and promoted rote learning which reduced the chance of reflective thinking on the one hand where as on the other it did not provide an opportunities for the pupil teacher to base his/her teaching on deep observation of course, content, context and so on. Poor teaching practice with poor lesson planning, lack of learners' own conception of children, lack of expertise of teaching methods, non practice of teaching skills, pathetic subject knowledge of teachers, lack of understanding of issues that affect education, religion, gender and spirals the problem of the whole teacher education programme. Academic degradation is also associated with the salary of teacher educators who are often less paid. This does not provide them opportunities to fully and consciously devote his/her time in providing improved training rather they try to find another and better paid vocation. Dilution of eligibility criteria has paved way for many such teacher educators who have not even taught in the schools but found vocation as teacher educators. Such teachers develop a hypothetical conception regarding the actual functionality of the classroom and children's interaction with teachers. This does not provide them with actual experience of the classroom which ultimately deteriorates the standard of the teacher education programme.

Children of today are very advance with regard to technology. Contrary to it are our teachers who are hardly technology savvy. There is a major paradigm shift in the instructional methods with the change of time. To be competitive in the period of globalization it is important to change our traditional methods so as to meet the challenges posed by the global markets. To meet these demands, a teacher must supplement or replace traditional methods of instruction with innovative educational experiences. UGC model curriculum for education (2001) acknowledges that newer technologies such as internet, telematics, World Wide Web (www), e-mail, e-commerce etc are impacting education. Therefore, in order to be relevant and as a potent means of socio-economic reconstruction, education must be responsive to these changes and challenges. In the post modern era where technology is accessible to almost every one and where students are more technology savvy, we must acknowledge that technology should be used as a means and not as an end from the point of view of teaching and learning processes. Technology

must be used as a tool to facilitate these methods whereas schools must implement technology in the learning environment. It is hard to believe in the technological era that understanding of children can not be increased deeply on any topic. Technology has even taken the place of writing board in the classroom what we usually call black board. However, one thing that has almost static is our teaching methods where quite less progress has been made technologically with regard to teaching in the classroom environment. Peter Senge, senior lecturer at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, while answering a simple question as how has the world of a child changed in the last 150 years says '*It's hard to imagine any way in which it has not changed! But if you look at school today versus 100 years ago, it is more similar than dissimilar.*'

Concern for teacher education can, therefore, be classified into two essential categories. The first may deals with the nature of training 'delivery' (in contrast to content) and this includes the 'cascade' model of in-service training currently in practice, and how pre-service courses such as D. Ed. are structured. The second, should deals with the content of in-service and pre-service training which take into account the profile of persons who adopt teaching as their profession in the current context, the requirements and understanding of teaching- whether it indeed is a profession which includes a specialized set of knowledge and skills, and if so, what all must teachers know about pedagogy, subject content and learning.

Let us begin by identifying some of the fundamental premise that will inform a framework for constructing a pro-people transformative teacher education programme. A tentative list of such premises can be:

- The subject knowledge gained by the students-teacher before entering a teacher education programme is neither adequate nor epistemologically sound from the stand point of becoming a teacher.
- The theoretical and practical components should have a dialectical relationship; these components qualitatively and continuously transform the student-teacher's understanding, sensitivity and pedagogic capacity through mutual feedback
- The courses in philosophy, sociology, psychology and pedagogy should be designed to enable the student-teacher to re-think about the philosophical orientation of education, epistemological sources and character of knowledge in the curriculum, social paradigm of

education, learning theories and pedagogic framework from standpoint of the transformative role of teacher education.

- The student-teacher should be equipped with the necessary evaluative and analytical tools in order to be able to utilize research as a method of critically examining her/his role in the education system and to continuously endeavour to reform.
- The course design should adequately address intra- and inter domain issues relating to three major domains viz. cognitive, affective and conative.
- The course design should provide ample space to the student-teacher to develop her/his conceptual insights and cultural sensitivity into issues on the school-society interface and also to build her/his capacity to deal at practical level with the problems relating to this interface.
- The programme should prepare the student-teacher to act as a creative and sensitive catalyst of transformation, rather than to passively compromise with the curricular, pedagogic and socio-cultural constraints as prevailing in the education system.
- The programme should build up the capacity of the student-teachers to use education as a tool for examining, questioning and ultimately resisting the phenomena of socio-economic exploitation, impoverishment, communalization, social, cultural and gender discrimination, destruction of human environment through over-consumption and mindless submission to the market force.
- The programme should build up a basic understanding in the student-teacher of the current status of education in the context of the socio-economic and political reality of contemporary India and the world and prepare her/him to continuously review the education system with the objective of promoting education as a process of social change.
- The programme should enhance the student-teachers capacity for critical thinking and build up critical appreciation of one's own as well as other's cultural history; the curriculum should be designed to effectively address the issues related to the rich multi-cultural, multi-ethnic and multi-lingual composite heritage of India in order to enable her/him to resist the onslaught of the forces of cultural hegemony on Indian education.
- The programme should build up a commitment amongst the student-teachers to strengthen the vision of India as enshrined in the Indian constitution and to struggle for promoting

values necessary for creating an egalitarian, democratic and secular society in India and world.

- Utilization of new technologies will help equip student-teachers with several tools for better pedagogical processes. The programme should identify and include these technologies for better transaction in the classroom.

Conclusion:

In an increasing globalized, world where the disadvantaged has to compete with the privileged one nationally or internationally, the intellectual skills that are needed to understand the ways in which education is influenced as much by what happens in the classroom and the school outside the school, at local levels of economics, politics and international policy, the component of B. Ed. course does not prepare our teachers for it. Often then, even students who pass out of these courses with honours and excellent teaching skills are at loss when they are faced with over-crowded classrooms, with schools where the annual examination and a prescribed syllabus take precedence over every human consideration about learning, where they have no say in the day-to-day functioning of the schools or the administration that govern the schools. Teacher education in India represents a discipline that has chosen to live in the past instead of moving ahead and changing with times. Excessive emphasis on theory should shift and make room for greater focus on professional competencies that can prove workable in classrooms of today and of tomorrow. It is therefore, time to critically evaluate the project of education and the reason why institution of teacher education continue to remain on the margins of major educational debates.

Reference

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