

Teacher Education in Northeast India—Status, Weaknesses and Alternatives

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Northeast India comprises of a cluster of eight states—Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Meghalaya, Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura. The region is usually stereotyped as underdeveloped. Geographically, the region is surrounded by international border with part of Nepal, Bhutan, China, Myanmar and Bangladesh. Prevalence of insurgency and terrorism is often regarded as major deterrent for over all progress of the region. It is also felt that to accelerate the process of development, it is necessary to utilize the potential of human resources that are available in the region. For this, human resource development initiatives need to be strengthened. Education, being one of the important inputs for human resource development, assumes priority. Providing basic education of minimum quality to children has been an obligation of the state since long. The state governments have been making attempts to provide free, compulsory and universal primary education. Particularly after the SSA (Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan) (education for all) has been launched in the 2001-2002, a large number of children have been brought under ambit of school education. However, as far as quality is concerned, much needs to be done, particularly in the area of teacher education. The paper highlights the features of existing teacher education programs in the region and examines alternatives.

Keywords: Northeast India, international border, teacher education, quality

Introduction

Whether teachers are born or made is no longer a debate in education. Because irrespective of the fact that some individuals are endowed with those positive qualities which a good teacher should have even without undergoing any formal teacher training course, no one can undermine the need and importance of formal teacher education program, especially for those who join the profession with nil orientation. This is particularly applicable in a country like India where universalization of elementary education (of certain quality) is a national commitment. The system here requires services of millions of teachers who can impart quality education. This obviously implies that a good teacher preparation program should be in place to achieve the goals of universalisation. With progressive realization of the importance of professionalization of teaching profession, it is accepted that continuous professional development of teachers by way of initial (pre-service) and recurrent (in-service) is a dire necessity. It is this that teacher education policy of India is increasingly aligning towards.

Teacher Training Scenario in Northeastern States

Northeast India is considered as a special region in many respects. Remote as it is from the main stream of

India, there is a general notion that this region represents underdevelopment and backwardness. The region comprises of seven states, namely, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Meghalaya, Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura (see Figure 1). To these, Sikkim has been added as the 81, especially after bringing it officially under the purview of the Northeastern Council. Thus, Northeastern region at present incorporates a cluster of eight states, although location of Sikkim is not in exact geographical contiguity. A special feature of the region is that it shares international boundary with China, Myanmar, Bangladesh, Bhutan and Nepal which has significant impact on the population dynamics and related societal features (Lyndem & Bhattacharjee, 2005).



Figure 1. Map of North East India with constituent States

Area and population wise analysis shows that Northeast India occupies 7.97% of the area and 3.79% of the total population of India. Literacy rate, except Mizoram (88.49%), does not indicate substantial increase when compared with figure at the national level. There are states, Arunachal Pradesh (54.74%) and Meghalaya (63.31%), which register even lower than national average. General educational profile indicates rather a low profile except in selected indicators. The major area of concern for quality in education which is common to all the eight states is the presence of large number of untrained teachers, especially at the elementary level. In average, around 60% of the teachers at elementary level are untrained. There are two major factors which have contributed to this. First, teacher recruitment rules of concerned states; and second, lack of sufficient infrastructure for teacher education. In addition, the main problems of teacher education in Northeast India relates to large number of untrained teachers, language, preparedness, governments willingness, communication, lack of information, absence of technology, geographical features, non-availability of resource persons, etc. (Koul, 2007).

As far as teacher education is concerned, institutions can be categorized into two kinds mainly B.Ed (Bachelor of Education) colleges and institutions for training primary/elementary teachers. Under both the categories, there are institutions run by concerned State Government as well as private agencies. Table 1 indicates state wise number of B.Ed colleges in Northeast region.

Primary teacher training institutions evolved through different stages like normal schools, basic training institutions, primary teacher institutions and district institutes of educational training. These institutions are primarily government run institutions. The syllabus and courses are developed by the SCERT's (State Council of Educational Research and Training) of States. One unique feature of these institutions in Northeast India is that these institutions are primarily utilized for imparting in-service teacher training of various durations to clear the backlog of untrained teachers depending upon state policy. Thus, full length pre-service teacher

training for elementary teachers in the true sense is non-existent in Northeast India.

Table 1

State Wise Number of B.Ed Colleges

States	Number of B.Ed colleges
Arunachal Pradesh	1
Assam	52
Meghalaya	3
Mizoram	1
Manipur	3
Nagaland	2
Sikkim	2
Tripura	1

Note. Source: NCTE (National Council of Teacher Education) Website.

SSA (Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan) Intervention

Dearth of trained teachers has always been a problem in Northeastern states. When SSA (Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan) was launched in 2002, a large number of additional teachers were recruited to meet the demands. The component of teacher training is in-built in the scheme. Under these 20 days, induction training is imparted batch by batch to train teachers under SSA. Although coverage of teacher training is quite large under SSA, this being short term cannot be a substitute for full length training program for teacher preparation.

Reorganization of Teacher Education Under Centrally Sponsored Scheme

Followed by the National Policy of Education in 1986, Government of India launched a centrally sponsored scheme of reorganization of teacher education under which funds were allocated or improving existing SCERTs and established DIETs (district institutes of education and training) in all states in a phased manner. All eight states of Northeast also started implementing the scheme in a phase. However, the process of implementation is slow and incomplete. The main reason for this is stated to be non-availability of qualified faculty in these states as well local-centric recruitment policy of concerned states. Among the Northeastern states, except for Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim, remaining states do have SCERTs. Table 2 shows number of DIETs in Northeastern states.

Table 2

State Wise Number of DIETS

States	Number of DIETS
Arunachal Pradesh	6
Assam	19
Meghalaya	7
Mizoram	2
Manipur	7
Nagaland	6
Sikkim	1
Tripura	4

National Evaluation Study conducted by NIEPA (National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration) (2000) shows DIETs of Northeastern states are non-operational. It is only on the basis of recommendations of the report of the study that DIETs have been made operational to some extent. Even now these DIETs are not fully operational and functions of these are mostly restricted to conducting training of untrained in-service teachers, and other multi-dimensional activities which DIETs are supposed to perform are virtually non-existent.

Another important feature of the scheme is setting up of IASEs (Institute of Advanced Studies in Education) and CTEs (Colleges of Teacher Education). As far as IASEs are concerned, there are two sanctioned IASEs for Assam and one for Tripura; remaining states do not have these at all. Table 3 indicates number of CTEs in these states.

Table 3

State Wise Number of CTE and IASE

State	CTE	IASE
Arunachal Pradesh	-	-
Assam	7	2
Meghalaya	3	-
Mizoram	1	-
Manipur	1	-
Nagaland	1	-
Sikkim	-	-
Tripura	-	1

Teacher Training in Distance Mode

To address the issue of backlog of untrained teachers in Northeastern states, IGNOU (India Gandhi National Open University) had launched a diploma in primary education in distance mode in 1995. The program was designed in a modular form consisting of three modules: (1) certificate in primary education; (2) certificate in primary curriculum; and (3) diploma in primary education to suit the varied needs of states. However, except which implemented only Module 1 for its untrained teachers, other states did not opt for it. Again, in 2003 after SSA was launched, a condensed version of the program in the form of certificate in primary education of six months in distance mode was designed by IGNOU to be used for clearing backlog of untrained teachers. However, except three states: Sikkim, Meghalaya and Assam, CPE (certificate in primary education) was not introduced in other states. Thus, teacher training through distance mode in Northeastern states was rather sporadic and inadequate.

NCF (National Curriculum Framework), 2005

NCF prepared by NCERT (National Council of Educational Research and Training) and accepted by the CABE (Central Advisory Board of Education), brought new areas of concerns in teacher education in the form of “systemic reform” initiatives. In particular, it emphasized the need for reorganizing teacher education syllabi in tune with constructivist pedagogy and major national concerns. As far as Northeastern states are concerned, such initiatives are conspicuous by their absence.

Right to Education Act, 2009

The historical Right to Education Act (2009) passed by Indian Parliament puts a new thrust to teacher

training at elementary level. The act clearly implies the need to reorient teachers to a child friendly pedagogy and taking responsibility for over all welfare of children. If the provisions of the act are to be fully implemented, a well integrated teacher training system needs to be in place. Like other parts of the country, Northeastern states have to evolve their own strategies for fulfilling training needs of teachers.

NCFTE (National Curriculum Framework for Teacher Education), 2009

NCTE which is the regulatory body for teacher education has issued NCFTE. Guidelines for syllabus framing for pre-service teacher education, transaction mode, continuous professional development of teachers, preparing teacher educators, etc., have been elaborated in the document. Each of the Northeastern states has initiated actions in this regard. However, paucity of qualified man-power and lack of infrastructure are inhibiting factors.

NERIE (North East Regional Institute of Education) (NCERT) Initiative

NERIE, NCERT, has recently initiated action to prepare training modules for training the untrained teachers of Northeastern states through face-to-face mode to be implemented by concerned states. The draft modules are being field tested to contextualize these modules. After this phase is over, these modules will be given to SCERTs of concerned states for implementation through their own machineries. Along with this, NERIE has also started training a set of Master Resource Persons for each state to implement these training modules.

I-CAT (Institute of Competency Advancement of Teachers), IGNOU

In view of the urgent need of strengthening teacher training facilities in Northeastern states, IGNOU has recently established a new institute called i-CAT to design and deliver need-based teacher training programs through ODL (open and distance learning) system. The institute has started functioning in Guwahati. The main focus of the institute would be to use ICT (information and communication technology) in teacher training in an extensive manner.

Weaknesses of Teacher Education in Northeastern States

Absence of actual pre-service teacher training is the greatest lacuna in teacher education in Northeastern states. In almost all of these states, teachers are appointed without any training and sometimes even without requisite qualification. Recently, some the states have come out with notification that minimum qualification for teachers at elementary stage will be 10 + 2 with two-year diploma in teaching. However, none of the states could implement this in true spirit. As a result, those teachers who are appointed without training are deputed for training after few years as in-service candidates. This practice is in a way is a kind of delayed pre-service training given to in-service teachers. Over the years, batches of this category of untrained teachers accumulate in the system creating a huge backlog of untrained teachers. There is a vicious cycle of demands of more teachers and appointment of untrained teachers.

The course content of existing teacher training is outdated, theoretical and isolated from classroom context. No revision has so far taken place in either content or methodology of teacher training as per guidelines of NCF 2005 and NCFTE 2009. Especially upcoming areas like constructivist pedagogy, CCE (continuous comprehensive evaluation), work education, inclusive education, peace education, etc., are yet to find place in teacher education curriculum.

There is virtually no provision of continuous professional development of teachers. The SCERTs and

DIETs are not in a position to discharge this function due to various systemic problems. Private school teachers who constitute a large chunk of teaching community are totally out of any teacher development initiative.

No attempt has yet been made to empower teachers with ICT skills. Hence, teachers are neither capable of using ICT in classroom instruction nor for their own professional enrichment.

Paucity of qualified teacher educators is another area of concern in these states. Most of the SCERTs and DIETs are staffed by under qualified faculty. As far as DIETs are concerned, most of the states posts TGTs (trained graduate teachers)/PGTs (post graduate teachers) as faculty without recruiting fresh qualified teaching faculty. This is one of the reasons for low quality of teacher training.

Search for Alternative Approaches

Training huge number of untrained teachers in northeast is indeed the biggest challenge for state governments. It is obvious that existing infrastructure is too inadequate to cover such large number of untrained teachers through conventional approaches. One has to think out of box to work out some solution. It is also true that there is no single solution to the problem. It has to be a combination of many approaches. But the basic course content of teacher training needs to be well structured taking into consideration NCTE guidelines and provisions of the Right to Education Act (2009). Once the course content is structured, delivery mode and transactional procedure may be worked out with greater flexibility. Looking at the model pre-service teacher education syllabus recently released by NCTE, it can be found that a substantial weight age is allotted to Internship. This particular provision can perhaps be integrated with the day to day teaching functions of in-service teachers.

Conclusions

Teacher training scenario in Northeastern states presents a complex and complicated picture. The backlog of untrained teachers is so high that clearing it in conventional approach appears to be very remote. There is no single solution for the problem. It has to be a combination of multifarious models and delivery modes. Also governmental agency cannot solve the issue singly. It has to be a concerted effort of all the players in the field including universities, voluntary organizations, NGOs (non government organizations), etc.. However, while involving all these agencies, it is necessary to be cautious about quality of training that is imparted which is to be authenticated by regulatory body like NCTE.

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