

Structural Changes in Teacher Education Programmes: Some Ground Realities

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1. The Context

National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE) has overhauled the teacher education programmes at the graduation and post-graduation levels in India in the year 2014 in order to meet the needs of the twenty first century. The long awaited move of extending the duration of these courses from one year to two years was the most significant. An extension of the duration of the programmes resulted in complete restructuring also. New courses like Language across Curriculum, courses for Enhancing Professional Competencies, Gender, School and Society and Creating an Inclusive School were welcome additions to the graduate level programmes (Bachelor of Education – B Ed). Also the period of school internship for B. Ed. students was extended to 14 weeks which previously ranged from 5 to 6 weeks. This modification resulted in an extended period of exposure for the student teachers to the actual school environment helping them acquire a comprehensive understanding of the functioning of schools.

National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE) further emphasized the importance of school internship for B Ed students by releasing a frame work and guidelines document for school internship in the year 2016. The total period of field engagement was decided to be 20 weeks, of which 4 weeks were to be in the first year and 16 weeks in the second year. Out of the 16 weeks allotted for school internship in the second year, two weeks are to be spent for community works and the remaining 14 weeks for teaching and related activities in the school. The guidelines recommend the student teachers to spend 80% of their school internship in government schools and the remaining 20% in private schools. They are also advised to get exposure at secondary and primary level classes or secondary and higher secondary classes. The guidelines also emphasise the need for student teachers to undergo internship in urban, rural as well as tribal schools. However, in any circumstances the student teachers are not to be sent to more than two schools. There are sixteen specifically mentioned tasks ranging from observing classroom teaching of regular teachers to community work/survey which have to be completed by the student teachers during the period of school internship. This comprehensive list of tasks is meant to provide the student teachers all the available opportunities to hone their skills as a teacher.

Few year has been completed with the implementation of structural changes in the teacher education programme in the country. Discussions and debates are taking place about the prone and cones of the restructured teacher education programmes across the country. Meanwhile the Government of India has been announced the four year integrated programme of teacher education from the year 2019 onwards. In this context an attempt has been made to analyses some of the field realities of implementation of the restructured teacher education programme.

2. Perception of Teacher Educators on their Competence

According to the two year curriculum for B.Ed. transaction of the courses is to be done using a variety of approaches, such as, case studies, group presentations, projects, discussions on reflective journals, observations of children, and interactions with the community in multiple socio cultural environments (NCTE, 2014). But in realities the introduction of the revised curriculum has not been resulted in any competence change of the teacher educators as in many universities no much competence building programme has not been organised for them. Teacher educators are of the opinion that they are continuing the same pedagogical practices as practiced before restructuring of the curriculum, but in a ‘relaxed manner’ due to the

extended time. No much change has been taken place in the classroom practices of teacher educators.

3. Disintegration of Curricular Areas

The B.Ed. programme comprise of three broad curricular areas – Perspectives in Education, Curriculum and Pedagogic Studies, and Engagement with the Field. Along with these there is as courses on Enhancing Professional Capacities (EPC), which has been appreciated by many teacher educators. It includes courses on (i) Reading and Reflecting on Texts (ii) Drama and Art in Education (iii) Critical Understanding of ICT and (iv) Understanding the Self.

The EPC courses are done by organising workshops by inviting experts itto the institutions in many cases. Hence, they remain isolated. As a result student teachers fails to integrate the competence gained from these areas into their professional practices. The EPC courses are to be integrated with and intertwined with the entire programme. Then only the students teachers can reap advantages of it.

For example, some student teachers who are performing excellently during the workshop on drama and arts in education are not able to utilise its possibilities in the real classroom situations. Transformational education involves reflection, introspection and action, with a deep relationship between the head, heart and hand (NCTE, 2014). Drama in Education is not merely doing theatrics or ‘acting’ in a superficial manner, but is for creating that ‘dramatic pressure’ or tension, where the student would arrive at a problem or an understanding in a new way (Heathcote & Bolton, 1994). Drama as ‘critical pedagogy’ can move beyond the classroom, to invoke the collective consciousness and involve the community to participate in educational and social change (NCTE, 2014). But drama and arts components are practiced by student teachers just as an entertainment or as mechanical. The pedagogical aspects are ‘drop out’ in reality. The components of fine arts aim to develop aesthetic sensibilities in student-teachers and learn the use of art in teaching learning. But it is observed that the soul of this aim has been lost in its practice.

It is observed that the essence of the different components of EPC courses has been lost in its implementations. In many cases the courses are done for its own sake only. Hence student teachers fail to relate it with their pedagogic practices.

4. Decreased Number of Student Teachers

The new restructured programme has limited the number of intake to 50 per batch. As a result in optional classes in many cases the number of students has been limited to three or four . Teacher educators opine that less number of student teachers adversely affected the classroom activities and knowledge construction. Discussions, debates and other group dynamic methods are less likely to be successful in such cases, they opines.

5. Quality and Competence of Student teacher

Teacher educators are of the opinion that the quality of student teachers who completed the teacher education programme under the restructured curriculum has been far better than those who done the programme under the old one year programme. But they attribute the same not to the restructured programme, but to the fact that only genuinely interested candidates join the programme because of the extended duration.

Earlier candidates who are waiting for their Post Graduate results join for the B.Ed programme just to fill the gap before deciding the next programme like M.Phil, or Ph.D. or joining a career. The restructured teacher education programme requires an investment of minimum two year and more in some universities due to the delay in conducting examination and declaration of results. Hence, the teacher educators opine that, only genuinely interested candidates join for the programme. This added to the quality of student teachers. So, If it is not the restructuring of the programme, but the quality of intakes (students) are the contributing factor, why not a true screening and testing of true aptitude for selection of students to the programme ?

6. Nature of Questions of University Examinations

The analysis of the question papers employed by different universities reveals that the nature of the questions in the university examinations has been remaining more or less same as before the restructuring of the curriculum. The practices of teachers in the evaluation of answer scripts also remain unchanged. Do restructuring of the pattern, quality and nature of questions are important to enhance the quality of teacher education programme?

7. The Interrelationship between the Different Competences of Student Teachers

For analysing the interrelationship between the different competences mastered by student teachers in different curricular areas, viz, Perspectives in Education, Curriculum and Pedagogic Studies, Engagement with the Field, EPC and the teaching competence scores

(Practice teaching scores) has been performed by randomly taking the results published by a University. The results reveals that there is no significant relationship between the competences of student teachers on these different curricular areas. Arekkuzhiyil (2014) observed that the relationship between the teaching competence and competence in different pedagogic areas of student teachers are very meagre and the competence in different curricular areas together explain only less than 20% to the teaching competence of student teachers. It indicates the incongruence between competence gained by student teachers in different curricular areas. The situation remains more or less same in the restructured teacher education programme also. It leads doubtful eye either to the validity and reliability of the evaluation practices or the real strength of the configuration of the restructured teacher education programme.

8. Summing Up

Is there any qualitative change in the competence and attitude of student teachers due to the restructured two year curriculum for teacher education is a larger concern which has to be analysed in a larger national context. But the observation of field realities shed light to some of the gray areas which require deeper further analysis. A more thought-out programmes of actions are required to reap the desired fruits of the restructuring of teacher education in India. These must be a more critical and significant concerns of all stake holders as it is decided to introduce four year integrated teacher education programme in the country.

9. References

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