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Research Paper Education

Quality Improvement in Elementary Teacher Education

Ramesh B. Sakhiya M.A. (Eng.) , M.Ed. (Uni. First), PH.D.

ABSTRACT

To achieve the goal of universalization of elementary education, the government of India has taken many steps. Such one major step has been taken, which is called SSA (Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan). And so the changes occurred in elementary teacher education in form of quality improvements.

The present paper discusses the points like (1) Selections of quality teachers and curriculum reforms (2) The recruitment qualifications (3) Pre- service teacher education (4) Role of teachers and teacher educators (5) Para- teacher and (6) DMS and in-service education.

KEYWORDS:

1.0 Introduction

Since independence the country has made impressive progress in fulfilling its constitutional commitment of providing free and compulsory education to all children up to the age of 14, i.e. 8 years of elementary education. In 1950-51, there were about 210 thousand primary and 14 thousand upper primary schools. By the year 1999-2000 there numbers have increased to 642 thousand and 198 thousand, respectively. Yet the goal of achieving universal elementary education seems to have receded away at a faster pace in spite of the best efforts of the State, and thus far has remained out of reach. Reasons for it are not hard to see. In addition to clearing the backlog of 60 million out of school children the State has to arrange access for education to 20 million children born each year. Therefore, instead of giving an historical account of the various initiatives that were taken up by the State during the past fifty years for achieving universal elementary education and of reasons why the target period of ten years that lapsed in 1960 had to be continually shifted from time to time, it would be prudent to focus on the recent initiative of the Government of India, called the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA): An Initiative for Universal Elementary Education. The broad targets of the SSA are that all eligible children will be enrolled in school by 2003; that they will complete five years of schooling by 2007 and of eight years by the 2010. There are many dimensions of the SSA scheme. Some of the dimensions that have bearing on the mandate given to the NCTE in its Act are the analysis of the curriculum of pre-service courses vis-à-vis task profiles for teaching at the elementary stage of schooling; recruitment qualifications of teachers for the primary stage, upper primary stage and for the integrated elementary stage; innovations in pre-service teacher education for this stage and their effectiveness; implications of appointment of Para-teachers on the status of teachers.

2.0Selection of quality teachers and Curriculum reforms

It should not be found surprising that because of the heterogeneity of conditions of school education in the different States there is neither uniformity in the structure of elementary school stage nor in the curriculum of the pre-service teacher education for this stage. In some of the states the upper primary stage is stapled with the secondary stage and graduate teachers with B.Ed. degree are appointed for teaching and in some of the states it forms a part of the middle-school and teachers with class 12 and two-year diploma are appointed for teaching. The University of Delhi has introduced a 4-year pre-service course, called the B.El. Ed., for teaching at the elementary stage and the Indira Gandhi Open University offers a 2-year diploma course for untrained teachers in service. In the wake of the experience of the DPEP scheme many of the states have introduced curriculum reforms in pre-service teacher education for achieving quality in elementary education. Also, there is a palpable concern about the irrelevance of the curriculum of the basic teacher training diploma course that is being followed in the country particularly when the context of schooling for living effectively in the 21st century has radically changed. The UNESCO document Learning the Treasure Within has identified the four pillars of education, learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together and learning to be. As the world has entered in the information age and is inundated by an unprecedented information explosion, it is being realised that the basic skill to be learnt now is that of learning how to learn, for each person has to develop an attitude of lifelong learning. Also, now the parents are asking for a greater say on the education to be given to their children.

3.0The recruitment qualifications

For teaching up to the primary stage it is generally accepted that subject teachers are not required and each teacher should be able to teach all the school subjects. Therefore, the recruitment qualification of a pass in class 12 and a two-year pre-service diploma course laid down by the NCTE has received endorsement from most of the states. Some of the states that traditionally have been recruiting teachers with a pass in class 10 and a certificate course of one year duration have been given time for switching over to the NCTE qualifications. For teaching at the upper primary stage subject experts are appointed. For teaching mathematics, or science, or social studies, or English or a regional language it would be essential that the concerned teacher should have studied that subject at least at the level of classes 11 and 12. Therefore, for teaching at the upper primary stages many of the school systems such as the Kendriya Vidyalaya Sangathan, the Navodaya Vidyalaya Samiti appoint graduate teachers having the B.Ed. degree. In this context it has gained urgency to answer whether the curriculum of the two-year basic teacher education course provides professional competence for teaching the entire span of elementary stage i.e. from class 1 to class 8 or is valid for teaching the primary stage i.e. from class 1 to class 5 only. An effort has been made in compiling relevant information from as many states as possible on their recruitment rules and in analysing the curriculum of their basic teacher training courses.

4.0Pre-Service teacher education

There are other curriculum related issues such as making school internship an essential component of the pre-service course, duration of the course and its theoretical and praxis components. The challenge is to evolve a framework for pre-service teacher education in the context of the new role of teacher who is expected to act as change agent for inculcating in children the values for living harmoniously in a pluralistic secular society and for developing in them the ability of learning how to learn and for making education an instrument not only for one's personal good but also for the general societal good. Experiences of four State Governments on pre-service teacher education, namely Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, West Bengal and Uttar Pradesh will be presented by their Secretaries and their Directors of the SCERT. Also, innovations in pre-service elementary teacher education tried out by three universities, namely, Delhi, Jamia Millia Islamia and IGNOU. The University of Delhi has developed a 4-year B.El.Ed. Course specially designed for preparing elementary school teachers. This course is being offered by some of its colleges as an integrated programme taught jointly by their content faculty and faculty drawn from disciplines cognate to education. The Institute of Advanced Study in Education (IASE) of the Jamia Millia Islamia has developed a two-year diploma course on pre-service teacher education for preparing elementary school teachers. The IGNOU has developed a two-year distance education diploma course for untrained elementary school teachers in service. Experts with backgrounds of teaching and research in the formal teacher education system, and those who have worked at the grassroots level with elementary school teachers, those who have been policy makers and those who are or those who were educational administrators would be sharing their experiences and vision for pre-service teacher education.

5.0Role of teachers and teachers educators

The development of a curriculum framework for pre-service course required for preparing teachers who by playing the role of facilitator

of learning can transact the new school curriculum. But for effective implementation of programmes of teacher education it will be crucial that teacher educators possess professional attributes such as competence and commitment for teaching. Therefore, the first task of the State Governments would have to be to change their policy of posting secondary school teachers, who generally neither have experience of teaching at the elementary level nor possess professional expertise for teacher education, as teachers in the District Institutes of Education and Training (DIETs) or as faculty in the State Council of Educational Research and Training (SCERT). A separate cadre of teacher educators may have to be created by following the qualifications laid down in the NCTE regulations. Recent study on the DIET scheme carried out by the National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration (NIEPA) has revealed that if this scheme has not achieved all that was expected of it the responsibility can be squarely laid on the placement of persons unsuitable for carrying out the tasks to be performed at these institutions. If in a district its DIET is an unrecognised institution it cannot run pre-service programme and the problem of providing trained teachers in the schools in that district get further compounded for that DIET cannot also function as a Resource Centre for the distance education programmes. The SCERT of a State is the nodal centre for coordinating programmes of teacher education. If care is not exercised in appointing faculty in a SCERT by matching qualifications and experience with the task profiles required for pre and in-service teacher education, the benefit of a crucial instrument for monitoring quality of teacher education in that State may not be available. It is for these reasons in the 10th Five Year Plan in the central scheme for teacher education creation of a separate cadre of teacher educators for appointment in DIETs and the SCERT has been made a pre-requisite for receiving central assistance. Another important category of institutions that were expected to contribute to improvement of the quality of elementary teacher education through their pre and in-service courses and research programmes were the Institutes of Advanced Studies in Education (IASE). The IASE were to run M.Ed. degree course with a specialization in elementary teacher education and also conduct in-service courses for DIET and SCERT faculty. Therefore, for achieving the objectives of the SSA it would be necessary that a network of DIETs, SCERT and IASE be put into place so that these institutions may provide support to each other.

6.0Para-teachers

Induction of Para-teachers for providing opportunity for schooling in remote habitations seems to have spread its tentacles even in schools located in the urban areas. With the appointment of teachers on payment of fixed remuneration the status of teaching as a profession has received a hard blow. The financial constraint of the State and its will to provide access to schooling to all children may have been the compulsion for appointment of Para-teachers. If the quality of education that children studying from Para-teachers has to be ensured the issues such as the nature of induction training and subsequent trainings for helping them discharge their teaching tasks with competence would have to be answered through research studies.

7.0DMS and in-service education

In summing up it would be in order to mention that recently the NCTE has carried out pioneering experiment on in-service education of teachers by using the Direct Media Service (DMS) of the WorldSpace. The WorldSpace is a wireless delivery system of multimedia information from a satellite with a footprint of 14 million square kilometres. Lessons in multimedia were delivered to teachers in their computers connected with a PC-adapter to a 10 cm antenna for receiving data at the speed of 128 kbps. The success of the experiments that were carried out in end of November 2001 in use of advanced information and communication technologies for in-service education have opened the possibility of making available to teachers in schools throughout the country lessons given by experts appropriate for different levels of education and that too in multimedia.



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