

PERSPECTIVE OF TEACHER EDUCATION IN INDIA

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Abstract

Teacher Education of India is almost in shambles. Mushrooming growth in Teacher Education Institutions (TEIs) was experienced during last fifteen years. Growth of TEIs also remained regionally unbalanced and did not equally cater to all levels of education. Nearly 90 percent of these institutions lie in private self financed sector. These private players are generally guided by commercial and profit making motive in almost every field of their participation. Sudeep Bannerjee Committee was appointed in 2007 to look into bulk recognition of self financed private TEIs in a very short span of time and reports of rampant malpractices followed in these institutions in admissions, teaching and examinations, and to suggest necessary action. The Bannerjee Committee had observed that the functioning of NCTE was not commensurate with the objectives of planned and coordinated development of teacher education and recommended that NCTE should be abolished. The Supreme Court appointed Justice J S Verma Commission on improving teacher education system in the country which submitted its report in August 2012. The commission underlined sad state of affairs of preparing teachers in the country after making a study of large number of TEIs and suggested various measures for strengthening power and functions of NCTE, capacity building of TEIs, changes in curricula of various teacher education programs and reality based linkage between TEIs and schools etc. In the present paper the author has tried to discuss changing state of affairs of teacher education in the country and indentify inherent problems there in. The author has also tried to look into the need of indigenous curricula and increased public investment in education for better inclusivity.

Keywords

Teacher Education Institutions (TEIs), National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE)

Teacher education system in the country has been a matter of serious concern for some decades now. National Commission on Teachers (1985) had invited the attention to the problem of unsatisfactory teacher preparation and the lackadaisical attitude shown by the country towards it. As a part of response to this concern, National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE) was set up in 1993 which was a non-statutory Council. Provision of teacher education for many years even after independence was limited due to the fact that the 'professional education of teachers' was a comparatively neglected area despite the emphasis laid on its significance by the University Education Commission (1949) and Secondary Education Commission (1953). This resulted in appointment of more than forty percent teachers without training including those who were unqualified, except in Madras, Kerala and Punjab where proportion of qualified and trained teachers even in early sixties was above eighty percent. However, it is interesting to note that the practice of appointing untrained and unqualified teachers in schools was even then followed not entirely due to non-availability of trained and qualified teachers but, more importantly, because of financial considerations as untrained and unqualified teachers used to cost less. The later reason continued to drive many state governments until recently to appoint under-paid para teachers. The practice of payment of differential remuneration to teachers still continues in many places due to the oversight in the Right to Education (RTE) Act of an indicative benchmark for teachers' salary. Not only this, teachers are often loaded with non-teaching/non-academic assignments. Practically there is hardly any concern for quality education.

After the implementation of the National Policy on Education (1986) number of teachers doubled between 1986 and 2007, the demand for school teachers got heavily enhanced. According to MHRD data during 1980-92, 1992-2002 and 2002-2002-8, 96 lakh, 10.7 lakh and 12.4 lakh teachers, respectively were appointed in schools though all of them were not necessarily trained. The demand of school teachers grew manifold after implementation of RTE. Neglecting the quality concern of school education a large number of teachers/para-teachers were appointed to meet the requirement of children's fundamental right and their

subsequent increase in enrollment at secondary and senior secondary level. The process of such appointment is still continuing. As result of policy change in pursuance of globalization, the government generally encouraged privatization and liberalization in every sector of economy including education from early nineties. Consequently, a large number of private players, not necessarily philanthropists, entered into the field of teacher education, as they did in engineering and other areas of education also, and soon they substantially outnumbered the state run Teacher Education Institutions (TEIs). As of today, around ninety percent of the teacher training capacity in the country lies in private self financed sector. But the issue here relates with the object of provision of free and compulsory quality education by the state of which teacher education and development is an integral part and hence, for the sake of providing free quality education to all children, it must be the welfare state's duty to arrange for quality teacher education at its own initiative and investment, instead of leaving it so much to private players who are generally guided by commercial and profit making motive in almost every field of their participation. Nowhere in the world teacher education has been given in private hands on such a massive scale as it has been done here. Generally, in other places it is arranged and maintained by the state as a part of its responsibility towards school education.

At the start of the NCTE in 1995 there were less than 800 TEIs in the country. These were mostly in government and aided sectors. However, they were unevenly distributed across states and levels. Their number rose to around 1900 by the year 2000 and 2500 by 2003. But during 2004-08, a whopping number of 8650 TEIs mushroomed with the concurrence of NCTE, out of which 2439 TEIs were recognized in 2007-08 alone and thus their number by 2008 jumped to more than eleven thousand TEIs. Some experts hold a section of teacher educators themselves partly responsible for this uncontrolled expansion who, 'for the sake of fringe benefits bestowed on them by private players, facilitated their recognition. The claim even though unsubstantiated, may not be disputed. Progress in TEIs again remained regionally unbalanced and did not equally cater to all levels of education. The expansion mostly concentrated in states like AP, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, MP, Maharashtra, Haryana, Punjab, HP and UP, and on ETE and B.Ed. courses. Due to galloping growth of TEIs during 2004-08, the institutions preparing teacher educators could not keep pace with the increased demand of faculty as their capacity did not expand commensurately because the government did not pay any attention on their education and the

private sector perhaps did not find it a viable area of investment. In the International Seminar on Elementary Teacher Education, it was rightly observed that though preparation of teachers depends largely on the quality and preparation of teacher educators, this is one of the least talked about issues in the discourse on teacher preparation. Perhaps, buckling under the pressure of the strong private TEI lobby, NCTE found out a novel solution to the problem of shortage of teacher educators, and in 2007 it downgraded the faculty qualification for TEIs from M.Ed. to B.Ed. which led to a large scale recruitment of faculty possessing the lowered qualification, some even removed their faculty with M.Ed. degrees and replaced them with B.Ed. pass outs as this saved them some more bucks in their salary. However, scaling down of faculty qualification invited an all round criticism from educationists and the government, as this was going to cause further damage to the quality of teacher preparation at the hands of the fly-by-night TEIs mushroomed recently. Baffled by the bulk recognition of self financed TEIs granted during the last few years and by the reports of rampant malpractices followed in these institutions in admissions, teaching and examinations, a Review Committee was constituted by the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) in 2007 under the Chairmanship of Sudeep Banerjee, former Secretary, MHRD, to conduct an in depth study of the function of the NCTE and its Regional Committees in the wake of numerous complaints about the NCTE. In its report the Committee has stated that (1) the NCTE paid scant attention to the quality of training and curriculum while fostering privatization in teacher education, (2) NCTE had failed in its endeavor, and (3) not only had the NCTE been derelict in its duties, the apex teacher education body had promoted commercialization and unplanned proliferation of teacher education institutes. (Seturaman, 2009)

The committee came to the conclusion that the NCTE had moved away from its mandate of ensuring quality teacher education and was preoccupied with sanctioning institutions. It paid scant attention to quality of training and curriculum while fostering privatization in teacher education. It also presided over lopsided development as a result of which some states were overcrowded with TEIs while they were few and far between in others. The government also reported in the Parliament in 2008 that the Banerjee Committee had observed that the functioning of NCTE was not commensurate with the objectives of planned and coordinated development of teacher education and recommended that NCTE Act should be repealed.

In 2012 Justice Verma Committee recommended that the Government should increase its investment for establishing teacher education institutions and increase the institutional capacity of teacher preparation, especially in the deficit States . In order to implement the recommendation of Justice Verma Committee Report NCTE has suggested changes in duration and curricular structure of popular teacher education programs like B.Ed. and M.Ed. It has also suggested increase in number of teachers in TEIs. The suggested change in the nature of TEI as composite institution has been delimited by NCTE as it apprehended that most of existing TEIs may not be able to convert them into composite institutions having various courses usually run by arts and or science colleges. As per recommendation of Justice Verma Committee, NCTE suggested new curricular framework in order to provide sound theoretical backup to students of teacher education programs. But the framework emerged from a centralized panel of experts without holding a decentralized discussion among different levels of teacher professionals, experts and activists associated with challenges of teacher education in the country. No attention was paid on developing required linkage among Teacher Education Institutions, schools, universities, NCTE. The qualification of teachers to be appointed in a teacher education institution as determined by NCTE norms 2014 appears to be not in consonance of the vision of teachers having best theoretical training in perspective (foundation) and pedagogical areas. Qualifications were determined under pressure from conventional teacher educators who always escaped the growing challenges thrown by experts from social and behavioral sciences on whose knowledge edifice rests teacher education. In global perspective where knowledge society is the cherished goal, the proposed curricular framework and selection criteria for teachers in Teacher Education Institutions appear to be hardly in tune with the recommendations of Justice Verma Committee. The NCTE has also diluted the Committee's concept of composite institution, perhaps under the pressure of private sector which does want to teach various non profitable courses in arts and science disciplines.

Although recommendations of the Committee are in various stages of implementation, another panel was set up in November 2015 to complement the Verma commission. The five-member committee headed by Akhtar Siddiqui, former chairperson of NCTE is tasked with reviewing teacher education and advising the government on improving quality in the training. It has been reported by many corners that the private players who largely control the teacher education of the country are not comfortable with the extended time frame of

B.Ed. and M.Ed. programs of teacher education and pressurizing the committee to make recommendation for reverting these courses back to one year duration. In spite of various shortcomings in the implementation of Justice Verma Committee report, extended time- frame of teacher education programs is a welcome step.

Our universities and institutions could not develop curricula for various disciplines on the basis of our social context, needs and requirements. In most of the cases we borrowed or adopted western curricula in order to achieve quality education. It is ironical that we have developed a colonial mindset that forces us to look into our education system in isolation, keeping it away from indigenous social, cultural and economic context. This has arisen from implicit faith in the universality of efficacy of western education is a legacy of colonialism. The appropriations of western or foreign models have destroyed the innovative spirit of higher education including teacher education completely. Culture of borrowing or adopting knowledge and its sources prevailed in our education system at all levels in general and higher education in particular. Those few involved in alternative and innovative practices hardly get support from the establishment. The opening of foreign educational institutions will never be able to insure quality enhancement if importance of our social context is negated. In fact education has hardly any meaning apart from social and cultural context.

Creativity in higher education thrives through research which involves diversification, localization and internalization of intellectual enquiry. While research is enriched through assimilation of knowledge from diverse sources, it degenerates through transplantation or imitation of external models. One of the possible reasons for the backwardness of modern Indian education is its failure to integrate the insights of western systems with indigenous knowledge systems. The attempt to improve the quality of Indian education by importing foreign educational packages would be a remedy worse than the disease.

Increasing the number of institutions or seats alone would also not ensure greater access. For B.Ed. and Engineering courses in many states, there are plenty of vacant seats under the self-financing streams. What thus we need is equitable access, which foreign educational providers or private institutions will not provide, more so as there is no cap on the fees that can be levied by these institutions. Provision for reservation of seats is either not there or not implemented, which would tend to strengthen the existing iniquities in Indian higher education. The foreign providers would also wean away a large chunk of

bright students from Indian institutions. The exodus of such students could only lead to academic impoverishment and deterioration of Indian institutions.

But expansion and modernization of Indian higher education requires huge public investment. The requirement of inclusiveness further demands massive public investment. With government expenditure on education as a whole pegged at 3.5 per cent and on higher education alone at 0.4 per cent of the GDP, public expenditure on education by western standards is abysmally low in India. Any attempt at improvement in access and quality cannot be achieved just by entry of foreign universities and opening of private state universities but it can be achieved by increasing public expenditure on higher education. Public expenditure on education should be increased to at least 6 per cent of the GDP, of which 25 per cent should be set apart for higher education. There are no quick-fix alternatives to adequate public investment in education.

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