Redefining Teacher Education in India

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Abstract

Professional development of a teacher is a continuous process. Quantitative and qualitative debate may hinder our approach to fill the deep crevices between theory and practice regarding teacher development. Reflective teaching practice and improvement of environment for CPD predetermines for unanimity in variations. Upgrading national policy on education teachers' training institutions and creating centre of excellence are among few expected ways to meet the challenges. Integration of information and communication technology in education and stimulation of quality assurance system may support CPD. Furthermore, uniform policy on recruitment, cadre of teachers, and financial benefits may induce the overall teachers' professional development across the time and space.

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Introduction

The continuing professional development of teachers through planned interventions has not been fully appreciated till the beginning of the current century. However, it has been an area of concern and reflection for many intellectuals and to keep them in pensive mood. The skills, knowledge and experience that teachers gain both formally and informally as they undergo preparation and subsequently join the world of work, seem to be inadequate to meet the challenges in present teaching-learning scenario. Now, it is appreciated that the teacher development is a continuous process in harmony with evolution of school education system. Therefore, the challenges for CPD for teachers will continue to emerge as we move in time.

It may be difficult to predict the exact nature of these future changes and also a permanent solution to address different dimensions and diverse features of such changes and other related issues. It could be more appropriate to empower the teachers and teacher-educators to face the challenges as and when they emerge and develop their capabilities and confidence in harnessing such challenges to their advantages. In this context, some of the generic and congenial issues associated with the systems for continuing professional development of the teachers and teacher educators are described below.

Balancing Theory and Practice

Education in itself is a first order activity, concerned with theories and practice of teaching and developing the young. Education has its own immediate higher order activities, educational theorising, the making of theories about education and theories of education (Moore, 2010). In actual situation, the school and classroom processes and activities seem to

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be far away from the theories taught in the teacher education institutions. The knowledge in present scenario, is

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transformed from being static and possessed singly by the educator to something that is far more collaborative, emerging, fluid and dynamic, transforming both the roles of student and educator (Parker, 2015). Again, the inputs provided through different teacher education programmes (both PSTE and INSET) do not match the requirements in terms of the quantum and rates of changes occurring in the school/classroom processes. However, for the sound qualitative growth of the school practices and the teacher education programmes, both need to functionally complement each other. There is need for the availability of flexible systemic provision to incorporate changes in the curricular inputs of the teacher education programmes that are commensurate with the changes occurring in the school and classroom practices. This process is equally applicable for the courses for the preparation and also professional development of teacher educators. Recognising and supporting local flexibility and tailoring.

A protagonist

Asha is teaching in a Government school on contractual basis, after completing her B.Ed. programme. She admitted regarding a wide gap between the theory and the practice that she learnt as part of training. She shared that school administration cares only about finishing syllabus without giving any attention to true learning enhancement. She narrated that she learnt different strategies to develop the interest of the student in the class but of no use as no freedom of planning units and curriculum is imparted to her. In this way, actual classroom situation every thing gets changed due to exigencies of the circumstances and compulsions.

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Quantity and Quality Dilemma

In the recent time, the teacher education institutions have been randomly proliferating and mushrooming in almost all parts of the country receiving impetus from sudden increase in demand for qualified and trained teachers as a part UEE and EFA programmes. Many of these institutions adopt compromising attitude appertain to quality teacher education which worries everyone concerned from a policy maker to the employer. The National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE) has set mandatory norms and standards for these institutions in order to keep the quality of teacher education at satisfactory level. However, the continuing efforts of the NCTE appear to be inadequate to counter present issues and problems in the area of teachers' preparation. Justice Verma Commission (2013) has recommended steps to discourage the proliferation of, unwanted institutions and to enhance quality of teacher education programmes in the country, however, the effect is yet to be visible. Recent initiative of doubling the course duration of B.Ed. and M.Ed. programmes in the country by NCTE is a welcome effort for supply of quality teachers. It also suggests *prima facie* the total supply of teacher is going to be halved until infrastructural development takes place. It is high time the Governments, both at the Centre and the States, come out with long term and sustainable policies and plans for continuous supply of adequate number of teachers while ensuring the quality of the teacher education programmes.

Under-preparation

Savita is doing her B.Ed. from one of the College in Ghaziabad of the CCSUniversity. She shared that she hardly went regularly to the college. Whenever there was any practical, final submission of assignments and invigilation only then she goes to the college. She used to get message, like other students, from teachers to come to the college on such occasions for specific reasons. She also shared that she did not expect that this is the way the B.Ed. programme shall run in the college, otherwise she could have completed it earlier even while preparing for some of the competitive examinations for government jobs. She told that it is really a great task to choose the proper college to pursue the B.Ed. course as there are large number of colleges

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Teacher Educators: quest for unanimity in variations

Ever since its establishment in 1993 as a statutory body for teacher education in the country, the NCTE is committed for the quality education for teacher. Several views have been put forward regarding the basic qualification of teacher educators. While Master degree in Education is recognized as the required minimum qualification for teacher educators, other qualifications like Bachelor degree in Education with Master degree in any school teaching subject is also proposed for becoming teacher educators. Those with M.A. in Education from different universities have also requisite grounding on the foundation subjects of Education. However, the orientation and exposure while joining the profession of teaching or as teacher educator are different.

The M.Ed. courses offered by the different universities and institutes have also wide variations in terms of contents and rigor of training indicating ambiguities in addressing issues of quality in the preparation of teacher educators. The variation in curriculum content, course structure and philosophy/ideology in selecting specific courses by different institutions also affect the outcome. The NCTE is needed to address and resolve the issue and come out with clear recommendations regarding the requirements of basic qualification to become teacher educators. In no case, merely a B.Ed. or equivalent professional degrees should be taken as the minimum qualification to become a teacher educator.

The scarcity of teacher educators in adequate number for the existing and upcoming institutions of teacher education is now being experienced in nearly all the states. The situation is becoming more acute as there is demand for qualified teacher educators for several upcoming programmes for CPD besides their shortage in the PSTE programmes.

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Reflective Teaching Practice

Teaching takes place in the social context having its own specific facilitating features and the constraints. In a particular social setting, to improve the teaching learning process it is necessary for the teacher to reflect on that process at every stage. The ultimate aim of CPD is to produce reflective practitioners, who can identify, evaluate and ruminate over the whole process of teaching-learning process. Schon (1993) considered that reflective teaching practice is a continuous process and involves learner thoughtfully considering his own experiences in applying knowledge to practice while being taught by professionals. It enables the teachers to develop their own personality and teaching learning process.

Navaneedhan (2011) stated that reflective teaching means looking at what you do in the classroom, thinking about why you do it, and thinking about if it works - a process of self-observation and self-evaluation. By collecting information about what goes on in our classroom, and by analyzing and evaluating this information, we identify and explore our own practices and underlying beliefs. This may then lead to changes and improvements in our teaching. Therefore on one side, it is necessary that reflective teaching practice should be the integral part of both the in-service and pre-service trainings and on the other to promote the workshops, seminar and conferences where the exchange of ideas and experiences can take place.

Reflective Teaching

Kamla is a lecturer in a DIET in Jharkhand. She shared that she found that now a days, people have started view teaching as a profession for earning money. There is an identity crisis on the part of the teacher as a professional, which should be addressed through different mediums.

She also shared her experience of attending a training programme, where she got the chance to retrospect herself. She admitted that there is necessity of such programmes where the teachers get the chance to differentiate between the conventional or routinized teacher and the reflective teacher.

She expressed that it is the need of the hour that teachers should realize and accept the

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Improvement of Environment for Continuous Professional Development

In conformity with the requirements of meeting challenges in the field of education, the teacher education system, institutions and schools must create and maintain a conducive environment to ensure continuous professional development of teachers. All the stake holders associated with school education e.g. policy planners; administrators, community leaders and parents need to have positive disposition and orientation to build a supportive climate for the purpose. The essential support could exhibit in features like esprit de corps or synergy in team, opportunities for teachers' learning, cultivation of personal qualities amongst teachers and maximum support in the academic subject(s) as well as other fields concerning their professional growth through deliberate and concerted efforts. All available channels like distance learning, on the job training and institutionalized courses/curriculum is required to be optimally utilized in phased and programmed manner. The policy will ensure availability of required number of trained teachers at all stages of education to take care of teaching of academic subjects, nurturing talent as well as sharing the responsibility of school management as a team player. The policy should be such that it creates a balance in job performance and personal professional growth. The resources like adequate spare time for self improvement, steady progression in individual qualifications, and engagement in research work and involvement in social networking in teams concerned with academic, administration and research activities need to be ensured to motivate and support teachers' professional development.

The Government and policy makers must guarantee maximum opportunities, and resources to encourage teachers to widen their horizon of understanding and teaching.

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Advanced countries like Germany and Japan and developing countries like China and Singapore ensure that approximately two hours out of daily working time is utilized for professional development. Japan provides a minimum 20 hours per week for higher studies, research projects and career building to the teachers. Various activities like visiting reputed professional bodies / institutions, professional universities as well as attending conferences, seminars and the related courses organized and conducted by or on behalf of government. Such programmes impart high degree of intellectual stimulation and honesty and create professional commitment and loyalty among teachers. There is a need for our country to adopt all available modes and open education resources, OER to “Train the Trainers” and spare the teachers for their career enhancement to meet the future challenges in education system. The revamping of existing policies concerning education, educational institutions and the professional development of teaching community is required to be assigned higher priority.

Suggestions to meet Future Challenges

There are enormous emerging challenges that are to be faced by us as a cohesive society and nation in the near future. The education is one of the important resources for our preparedness for future and win over all the challenges and accrue opportunities for securing future of our choice. The teachers have key role for enabling education to contribute to our desired preparedness for future. In this context, our efforts must gear up to create conducive environment to meet the demand of professionally competent teachers in terms of numbers and expected level of performance for quality education to our pupil. The important measures for achieving the objective could include the measures detailed below:

Upgrading National Policy on Education

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The educational policy and the available resources for its implementation are required to be reviewed periodically. When the policy is made, there is high motivation, however, for the want of resources the implementation varies in respect of different provisions in the policy. The enthusiasm decreases with time and again the routine activities overtake the agenda of reform. We have witnessed that policies are subjected to review and incorporation of new provisions or to revise emphasis of existing provisions after a few decades whereas the world has been changing with a fast pace.

There is no empowered group in the country to advice changes after a definite frequency which will receive attention of Parliament irrespective the political leadership in the country. The structural changes could be desired so that the suggestions for improvements emerging from various stake holders at different times are incorporated in the next structural review and if required for incorporation in the change in Policy. The Education Policy formulation must take place a dynamic and interactive situation with the involvement of all the stake holders. Specific agency could be entrusted the task to suggest improvements in the policy having definite frequency based on the experience across nations and results of research that is conducted by educationists, scientists, social scientists and related agencies.

In conformity with trends and reforms in education in secondary and senior secondary schools the changes must be effected in the National Policy of teacher development. The continual improvement need to be part of the education policy as well as policy for teachers' preparation and development. The teachers must receive enough support in their professional development and must be accountable for performance. The incentivising professional standing and performance will be help motivates the teachers to change educational environment in the country.

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There is a dire need to upgrade existing Regional Institutions imparting the degrees like B.Ed., M.Ed. and higher degrees like M. Phil and Ph D in Education to State Level Universities. These institutions must have autonomy for innovation in education and training and they should not function within traditional system of Universities which have high inertia for innovation and change. The teaching in these institutions must mix with research like in IITs so as to have continual growth of the faculty there through their involvement in research and problem solving activities in the educational fields. The professional institutions must be established at the levels of regions and states based on requirement and these institutions should be degree awarding. These institutions will support the teachers at all levels through different programmes, seminars, courses and learning material. This will not only refresh the knowledge and awareness of teachers but also assist to bridge the gap of isolation. Establishing the new universities and modern means of teacher education, with the view to enlarged scope, improved quality and fresh research for continued input in education policy will equip the teachers to meet the current and future requirements in the field of education. Various departments of the said institutions would create reserves of knowledge and reference material to meet demands of the emerging educational environment. The availability of quality courses with orientation for emerging future challenges and refresher training programmes would synergies the present quality of institutions and standard of educational processes and techniques of teaching in the States.

While at state and regional levels, the upgrade teachers training institutions with university status shall be able to meet the challenges in their respective regions and priority areas, the national level institutions are required to be strengthened to the level of Centre of Excellence with wider global vision in terms of their competitiveness and providing leadership to institutions in the country in respect of all the concerns in the area of teachers' preparation and professional development. These centres of excellence must be characterised

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by intense activities related to teaching, research, creating managers and administrators for academic/educational fields and policy research keeping in view current and emerging challenges before the society and the nation. These institutions shall also have resources and resource persons for the training of trainers/faculty for teacher education institutions in the country.

Integration of Information and Communication Technology in Education

In modern education, Information Technology, IT has emerged as a powerful tool for communication and information sharing, which is a major activity in the field of education irrespective of its scope and contents. The teachers are required to understand assimilate the knowledge and skills of IT with an intention of application to their own field of activity and competence. The teachers must have the resources of IT for utilization to enhance their effectiveness, productivity and overall impact. In order to meet the increasing demand of students, there is a requirement of improving the potential of all teachers to access and scrutinize the material available world wide web and to selectively and gainfully utilize it. The communication in the professional networks and the official working could greatly ease the working with many significant improvements. The challenges created by development in the information technologies obligate teachers to be oriented and sensitized towards the new tools and techniques for self improvement and performance in professional setting.

Stimulation of Quality Assurance System

There is need for integrating Quality Management Systems in education as well as in institutions concerned with preparation and professional development of teachers. The vision, objectives, commitment of leadership in these institutions and resources including physical

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facilities, soft skills and budgetary support etc should be clearly identified for improved functioning.

Similarly, the quality and frequency of testing during and conclusion of teaching need to be defined so that the students coming out of these institutions have minimally desired level of competence for the world of their next endeavour.

The wider exposure teachers and policy planners is required for the appreciation of these concepts in their actual working. The visits of teachers and associated administrators to exemplary institutions in the country and abroad will provide them positive disposition and orientation for change and ensuring assurance of quality through their efforts.

Uniform Policy on Recruitment and Cadre of Teachers

In order to oversee the recruitment ensuring minimum qualification for entrants at different levels ensuring their overall competence and intelligence for the profession. The DTE in the NCERT may be entrusted to evolve suitable frame work for teachers' recruitment as a cadre in HRD Ministry with proper career progression and mid-career preparation for required professional development as part of requirement to meet the challenges of their responsibilities. The States could follow the Centre with adequate adjustments to take care of local specific situations and environment.

The National Council for Teacher Education in collaboration with other institutions at National and State Levels be entrusted to prepare a concept paper for organizing the cadre of teachers specifying various parameters for recruitment, responsibilities, professional development and the career progression at different levels. The cadres at elementary, secondary and senior secondary levels would need to be different; however, some kind of minimum level of uniformity will need to be ensured for schools under Government and private management. The performance evaluation and promotions with adequate professional

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development will bring positive change and competitiveness in the working of the private and Government systems.

Policy for Promotion and Financial Benefits

The incentives for upward movement of teachers with calibre, performance and contribution should be debated and standardised with proper documentation at State and National levels and given adequate publicity for of incentives for exemplary performance. The promotions and other financial incentives need to be there for performers e.g. the teachers do not get any incentive if their students performs better in academic examinations or state and national level co-curricular activities. In this situation, the environment is discouraging for students and less motivating for the teachers and concerned officials. In the absence of promotional support and incentives many activities are left to personal choice and interest of teachers. This situation must change; the system needs to be energized.

a) Social & Moral Code for National Integration

The social and moral codes in the profession of teaching support the efforts towards promoting the mutual respect of different cultures and languages and create environment for social cohesion and thus promote National Integration. The creation of cadre at central and state levels will be conducive to impart many desirable attributes in teachers as part of their training before joining the world of work. In the continuing current situation, the teachers of all the States should be made to periodically undergo national integration camps and national integration Awareness Programmes organized by different states. Such meetings would encourage social and cultural enrichment and promotion of human rights at national level.

b) Adopting Open Resources for Teacher Education

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Maximum numbers of teachers should be enrolled and utilize the facilities provided by the system. It will help to reach far sighted learning resources for all subjects, grades, languages etc. in various forms. Networking of institutions in the system will contribute to synergizing of existing resources, improvement of quality of education and overall professional enrichment.

c) Integration of TE Institutions with schools

Coordination between TE institutions and schools for executions of policies, goals and programmes in the schedule is inescapable. Adoptions of school a model in a particular region by larger institutions and universities could be one of the steps in desired field. Enforcing close relationship between teachers education programme and school curriculum at national and state level will improve quality of education in the country. New curricula are introduced in-service training forthwith and modalities worked one simultaneously. Thereafter infrastructures and authorization of manpower and resources be put in places as per the progress. The research and experiments of future innovative methods from teaching to examinations and from learning to placements for jobs will be seen as automated development of education policy of government.

d) Growth of Teacher Education

National and State level policies and plans be made and implemented for continuous growth of teacher educators. Even at international level, teacher educators should be integrated and dovetailed into Comprehensive Education Policy to revamp the existing system, improve awareness and knowledge through peer networks, self-review and improving varied teaching and learning processes. The plan so formulated be executed implicitly and upgraded to meet the envisaged challenges of teacher education.

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Education as a discipline with merging theories and practices simultaneously, demands practioners' inclusion in policy making as the hammer belongs to blacksmith so he would better know needs and nature of the job. Policy makers also need to be reflective towards reality of complexity and complexity of reality.

In conclusion education as the largest catalytic force for social change seems to be in exigency for change in itself. Educators of today and future need to be prepared not only to overcome classroom problems but also to guide students in proper direction in future. It is a prodigious task to enhance the whole level of teacher education in the country and elsewhere but not impossible. Even a single step taken in this field with true zeal, can make a monumental difference. Inclusion of teacher in planning, policy and practice would be a great assistance.

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