

Student Teachers Perceptions on Enhanced Duration of Secondary Teacher Education Programmes in India

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Abstract

India has one of the largest teacher education systems with about five million teachers and more than three thousand and two hundred elementary and three thousand and five hundred secondary teacher education institutions. The duration of secondary teacher education programmes is generally of one-year. Over the years stakeholders in education have strongly voiced the need for enhancing the duration of teacher education programmes for improving its quality both in theoretical inputs and in internship. An innovative two-year secondary teacher education programme was launched in five institutions in 1999. The study presents an analysis of the feedback received from student teachers on this programme. It presents their perceptions of student teachers' role and responsibility, interests, needs and difficulties faced by them while undergoing this course. It also gives self-assessment on their professional preparedness. The study further reveals their views on enhanced duration of secondary teacher education programme, the need for enriching school level subject content and strengthening practice teaching.

Introduction

Characterized as one of the longest surviving continuum of cultures, India is a multi-cultural and multi-lingual society with a perennial undercurrent of essential unity. Its social base consists of a large number of beliefs, religion and races, continuously competing and cooperating with one another. Despite a long tradition of social reform in all ages,

there still exists various kinds of imbalances such as rural/urban, rich/poor and discrimination on the basis of caste, religion, language, ideology, gender, religion and ethnicity. Education has to play a very significant role in minimising and eventually eliminating these inequities and discriminations. The vital instrument of this projected social change, the teacher, has to be

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suitably and adequately empowered to affect this change through a fresh and effective model of teacher education. The teacher needs adequate awareness of the socio-cultural imperatives of modernisation, urbanisation and globalisation. Thus, teacher education programmes must be designed in a way that help student teachers to understand deeply a wide array of things, about learning, social and cultural contexts and teaching and be able to enact these understandings in complex classrooms serving increasingly diverse students. (Hammond 2006)

At present there are over three thousand and five hundred secondary teacher education institutions. Entry qualifications to secondary teacher education programme is twelve years of school and three years of graduation, though a large number of post graduates also take admission in these institutions. The duration of secondary teacher education programmes (B.Ed.) is generally of one year. It has been observed that most of the time on teacher education programmes is spent on theoretical teaching, and less time on teaching practice and other practical aspects. Bhatia (1987) in her study on evaluation of secondary teacher education curriculum found that teacher educators unanimously agreed that practice teaching is the most important part of these programmes and should be organised seriously. It was often experienced in the schools that the products of one-year duration programmes were not fully and comprehensively equipped professionally. Hemambujam (1983) found that the prescribed curriculum was not

effectively implemented due to shortage of time. The whole spectrum of theoretical course and internship in school cannot be achieved within the short span of one academic year. Deo (1985) in the study on practical programme in teacher education institutions found that majority of the student teachers felt that lack of time was a major factor in not being able to achieve the objectives of practical experience. Practice teaching is one of the most important aspects of any pre-service programme, if not the main event (Henry, 1989). The practicum (Fullan, 1989), is often seen as the key element in pre-service teacher education, yet much of the research suggests that as it now operates, it is ineffective in helping students relate theory and practice in teaching. Because of such a situation, Queens University entirely changed their practicum (Upitis, 1999). Now the teacher education programme begins with an orientation in the beginning of the session itself. Student teachers join an associate school, beginning on the first day of school. By starting an extended practicum of fourteen weeks at the opening of the Fall Term it is recognised that people who are ready to become teachers are eager to get in the classroom as regular teachers. Researches in India have found that practice teaching is the weakest link in teacher education programme. Due to lack of time some 30 to 40 lessons spread over a period of four to six weeks are considered sufficient for practice teaching. Increased duration would help the student receive all the experiences that a teacher requires and acquire higher level teaching competencies and

become more effective by enhancing their skills for better communication.

The objectives of secondary teacher education are determined on the basis of internalisation of philosophical aspects of education at this stage by the student teachers. They need to understand the nature, purpose and basis of philosophy of education as also the psychology of pupils at the adolescent stage in relation to pre-adolescent and post adolescent stage. In a multi-cultural and multi-religious society, the process of socialisation, social cohesion and learning to live together becomes extremely important. The critical details to stage specific pedagogy, curriculum, transaction and evaluation have to be understood both in theoretical and in practical terms. The process of teaching and learning can be enhanced in quality and learning attainments only when student teachers are fully equipped in conducting the pedagogical analysis of each and every topic and unit. Skill development at a level that prepares middle level manpower and others for teacher education is the key to quality at this stage. Skilled development takes place most fruitfully on partnership basis. In the context of inclusive education every student teacher requires more time and greater inputs to perform the expected tasks at later stages. Every student teacher deserves thorough grounding in aesthetic sensibility, moral and ethical values and also simultaneously proficiency in modern ICT.

Societal context also includes our constitutional goals and obligations. The preamble of India's constitution envisages the country as 'sovereign

socialist, secular and democratic republic and promises to secure to all its citizens, justice, social, economic and political, liberty of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship, equality of status and of opportunity. It also promises to secure the dignity of all individuals and the unity and integrity of the nation. Teacher education cannot lose sight of these constitutional goals. It has, therefore, the responsibility of sensitising the teachers to these obligations and helping them acquire the requisite moral values to uphold the national resolve. Against this background, the Directive Principles of States and the sections on Fundamental Rights and Duties, from which the educational rights of the hitherto deprived groups like women, the poor and weaker sections of society and minorities, the tribal, the SC and ST and the migrating population emanate, provide another extremely significant perspective for teacher education.

Teacher education has to be conceived as an integral part of educational and social system and must primarily respond to the requirements of the school system. It can no longer remain conventional and static but should transform itself to a progressive, dynamic and responsive system. National values and goals need to be meaningfully reflected and their inculcation attempted with care and caution. The theoretical and practical components are to be balanced appropriately. The theory and practice of education has to be enriched with latest research finding not only in the field of education but also in the allied disciplines and areas. While it is

essential to develop identified competencies to prepare effective teacher, it is equally necessary to develop commitment and build capacity to perform as integral part of teacher preparation. The teachers have to keep abreast of the latest development not only in their field of specialisation but also in the area of educational development and social and cultural issues through continuous in service orientation. Emphasis on continuing life long learning has to become an essential concern of teacher education. A nation concerned with erosion of values needs teachers who are professionally committed and prepared to present a value-based model of interaction with their learners. The basic tenets identified in the national basic education scheme: Head, Heart and Hand need now to be linked to another 'H' — Highways. Information highways, websites and internet are going to become terms of common usage in teacher education. For a sound mind, we need a strong hand and a vibrant heart. Areas like physical education and vocational education will continue to gain greater emphasis in the years to come and will serve as the basis for developing competencies and skills in addition to commitments and values.

A comprehensive theoretical base is essential for a teacher to assume professional role and develop capacity to conceptualise inputs from other disciplines as well as and evolve strategies to utilise them. A true professional is capable of perceiving complexities and uncertainties in the society, has a thorough grasp of the subject, possesses skills to make critical diagnosis, takes decision and has

courage and conviction to implement such decision (NCTE, 1998).

Teacher education in India still needs to get fully rooted to Indian reality and psyche and have the leverage to continuously transform itself to assimilate the emerging changes in pedagogy. In the times of globalisation it needs for more emphasise than earlier times to inculcate the desired level of commitment amongst the student teachers.

A context-based and activity-oriented approach to teacher education with sufficient interactive opportunities within the institution and also in schools and with community could enhance not only the performance competence but also an understanding and appreciation of the social context. In a society that is still struggling to universalise elementary education and ready with plans to universalise secondary education, the role of teachers in years to come would be that of multifarious responsibilities. To obtain competent, committed and willing to perform teachers. India needs to attempt multi-models in teacher preparation. All along, only one year teacher education at secondary stage has continued. Educationists have for a long time now firmly opined that the total time available to student teachers is insufficient as the complexities in teaching-learning have increased and several new dimensions have to be eternalised with proficiency. While ICT has to become a major ingredient, concerns like social cohesion, value education, peace education, local elements of curriculum, environmental issues water crisis, and inclusive education, global warming,

fundamentalism and terrorism can also no more be kept out of the curricular of teacher education. All this in addition to regular pedagogic inputs definitely requires fresh thinking and a comprehensive curriculum that can not be transacted in the one year duration being presented by the institution to student teacher to get a degree in teacher education.

The breaking of isolation from the community is necessary to enable teachers and teacher educators to reconstruct pedagogical and educational principles and practices in the light of experiences gained from mutually beneficial community interactions. The teacher as a professional and an intellectual cannot remain indifferent to the events that are taking place in society. The academic and social issues are interrelated and inter-dependent. In contemporary context, the role of the teacher is not only confined to classroom teaching alone. The teachers are expected to play an active role in the developmental activities responding to progress of the community. In a diverse Indian context such interactions must be extended over a reasonable period of time, which is not practically possible in a programme limited to one year only.

Teacher preparation the world over is considered a professional endeavour. In most of the countries, after the necessary initial schooling, young persons are generally prepared as teachers over a period of three to four years. In India, the duration of secondary teacher preparation is one year. The concern for quality in teacher education was voiced consistently by educationists, teachers and teacher educators in the

seventies and eighties. The significance of the same has been highlighted by the supreme court of India in its judgment of June 15, 1993.

“The teacher training institutions are meant to teach children of impressionable age. We cannot let loose on the innocent and unwary children, teachers who have not received proper and adequate training. True they will be required to pass the examination but that may not be enough. Training for a certain minimum period in a properly organised and equipped training institute is essential before a candidate becomes qualified to receive teachers training certificate. The Supreme Court in the above case quoted observations from earlier judgement: “It is therefore, needless to state that teachers should be subjected to rigorous training with rigid scrutiny of efficiency. It has greater relevance to the needs of the day. The ill-trained or substandard teachers would be detrimental to our educational system, if not to punishment to our children. The government and the university must, therefore, take care to see that inadequacy in the training of teachers is not compounded by any extraneous consideration” (1998 (4) SC 431).

Teachers are central to the question of education’s quality and relevance. How they are educated and prepared for their work is a critical indicator of what kind of educational quality and relevance is being sought (UNESCO 1998).

There has been a long felt need to increase the duration of one-year B.Ed programme to two years specially in terms of lengthening the internship

period beyond the 4-6 weeks available at present. Various Commissions and Committees and a large number of teacher educators also expressed the need to increase the duration of the B.Ed. programme. Nemser (1983), argued that expecting student teachers to become expert classroom performers is unrealistic, given the short time of teacher education programme. The Central Advisory Board of Education of India, as early as in the year 1938 recommended B.Ed programme of at least 18 months duration. The Secondary Education Commission (1952-1953) also recommended duration of two academic years, though it was realised that it may not be feasible in the immediate future and would require some time before it could be implemented. Over the years, priority being on preparing more teachers, these recommendations generally remained unattended. However, the deficiencies were being regularly highlighted in professional discourse. Priority on expansion often relegated focus on quality to the background.

The National Commission on Teachers, which felt that one-year B.Ed course must be made effective by lengthening its duration, reiterated the recommendation of enhanced duration in 1983. In 1998, the statutory National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE) prepared a Curriculum Framework for Quality Teacher Education and once again recommended extended duration. It ensured implementation of two-year B.Ed. programme, in five institutions in 1999. This is the first case of its type when two years duration was accepted on a pilot basis. The perceptions of

student teachers, which adopted this course needed to be studied. The author undertook this research study after the two batches had completed the course to get the feedback from student teachers as to their perceptions on this innovative programme.

Methodology

Every student teacher of this programme was approached from the four Regional Institutes of Education, which accept student teachers from the specified regions. Thus, the student teachers were drawn from the entire country comprising of a nationally representative sample. Experts in content, pedagogy, ICT, and social and economic concerns were invited to deliberate upon the possible aspects that could be put before the student teachers in the form of a questionnaire. Accordingly questions, especially the components of ICT, action research, new transactional strategies, internship in teaching, school management, and community based field work; evaluation techniques and duration of the course were incorporated in a questionnaire consisting of 48 items, both of open-ended and closed-ended. A few of the items required Yes or No responses, while others were in the form of rating scales. A few checklist type items were also included.

Data

The data consisted of 328 subjects (140 science student teachers out of which 60 were male and 80 female; 188 arts student teachers out of which 93 were male and 95 female) drawn from four Regional Institutes of Education and

from Gujarat Vidyapeeth, Ahmedabad as per details given in the Table 1.

The data had 49% rural and 51% urban student teachers which indicated good representation of students from rural areas and also of female students. In the Indian context, an analysis in terms of rural and urban schools becomes very relevant as rural schools generally suffer greater inadequacy of teachers availability as compared to urban areas. Both categories are generally reluctant to teach in rural areas.

Analysis and Inferences

After analysis of the data the following results emerged with respect to the different variables of the study:

Demographic Status

- The percentage of urban student teachers was found to be only marginally higher than that of rural student teachers. The male and female students were 52 and 48 per cent in the total sample of 322. Occupation of the parents of

student teachers was grouped under four broad categories such as agriculture, service, business and others. 58 per cent of the parents of student teachers were in service category, 27 per cent agriculturists, 8 per cent from other professions and 7 per cent in business. The marital status of student teachers indicated that 83 per cent were unmarried and the remaining 17 per cent married. Regarding their educational qualifications 45% of the students were post-graduates. The minimum educational qualification required for admission to secondary teacher education programme is graduation.

Importance of Information and Communication Technology Course

Among the stakeholders in education a consensus exists that the effective use of ICT has a great potential for enhancing learning opportunities and the quality of education. (ILO and UNESCO, 2003). In today's' environment it has become

TABLE 1
Population Distribution according to Institution, Gender and Teaching Subject areas

Institutes/Subject Areas	B.Ed Science/Gender			B.Ed Arts/Gender			Total
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	
RIE, Bhubaneswar	11	19	30	10	12	22	52
RIE, Ajmer	17	17	34	22	17	39	73
RIE, Mysore	12	23	35	17	19	36	71
RIE, Bhopal	11	19	30	19	21	40	70
Gujarat Vidyapeeth	9	2	11	25	26	51	62
Total	60	80	140	93	95	188	328
%	43	57	100	52	48	100	-

necessary for student teachers to acquire proficiency in ICT as a necessary part of their skill development. Student teachers need to have well-developed ICT literacy skills that will enable them to effectively locate, retrieve, evaluate, manipulate, save and present data in a meaningful form (Smyth, 1977). In the report of the review of teacher education programmes in New South Wales it included an examination of the issue of integrating ICT into pedagogy.

The inquiry found that generally the use of ICT was not being sufficiently exploited during teacher education programmes (Ramsey, 2000). Perceptions on this count are no different in India. Student teachers should be able to explore the range of possibilities for the use of ICT across the curriculum and place ICT in a meaningful educational context. Based on their ICT experiences, student teachers should be able to approach the process of learning and teaching differently. Over time, they should realise a change in their perceptions of themselves and gain valuable insights into how to cope with the challenges of use of ICT in learning and teaching (Lee, 2001).

In this study 61 per cent student teachers found the course of information technology very much useful, in their performance during internship in teaching, 32 per cent felt it was helpful, whereas 6 per cent felt it was of not much use.

Community Based Field Work

Most of the available researches in India and elsewhere indicate that family and community involvement has received

little attention in teacher education programme. Greenwood and Hickman (1991) found that only 1.94% of 826 competencies, skills and objectives measured in teacher education examination deals with extra- classroom influences, only one of which was parent involvement. Williams & Chavkin (1987) found that only 4% of teaching programmes have a whole course devoted to the subject, 15% part of the course, and 37% one class period. Researchers and practitioners agree that teacher, family and community involvement practices have a stronger influence on children's success in schools. When parents are involved, students tend to earn higher grades (Deslandes, 1997). Generally student teachers are aware of only traditional ways and means of involving parents and community in the school and vice-versa. Bermudez and Padron (1987) suggest that student teachers should have clinical experiences with parents and community that would familiarize them with families and translate theories of parents and community involvement into practice.

In the present study 54 percent student teachers found community based fieldwork was 'very useful' which they did during the training period. 35 percent of them felt it was 'useful', 10 percent felt it was 'of some use' and rest 1 percent felt that community based field work was 'of no use' during the training period.

Following are some of the suggestions by student teachers for improvement in Community Based Field Work:

- Educational tours should provide opportunity for intensive community interaction.

- Student teachers also need to be trained for initiating Parent Teacher Association in the school.
- More activities regarding social services should be organised.
- Duration of community work programme be increased to at least 15 days in field situations, preferably rural areas.
- Activity schedules should invariably include surveys of some aspects of community-school interaction.
- Feedback should be taken from the students about the community work done by them and skilfully integrated in the subsequent programmes.

Usefulness of the Course Content in Value Education

Value erosion is a worldwide concern. The magnitude of value crises needs planned and persistent collaborative efforts by teachers, parents and the community. Expectations from teacher education programmes are indeed high. In the extended duration of two-year programme the value nurturance and development components find a significant place in the pedagogy adopted by the teachers. Value education needs to be an integral component in the entire curricular and co-curricular activities (NCERT, 2004). When student teachers were asked whether they found the course on value education useful 54 per cent of the students found the course useful to a large extent, 40 per cent found it useful to some extent, whereas, 5 per cent found it useful to very little extent.

Enrichment of School level Subject Content

Teaching of content causes concern in certain subject areas like science and mathematics. Majority of the teacher educators feel that student teachers lack mastery in the subject content to be taught in the school. It is essential that the subject content proficiency must be achieved at the level of full mastery at the teacher education institutions. An impressive 63 per cent of the students favoured the need for enrichment of their school level subject content. The rest 37 per cent student teachers found no need of it.

Following are some suggestions given by student teachers for enrichment of school level subject content:

- In biology the students were of the view that the content on nutrition should be included and molecular biology should be dealt in greater depth. In physics, optics and wave mechanics should be included in mathematics; they felt that emphasis should be given on algebra, geometry, co-ordinate trigonometry and functions relations. Students wanted that in English more emphasis should be given on pronunciation and grammar and in social studies value aspect should be added.

Transactional Strategies and Instructional Technologies

This is one of the aspect in which change percolates very slowly. The most common approach to teacher preparation equipping student teachers with expert

teaching strategies has been convincingly critiqued on theoretical and practical grounds (Hiebert, 2007). Transactional strategies constitute the backbone of teacher education. If developed comprehensively, these could prepare student teachers to internalise fully their role as transmitters and facilitators of learning. To achieve this, the student teacher needs to learn and practice how to ascertain the learning needs of the children as well as the remedial inputs necessary to augment their learning. 55 per cent student teachers were well-equipped to use transactional strategies learnt during the course 'to some extent' and 43 per cent student teachers felt they would be able to use transactional strategies learnt during the course 'to a large extent' and only 2 per cent students felt they would be able to use the transactional strategies 'very little' learnt during the course.

Identification of differently-abled Students in the School

Over the years there has been a growing emphasis on the education of differently-abled students and accommodating these students in the general classroom as far as possible. This demands a pedagogically correct response from teacher education programmes and the teachers. Lipsky and Gartner (1994) describe this situation as 'where the regular classroom teacher is responsible for the educational programme of disabled children alongside their non-disabled peers and where all of this education takes place in the regular classroom. The challenge now in this

regard is: how to support and legitimate difference through a range of resourcing arrangements, pedagogies and curriculum initiatives to expand options for all students. Majority of the student teachers do not have much experience with disabled children (Hamre and Oyler, 2004). Findings of research studies indicate (Avramidis et.al. 2000), that majority of the student teachers wanted more knowledge of different disabling conditions and different strategies for meeting their needs during the teacher education programme. They also wanted more experience and training with differently abled children specially training on managing the behaviour of students with emotional and behavioural difficulties. A study of disabled children in normal schools (Pathak, 1984), found that some of the problems that disabled children faced in normal schools were fear of the school, difficulty with classroom learning, dissatisfaction with teachers, ridicule by other children and inability to participate in co-curricular activities. Thus, it is strongly emphasised that prospective teachers need to have early and continuous exposure with disabled students preferably through field experiences.

In this study 51 per cent students had not been able to identify physically or mentally challenged students during their practice teaching in the school. 49 per cent student teachers had identified physically or mentally challenged students in the school and had adopted the following strategies:

- After school hour's remedial teaching, was imparted personally by student teachers. In order to

identify the challenged student's different types of intelligence tests along with interest inventories and aptitude tests were used, in addition with individualised instructional programme, observation and interview techniques. Student teachers conducted case studies of disabled children. They also paid special attention and showered more love and affection to the disabled children. The student teachers asked visually disabled children to sit in the front row. They often kept meetings with parents and held discussions with class teachers and principal. Action research projects were also conducted to overcome shortcomings. The disabled children were motivated to participate in discussions and in question-answer sessions in the class and build more self-confidence.

Health and Physical Education Activities

Health and physical education is one of the most critical components of school education, which rarely gets the importance it deserves in teacher education programme. It is an integral part of the education system, which aims at developing a healthy body, mind and a wholesome personality of the student. Every teacher has a role to contribute towards this and therefore, it cannot be considered the responsibility of the physical teacher alone. Deo (1985) found that physical education and participation in games and sports were taken casually by student teachers.

Following are some of the suggestions by student teachers for improving health and physical education activities:

- Student teachers felt that in physical education more games must be included and practice session need to be increased. They wanted that physical education should include training in yoga, judo karate and nature cure programmes. Students complained about lack of equipment and wanted more equipment to be procured for physical education. They suggested that physical education activities should be conducted to give first hand experience to the trainees with more seriousness. Students were of the opinion that competent and experienced teachers should be appointed. They also felt that at least three periods in a week, of one hour duration be allocated for it.

Commitment towards Profession, Learner and Society

In teacher education programmes, commitment has generally been presumed to be omnipresent. Unfortunately it is totally relegated to the background and efforts to generate commitment, motivation and devotion do not receive adequate emphasis during teacher education programme (NCTE 1998). Sandra Feldman (2005) President of American Federation of Teachers emphasised that to have a really skilful teacher who knows what to do in the classroom, you need, first of all, someone who is totally committed to teaching, who loves children and who could give the entire heart to the children. Only a

committed teacher can help in the growth of all-round development of the child. Teacher education institutions have a great challenge and responsibility to produce committed and truly humane teachers.

Sixty three per cent of the student teachers in the study felt that two-year B.Ed. programme had strengthened their profession. Fifty three per cent students felt that two year B.Ed. programme had also made them committed towards the learner and forty five per cent student teachers felt that two-year B.Ed. programme had made them committed to the society.

Career Ambitions in the Teaching Profession

It is well-known that the teaching profession does not necessarily attract the best talented. Entrants to this profession wait for an opportunity to get into a better occupation and treat teaching as a stepping-stone. Some of the major reasons for not being attracted to this profession are low status and low salaries. In a study conducted by Zhinx Su (2000) it revealed that majority of the student teachers did not enter the profession by choice and were not happy and willing to become teachers. Some of the reasons given by the students for joining this profession were: pressure from parents, especially as this profession is most suitable for girls. Others were in the teacher education institution because their grades were not high for entry into other fields of study. Even those who had good grades but could not enter other professions had to come into teacher education. A few students said that they were in this

profession because their parents could not financially support them for other professions of their choice, which were more expensive. Durchame (1993) found that routinised work, lack of upward mobility and reward, are some of the factors that prompt teachers to leave. Similarly in the Indian context also it is interesting to note that when student teachers were asked about their career ambition, majority of them had ambitions other than being a teacher.

The career ambitions expressed by student teachers who wanted to remain in teaching were: to be a principal of higher secondary school, a school inspector, a teacher educator while few others wanted to become a college teacher. A good number of students desired to be social workers, contribute to women education, adult education and women empowerment. Some wanted to become reputed writers.

Creative Abilities

One of the major objectives of extending the course duration was to provide extended opportunity to the student teachers to enhance their creative abilities. The creative abilities encouraged during the training were the following:

- Preparation of charts, models and opportunity to exhibit self made teaching aids to improve classroom teaching during Internship.
- Freedom to teach subjects specially physics and mathematics using one's own creative ideas.
- Teaching numerous concepts in mathematics through interesting games.

- Encouragements for playing games that have educational implications.
- Reciting self-composed poetry in school competitions.

Several of these activities may have been replaced by IT. However in the majority of Indian schools these are still relevant. 74 per cent of the student teachers felt that they could use their creative abilities during training, whereas 26 per cent did not get such opportunity to make use of their creative abilities.

Action Research

Action research has been successfully used for improvements in many schools in many countries (Reason and Bradbury 2001); it is a way of questioning your own practices and changing these as a result of the studies (Nofitke and Stevenson, 1995). Action research makes teachers' work more professional (Ponte 2004). They use research methods to reflect on their own practices and they use their insight and understanding gained to systematically improve their practice. Majority of the students had used action research approach of some kind in actual classroom situation. Some students could not undertake action research projects as other assignments were given to them and thus there was lack of time. Some students felt the environment was not conducive. Others felt the lack of experience and confidence to undertake action research. A few students felt that the content was not suitable for action research. 52 per cent felt that action research would be helpful to a large extent in becoming a competent teacher, 41 per cent felt that it would be helpful to some extent,

whereas 6 per cent thought that it would be of little use.

Duration

78 per cent of the student teachers felt that the duration of two-year B.Ed programme was appropriate and desirable. The remaining 22 per cent felt that duration of two-year B.Ed programme could be shortened.

Following are some of the alternatives suggested about the duration of two-year B.Ed. programmes.

A few student teachers felt that the duration of two-year B.Ed programme could be shortened to one and half years including two months of Internship in teaching and it should be held in three sessions, each of 6 months. Students wanted that some areas like work experience and working with community be implemented properly. They desired that the subject content component should be further enriched. Others felt that in a two-year programme, the theory component can be completed in one-year and six months should be devoted towards internship in teaching and the remaining six months be assigned to advance level content. Some student teachers felt that much of the course of first year is similar to second year, so repetition needs to be avoided.

Internship

Practice teaching is the most important and crucial component of every teacher education programme and yet remains the weakest link. Practice teaching is a collective responsibility of the teacher education institution and the school in which it is conducted. Special emphasis

on internship was included in this course to overcome this weakness.

The instructional strategies that were used by student teachers during internship were:

- Demonstration-cum-Discussion method, question-answer method, programmed learning, problem-solving method, project method, activity-based teaching, multi-sensory approach, simulated strategy, inductive method, use of models and charts, heuristic method, case study method.
- Student teachers also used programme learning, microteaching, and simulated teaching very prominently. Computer aided teaching and video-conferencing was preferred wherever available.
- During internship the role of supervisors was found critical and student teachers had clear views about it. 29 per cent student teachers felt very satisfied with the supervision and guidance provided by the college supervisors, 56 per cent were satisfied, 13 per cent did not feel satisfied and 2 per cent student teachers were not at all satisfied with the supervision and guidance provided by college supervisors.

Activities participated/organised by student teachers during internship were:

- School exhibition; morning assembly; participation in arts and crafts exhibition by the students; invigilation duty during exami-

nation; quiz Competition; scouts and guides activities; games and sports; story-writing and story-telling competition; distribution of polio vaccine among small children; PTA meetings; literacy programmes; action research in class; tour management; annual function; cultural programme; organising talks by eminent persons/educationists; handwriting competition; rally for pollution control. Every student teacher became associated with practically all of the above activities. This was distinctly different from one-year secondary teacher education programme in which only few activities could be taken up.

Difficulties faced by Students during Internship

The difficulties faced by students during internship were that very often there were lack of infrastructure facilities and equipment on one hand and pressures of curriculum and evaluation on the other prevented the conduct of several desirable activities. Use of computer, Overhead Projector, experimental method, cultural programme, screening of films, group discussion, panel discussion, could not be arranged in several instances due to lack of facilities. It applies to trips outside the school campus to conduct projects or observations, recording, analysis and drawing inferences.

There was general appreciation of pre-internship component, which gave sufficient initial inputs to the student teachers.

Evaluation Techniques used by Student Teachers during Internship

The major area of reforms in Indian school system is that of year-end written examination, which decides the total performance of the learner. The student teachers were particularly oriented in different evaluation techniques. They were encouraged to use these in the classrooms. Student teachers found the techniques of oral evaluation and diagnostic tests and remediation, home assignments, aptitude and creativity test, formative evaluation test as very helpful in evaluating learner achievements.

Improving Internship in Teaching

Some of the suggestions given by student teachers for improving internship are as follows:

- Internship must be arranged at the beginning or middle of the academic session.
 - Good schools with good infrastructure facilities must be selected. If possible, opportunity to teach in different types of schools must be given.
 - The number of lesson plans should be reduced to 60 in place of 80 or the period of internship be increased to 45 days instead of four weeks in order to complete 80 lessons in two years.
 - Prospective teachers should assemble once a week to share the problems faced and their experiences in schools.
 - Only experienced teachers should be deputed as supervisors and each co-operating teacher should be requested to observe classes.
- Number of assignments other than teaching need to be reduced during Internship so that more time can be devoted to teaching.
 - Before allotting the schools, medium of instruction should be taken into consideration.

In the total sample of science and arts student teachers, more than 70 per cent felt that duration of Internship was sufficient. 30 per cent student teachers were not satisfied with the duration of Internship programme. Their arguments in favour of extending it were:

- Internship should be of longer duration so that teaching skills can be fully and comprehensively developed.
- It should be between 4 to 6 months so that more guidance can be given.
- Only longer duration internship can enable student teachers to participate in co-curricular and other activities of the school during the Internship programme.

Evaluation of Student Teachers

90 per cent of the student teachers agreed with the procedure of evaluating their knowledge of theory, while 10 per cent did not agree with the procedure adopted by their Institute to evaluate their knowledge of theory subjects. The reasons given for not agreeing with the evaluation procedures were:

A few felt that due to the medium of instruction being a second language, that is English, only few student teachers who could articulate their thoughts in English were given better grades. Some also felt that towards the end of the academic session, students were

overburdened with assignments in each paper. The assignments should be given in the beginning of the session.

Recommendations for Improving the Secondary Teacher Education Programme

One of the main objectives of this research was to motivate the student teachers to articulate their own assessment of the extended duration programme they had opted to undergo. They had good suggestions to offer on practically every aspect. This included change in weightage of theory, practicals, including Internship, curriculum, content, use of IT and the pedagogy being adopted by their teacher educators. As internship in teaching and practicum is a major and vital component of this programme their suggestions on guidance and supervision needed during this period are found very pragmatic.

Change in the Teaching Methodology of Teacher Educators

Based upon the two-year interaction with teacher educators the student teachers had several suggestions to make to enhance the quality of teaching methodology of teacher educators.

Teacher educators must regularly use ICT aids and other teaching aids. Lecture method may be avoided and demonstration-cum-discussion method may be followed. Teacher educators should use approaches like activity method, field trips, excursion, demonstration, etc. Teacher educators must follow the same method of teaching as they expect from the student teachers in the real classroom situation. Only

experienced teachers should be assigned to teach the B.Ed classes. Practical work should be organised in such a manner that it may be completed on time. More lessons in practice teaching may be given. The trainees may be provided with opportunity to get acquainted with Parents Teachers Association and its activities. Theory and practice should go together. More seminars and discussions may be conducted in the class. In the teaching of English, too much of bilingual method is used which could be avoided. Socially Useful Productive Work classes should be held at least twice a week. One full paper should be taught by one teacher only. More emphasis should be given to the strategies of teaching. Teacher educators should continuously refresh their content knowledge, particularly before they come to the class.

Effective Supervision and Guidance

Only academically sound and experienced teachers must be deputed for supervision. Supervisor should sit in the class for the full period to observe the weaknesses of the student teachers. At least two supervisors for each subject should be deputed. Number of supervisors should be increased as per the need of student teachers. Supervisors should not focus only on the negative points, because it demoralises the student teacher. The institution should hold a meeting of the principals of selected schools and they should be properly guided or oriented so that the trainees would be received well by the school. Senior teacher educators should regularly visit some schools during the period and evaluate the performance of the assigned students. Teachers should

give feed back after the class and not in between the period. Supervisors should see how the student teachers organise other activities in the school apart from classroom teaching. Subject teachers should also supervise the class. There should be discussion among the supervisors and student teachers relating to the difficulties of student teachers and their possible remedies. Both the subject teacher and the education supervisor should sit together in the class to supervise the lesson. Fear of examination should be removed so that the student teacher can teach without any stress or strain.

Improvement of Practical Work

Practical work in different subjects should be arranged daily its record should be maintained. Different instructional strategies be used in practical work. There should be more practical classes in the first year. School should have lab-equipment which can be used to demonstrate experiments and teaching of science be made more effective. Teaching material should be developed for practical class and the students should use them in their classes. The concerned subject teachers should organise practical classes and examination (test) for practical work should be conducted by the concerned teacher. Time for Internship and practical experiences should be increased.

Suggestions of Student Teachers for overall Improvement of two-year B.Ed Programme

- Admission to the course should be made on the basis of an entrance test including an aptitude test.

- Compulsory internal tests need to be conducted.
- Co-scholastic activities should be increased.
- Mother tongue should be used as medium of instruction. Proficiency in English be provided separately.
- Continuous evaluation, like other professional courses, should be conducted.
- More emphasis on information technology and computer-aided teaching should be given.
- Instructional materials of good quality should be made available. These should be updated regularly.
- Integration of pedagogy and content should be visible in classes conducted by teacher educators.
- Obsolete course content be reduced and repetition of content units be deleted.
- Student teachers should be made familiar with the interview techniques and prepare them for future situations.
- Scholarship should be given to the trainees as the course is of longer duration.
- Community education, work education and computer education should be given more scope and weightage.
- More field experiences would strengthen learning.

More emphasis be given to Enrichment in School Level Subject Content

Discussion

The study reveals that majority of student teachers were in favour of

extended duration of B.Ed programme. They felt that the two-year programme had made them more committed towards the profession, the learner and the society. Some student teachers were of the view that first year B.Ed course is similar in several areas to that of second year. Hence the syllabi of the existing two-year B.Ed programme needs to be revised and the similarities or repetition of topics be deleted.

Students start their training with different perceptions and ideas about teaching. In a study on student teachers early conceptions of classroom practice (Calderhead and Robson, 1991) it is interesting to find that some students repeatedly claim that to learn to teach one needs experience in the actual classrooms. Another student teacher said that from her experiences in helping her mother in a primary school, she already feels confident in her ability to teach, what she only wanted from teacher education institution was familiarity with the latest concepts and curriculum materials.

Majority of the students gave more importance to the need for enrichment of school level subject contents. Teacher education institutions need to strengthen this aspect. Researches have found that teachers are usually weak in the subject they teach like mathematics or English, as they themselves have not studied these subjects beyond school. Roberts (2005) remarks 'When I think about the teachers that I have known who are really good at what they do, it seems to me that they, first of all, have a tremendous understanding of the content of what it is they are teaching and they never lose that expertise. So

knowledge about the subject matter and really feeling comfortable with it is very important'.

The student teachers felt that more guidance be provided in the community work and more emphasis be given to information and communication technology. Student teachers need to be encouraged to explore using computers for a variety of tasks. A survey conducted in United States of more than four hundred teacher education institutions to determine the status of technology training revealed that teacher education institutions generally did not adequately prepare students to make effective use of technology. (Basinger, 1999; Wood, 2000). In India also, the effective use of ICT is also limited because of infrastructural deficiencies and resource constraints.

It is generally observed that practising schools do not involve student teachers in all the activities during internship and some are not allowed to use latest equipment and technology even if it is available. Teacher education institutions need to be careful to place student teachers in such schools that have good infrastructure facilities.

Student teachers expressed the need for strengthening the organisation of practical work. In their responses it was evident that Physical Education and other practical activities should be arranged daily and their hours be increased. They further felt that different instructional methods be used. The students also desired that duration of practical in the first year be increased and duration for internship and work experience be also increased. More than 50 per cent of the student

teachers could not identify differently abled students in the school. There is a need to focus on the transactional strategies especially when dealing in an inclusive classroom.

Majority of student teachers felt that action research would be helpful to a large extent for becoming competent teachers. Those student teachers who had not used action research approach in actual classroom teaching were due to lack of time and the absence of favourable environment. While student teachers, undergoing this programme,

were satisfied with the duration of the two-year B.Ed programme, they wanted certain modifications in the existing programme. This innovation needs to be studied and strengthened both in pedagogy and content. Its replication would certainly be adding value to quality improvement in the larger education system. The demographic advantage that India has opens up new avenues globally to its young population. Quality of education comes in focus and hence, the quality of teacher education deserves priority.

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