



ISSUES AND CHALLENGES IN TEACHER EDUCATION IN WEST BENGAL

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ABSTRACT:

In the intricate framework of educational systems, teacher education emerges as a linchpin wielding profound influence over quality and efficacy. This research delves into the multifaceted challenges plaguing teacher education in West Bengal, navigating a terrain from inadequate numbers of teacher-educators to an identity crisis faced by institutions. Anchored in educational philosophy, the study underscores the transformative potential of teachers who extend beyond preparing individuals for the future, envisioning them as stewards empowering learners to shape a responsible destiny. Despite UNESCO-ILO's unequivocal affirmation of teacher quality as pivotal in student achievement, the research unravels a disconcerting scarcity of trained and qualified teachers, fundamentally impeding equitable access to education. The symphony of teacher education, representing diverse institutions, unfolds amidst challenges in infrastructure, ICT resources, and an ongoing identity crisis. The study meticulously dissects the lacuna in pedagogical innovations, unveiling a pressing need for educators adept in navigating the nuances of new curricula. Specific challenges, ranging from insufficient numbers of teacher-educators to inadequate salary structures, accentuate the urgency for a paradigm shift, particularly in the post-COVID era. The heart of the study lies in elucidating these challenges, asserting the imperative of articulating professional qualifications and skills as notes and chords essential for nurturing prospective teachers. In response to these challenges, the research proposes a harmonious ensemble of suggestions, emphasizing transparency in recruitment practices, continuous professional development, and the integration of technology as keystones for transformation. Mitigating commercialization and ensuring inclusive education skills become imperative measures to elevate teacher education standards. This comprehensive exploration culminates in a crescendo of suggestions envisioning a future where teacher education metamorphoses into a beacon guiding a nation's progressive odyssey, resonating with the highest standards of education.

KEYWORDS:

TEACHER EDUCATION, EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY, PEDAGOGICAL INNOVATIONS, TEACHER QUALITY, INFRASTRUCTURE CHALLENGES, INCLUSIVE EDUCATION, PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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INTRODUCTION:

Teacher education stands as the linchpin in the intricate framework of educational systems, wielding profound influence over their quality and efficacy. The Delors Report, echoing through the corridors of educational philosophy, envisions a future where the pursuit of learning transcends its utilitarian role, emerging as a noble end in itself. Within this vision, teachers assume a sacred role, entrusted with the task of not merely preparing individuals for the future but empowering them to actively shape a purposeful and responsible destiny (Delors et al., 1956).

The indispensable role of teachers in sculpting an inclusive education system enjoys unanimous acknowledgment. The presence of highly motivated, qualified, and adeptly trained teachers becomes not just a prerequisite but an

assurance of equitable access to education [1]. The journey of teacher education unfolds as a nuanced process, a crucible where the proficiency and competence of teachers are meticulously cultivated. The Good's Dictionary of Education extends its embrace, defining teacher education as an amalgamation of all formal and non-formal activities and experiences that not only qualify an individual for assuming responsibilities within the educational profession but elevate this qualification to an art form. W.H. Kilpatrick, the maestro of educational philosophy, distinguishes teacher training from mere education, asserting that training, akin to its application to animals and circus performers, finds its transcendence in the realm of human beings. Teacher education, therefore, emerges as a symphony, harmonizing teaching skills, pedagogical

theory, and professional skills, orchestrating the delicate formula: Teacher Education = Teaching Skills + Pedagogical Theory + Professional Skills [2].

In the orchestration of educational evolution, Clinton, through his Call for Action for American Education in the 21st Century (1996), accentuates the imperative of populating every classroom with not just teachers but with talented and dedicated stewards of knowledge. He illuminates a significant opportunity, a golden thread weaving through the tapestry of the 21st century, where the assurance of teacher quality hinges upon the recruitment of promising individuals into the sacred art of teaching. This underscores the critical need for cultivating not just educators but virtuosos of education, as a robust teacher education system metamorphoses into a fundamental prerequisite for a nation's progressive odyssey.

Teacher quality, identified as the lodestar of school education, finds unequivocal affirmation in UNESCO-ILO's resonant assertion of its pivotal role in student achievement. The quality of teachers, intricately woven into the fabric of teacher education programs, policies, and practices, stands as the true north guiding the educational compass [3]. In the contemporary overture of the Universalization of Elementary Education and the grand opera of the Right to Education Act (RTE) harmonizing with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the demand for educators resonates as a crescendo. Meeting this demand necessitates not just the production but the virtuosity of adept teachers. Amidst the symphony of pedagogical innovations such as project-based learning, the cultivation of thinking skills, and the choreography of discovery learning methodologies, a lacuna persists. Many educators find themselves in unfamiliar terrain when implementing the concepts of new curricula, lacking the requisite skills for the effective orchestration of educational harmony. It becomes, therefore, not just imperative but a sacred duty to articulate the professional qualifications and skills that stand as the notes and chords essential for educators, nurturing their development in the hearts and minds of prospective teachers [4].

The panorama of teacher institutions, diverse in its manifestation, unfolds with the grace of a ballet, categorized into four exquisite movements: (a) government-managed, (b) examining body-managed, (c) government-aided and privately managed, and (d) self-financed and privately managed.

1. INSUFFICIENT NUMBER OF TEACHER-EDUCATORS:

A predicament arises when individuals lacking the requisite competencies and qualities for this significant profession enter the program. This, in turn, yields subpar quality teachers within the education system. Hence, there is a pressing need to establish an objective selection process to identify individuals with the potential to become effective teachers (Reddy, 1992). The scarcity of trained and qualified teachers in West Bengal's schools is a fundamental requirement for the schools' efficient

functioning and a successful teaching-learning process. Research indicates that proficient teachers significantly impact students' learning, with cognitive and non-cognitive effects enduring over time (Crawford and Rolleston, 2020). Unfortunately, the number of teacher educators in West Bengal's teacher training institutions falls significantly short of the actual requirement, resulting in perfunctory teaching processes, particularly in self-financed institutions.

2. CHALLENGES IN THE SELECTION PROCESS:

Both pre-service and in-service professional training are crucial components of school education, essential for individuals aspiring to become teachers. However, possessing training alone does not guarantee quality in education. Trained teachers are expected to excel in various aspects, such as subject knowledge, teaching methods, and pedagogy. In rural areas, particularly in self-financed colleges, individuals without the necessary eligibility criteria for teacher educators are appointed as teachers. For instance, NCTE Norms mandate specific qualifications like Curriculum and Pedagogic Courses in teaching, a Master's Degree, M.Ed., and NET/SLET/SET. However, in many cases, colleges hire individuals without meeting these criteria, resulting in compromised educational standards.

3. STUDENT ATTENDANCE CHALLENGES:

The academic year should consist of at least 150 teaching days, excluding admission and examination periods. Additionally, every teacher trainee should undergo a 30-day internship in nearby primary/secondary/senior secondary schools. Unfortunately, student attendance is often subpar, particularly in the post-COVID era. Furthermore, colleges' lax attitude and flexibility regarding attendance contribute to student absenteeism. Colleges often permit students to appear for exams with minimal fines, further fostering a culture of absenteeism.

4. INADEQUATE SALARY STRUCTURE:

In self-financed colleges, teachers are frequently appointed on a short-term basis with meager remuneration, resulting in a lack of dedication to their roles.

5. UNDERQUALIFIED TEACHERS:

Teacher education should encompass a holistic approach, integrating emotional competencies, life skills, info-savvy skills, and techno-pedagogic skills (Goel & Goel, 2021). However, training colleges often hire less qualified teachers at low salaries, leading to compromises in the teaching process. Even newly trained teachers are recruited without prior teaching experience. Helaiya's study (2009) emphasizes the integration of life skills in teacher education programs, advocating for a simultaneous focus on creative and critical thinking, self-management, and social management. The teachers of the 21st century should possess advanced skills in stress and emotion management.

6. INADEQUATE INFRASTRUCTURE:

In adherence to NCTE norms, teacher education

institutions must meet specified conditions, encompassing factors like an adequate number of classrooms, a multi-purpose hall for instructional activities, rooms for faculty and administrative staff, and appropriate instructional space per student. However, many colleges fail to comply with these rules. Libraries, laboratories, and ICT facilities are often insufficient, hindering the creation of an environment conducive to learning (Khan, Fauzee & Daud, 2016).

7. INSUFFICIENT ICT RESOURCES:

Teacher education programs are predominantly traditional, slow to adopt technological innovations for education. There is a pressing need to develop Net-Savvy Skills in Teacher Educator Trainees, fostering a more technologically advanced approach (Goel, 2006). Despite the demonstrated value of educational technology and ICT in education, these tools are underutilized, highlighting the need for a technological revolution in teacher education. Many self-financed colleges lack dedicated ICT rooms and computers for both students and teachers.

8. IDENTITY CRISIS:

Every teacher education institution should have a valid identity, encompassing valid land and plant, settings, inputs, processes, and products. Individual identification numbers for every teacher and teacher educator contribute to this sense of identity. Initiatives like the National Curriculum Framework for Teacher Education and Teacher Education: Reflections Towards Policy Formulation offer promising avenues for reviving and building the identity of teacher education.

9. PROFESSIONAL TRANSACTION AND ENROLLMENT CHALLENGES:

Enrollment in teacher education programs varies, with some institutions becoming more commercially oriented than educational. Certain institutions lack coverage despite specific NCTE teacher education curricula, showcasing a need for increased regulation and a ban on institutions prioritizing commercial interests over education. Such practices compromise the quality of education.

10. INADEQUATE INSTRUCTIONAL FACILITIES:

Teacher education programs require well-equipped laboratories for educational technology, media, and psychology. Unfortunately, many institutions, especially self-financed ones, lack these facilities, hindering the delivery of quality education.

11. POOR TECHNO-PEDAGOGIC SKILLS:

Teacher readiness for inclusive classrooms requires adequate techno-pedagogic skills. However, a significant number of teachers in training colleges lack proficiency in these skills, impacting the overall quality of education.

12. FEE STRUCTURE CHALLENGES:

There has been a rise in substandard teacher training institutions charging exorbitant fees, leading to commercialization. Despite charging high admission fees, some institutions fail to adhere to NCTE guidelines and

university rules, creating an alarming trend of turning teacher education into a commercial enterprise.

13. TEACHER READINESS FOR INCLUSIVE CLASSROOMS:

The inclusion of children with special needs in regular classrooms demands proper training, particularly special B.Ed. programs. Unfortunately, many teachers lack the necessary skills and experience to effectively teach students with disabilities in inclusive education settings. The National Curriculum Framework emphasizes child-centered pedagogy, but the current landscape reveals a considerable gap in teacher readiness for inclusive classrooms.

SUGGESTIONS FOR ENHANCING TEACHER EDUCATION

1. TRANSPARENT RECRUITMENT PRACTICES:

Institutes, particularly self-financed ones, should ensure transparency in the recruitment of teacher educators. Adherence to NCTE guidelines in the appointment of suitable individuals for the role of Teacher Educator is crucial, demanding increased vigilance from universities.

2. CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT:

Implement regular professional development initiatives for teacher educators to enhance the effectiveness of teaching and learning. This can include Refresher Courses, Orientation Programs, Seminars, Workshops, Conferences, Lecture Series, and Staff Meetings.

3. INTEGRATION OF TECHNOLOGY IN TEACHING:

Acknowledge the profound impact of technology on education. Equip teacher education institutions with proper ICT resources to facilitate theoretical and practical knowledge of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) for pupil-teachers.

4. ENSURING PROPER INFRASTRUCTURE:

Every teacher-training institute, whether government, government-aided, or self-financed, should maintain proper infrastructure. NCTE and universities need to oversee these matters and take appropriate actions or withdraw affiliation if standards are not met.

5. APPROPRIATE APPOINTMENT AND REMUNERATION:

Adhere to NCTE norms in appointing teachers and provide them with decent salaries to ensure dedication to their service. Full-time appointments should be prioritized.

6. INCLUSIVE EDUCATION SKILLS:

Recognize the increasing number of students with special needs. Take necessary steps to develop skills and provide training to prospective teachers, enabling them to cater to the needs of students with special needs.

7. MITIGATING COMMERCIALIZATION:

Combat the commercialization of teacher training in self-financed colleges by strictly adhering to NCTE guidelines for student admissions and appropriate fee

structures. Ensure proper attendance and execution of practice-teaching without additional charges.

8. MAINTAINING STUDENT-TEACHER RATIO:

Governments should prioritize recruiting an adequate number of teachers in government teacher-training institutions to maintain a balanced student-teacher ratio. These measures collectively aim to elevate the standards of teacher education, fostering a conducive environment for effective teaching and learning.

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