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Challenges of elementary teacher education in Kerala with special reference to ‘Quality’

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Abstract:

Quality of teacher education is an integral part of the quality of education system. Quality of teacher education would largely depend on the effectiveness of teacher education institutions. This paper tries to gather quality insight of elementary teacher trainees, teacher educators and D.Ed. college principals in Kerala through questionnaires and interview schedule on “quality concerns on elementary teacher education programme” prepared by the investigator. The sample consists of 500 elementary teacher trainees and 45 elementary teacher educators and 20 D.Ed. principals from 5 districts of Kerala. The survey questions were prepared to identify the opinion of elementary teacher trainees, teacher educators and D.Ed. college principals of Kerala about the quality challenges faced by them. The result of this study will reveal the real quality challenges and the current quality of elementary teacher education system.

Keywords: Quality, Elementary teacher education, Challenges.

Introduction:

Plethora of elementary teacher education institutions in the state gives training for a number of pre-service teachers every year. Even, after several decades since independence, education system in Kerala is still under the clouds of concern over the quality. Almost all the commissions and committees established after independence of India have expressed unanimously that quality of teacher education can be the right solution to achieve objective of education and the prosperity of nation and national integrity. In Kerala, during last few years, elementary teacher education system is fighting with a series of critical issues. National curriculum framework 2009 suggested several modifications for the elementary teacher education curriculum, including the increasing the minimum qualification of teacher trainees and teacher educators. State also made modification in the syllabus based on the same. But the bigger question is how far the elementary teacher education system is successful in the implementation these changes.

Singh (2005) commented that, India had been facing the challenge of paramount expansion of education system including teacher education. During 2002-03, there were about 5.5 million teachers in India. The admission in teacher education institutions was more than 2,00,000 every year and the number had gone too high. There were approximately 2000 teacher education institutions during 2000-03. The reason behind this fast rate expansion is because of privatization of teacher education. There were twelve types of teacher education courses being run in these institutions. Up to 2005, around 180 teacher education institutions have been accredited by NAAC with the assigned grade ranging from C+ to A+. However, the teacher education institutions quality had suffered much with rapid expansion both in number and size.

K.S.V. Nair (2003) in his study tried to reveal the problems and prospects of secondary teacher education in Kerala. The selection procedure of student teachers and the procedure for appointment of teacher educators were found defective. The investigator pleads for the lengthening of the duration of the course R.K. Nair (2003) reported that the student teachers of primary teacher education institutions face numerous problems regarding teaching practice, curriculum, availability of time, library and laboratory facilities and co-curricular activities.

George (2006) conducted a study on the government, aided and unaided teacher training institutes in Kottayam district of Kerala and revealed that majority of these institutions are not equipped with satisfactory infrastructural facilities and instructional resources.

NCTE identified many regulations, in-order to improve the quality of elementary teacher education system. But the reality is, most of the elementary teacher education institutions in Kerala lacks even basic facilities. The current article tries to investigate the quality challenges faced by the elementary teacher education system through collecting the opinion from trainee's teachers and principals of the D.Ed. colleges.

Quality of teacher education:

The success of a student depends mostly on the quality of the teachers from whom he/she learns. with the advent of global and electro accelerated reforms raising the quality of teachers in par with the demands has become a major concern and challenging for the policy makers, universities and colleges and this responsibility is burdened further on the colleges of teacher education, and the public in general. The question of quality assurance and relevance gained some urgency as a result of NPE (1986). Quality assurance needs to be pursued in all fields of education particularly teacher education by finding empirical basis for relevant and efficient teacher preparation programme. It is in this context, the research in this areas explores not only what exists today but what is required for the future become a priority.

Teachers are the greatest assets and backbone of any education system. The National Policy of Education 1986 rightly accepted the influence of teachers in these words, "The status of the teacher reflects the socio cultural ethos of a society. It is said that no people can rise above the level of its teachers" Teacher quality is therefore crucial and has been globally accepted to be significantly associated with the quality of education in general and students learning outcomes in particular. The role of Teacher Education Institutions in providing quality teachers for national development is well established, by providing the teachers with the opportunity to reflect on the critical social, economic, cultural, moral and spiritual issues facing humanity and equipping them with specialized knowledge and skills to help the young learners to tackle these problems. The most effective way to develop quality teachers in a dynamic and changing environment is to begin with a well-developed pre-service teacher education programmes and with continuous professional development opportunities. Teacher education Institutions play an important role in shaping the destiny of the country. The success of any educational system depends largely on a sound programme of teacher education and quality of teachers produced by Teacher Education Institutions. It is important that the right kinds of teachers are engaged in the teaching profession with the best possible training to ensure students achievement and progress. (Aggarwal, 1988). Hence enhancing the quality of teacher education programme to ensure quality education is the need of the hour. The existing teacher education programme however is not being considered adequate to meet the demand for quality education Teacher education is the process of providing teachers and potential teachers with the skills and knowledge necessary to teach effectively in a classroom environment. Quality of education plays important role in the process of development of nations. Hence, quality concerns in education are national priorities for all nations. The dimensions of quality in education include achieving pre-determined targets and objectives. Enlightened, emancipated and empowered teachers lead communities and nations in their march towards better and higher quality of life. They reveal and elaborate the secrets of attaining higher values in life and nurture empathy for the fellow beings. They not only disseminate knowledge but also create and generate new knowledge. They are responsible for acculturating role of education.

Quality indicators of teacher education:

NAAC has identified the following seven quality criteria's as the basis for its assessment and accreditation of teacher education institution with an assumption that these seven criteria encompass all the processes of an institution:

Curricular aspects:

This aspect requires information on how the curriculum design of the institution offers diversity and flexibility to trainees and teacher educators. It also seeks information on the practices of the institution in initiating and redesigning teacher education courses that are relevant to the regional and national needs

Teaching Learning and evaluation:

This criterion deals with the efforts of the institution in providing appropriate teaching-learning experiences through curriculum transaction to trainees. It also looks at the adequacy and competency of the faculty who handle the various programmes of study as well as the efficiency of the evaluation

methodology of the institution. Besides, this criterion deals with educational innovation, attainment of specific mission and goals, plan for institution growth in future.

Research, consultancy and extension:

This aspect seeks information on the activities of the institution with reference to research, development and extension. It also deals with the facilitating aspects of the institution to promote research, development and extension related activity and their outcomes.

Infrastructure and Learning Resources:

This aspect requires data on the adequacy and optimal use of the facilities available in the institution to maintain the quality of the academic and other aspects of the campus life. It also seeks information on how every constituent of the institution – teacher trainees, teachers and staff, benefit from these facilities.

Student Support and Progression:

The highlights of this criterion are the efforts of the institution to provide the necessary assistance for good student experiences in the campus and to facilitate their progression. It also seeks information on the student and alumni profiles.

Governance Leadership and management:

This criterion requires data on the policies and practices of the institution in the matter of planning, human power requirement, recruitment, training, performance appraisal and finance management.

Innovative Practices:

This aspect deals with Internal Quality Assurance System Inclusive Practices Stakeholder relationships

Objectives:

- To understand teacher trainees and teacher educator's opinion about quality aspects and challenges of elementary teacher education programme in Kerala
- To know the opinion of principals of D.Ed. centres about quality aspects and challenges of elementary teacher education programme in Kerala
- To list down the suggestions of the teacher trainees, teacher educators and principals of elementary training colleges in order to improve the quality of elementary teacher education programme

Methodology:

The method used for the study was survey and the type of sampling followed was Random purposive sampling. Data were collected from 500 elementary teacher trainees and 45 teacher educators and 20 principals from 20 elementary teacher training institutes covering Malappuram, Calicut , Trissur and Palakkad districts of Kerala.

For collecting data, the investigator developed and used the following tools

- Questionnaire on status and challenges of elementary teacher education programme for teacher trainees
- Questionnaire on status and challenges of elementary teacher education programme for teacher educators
- Interview schedule for principals on status and challenges of elementary teacher education programme

Discussion and results:

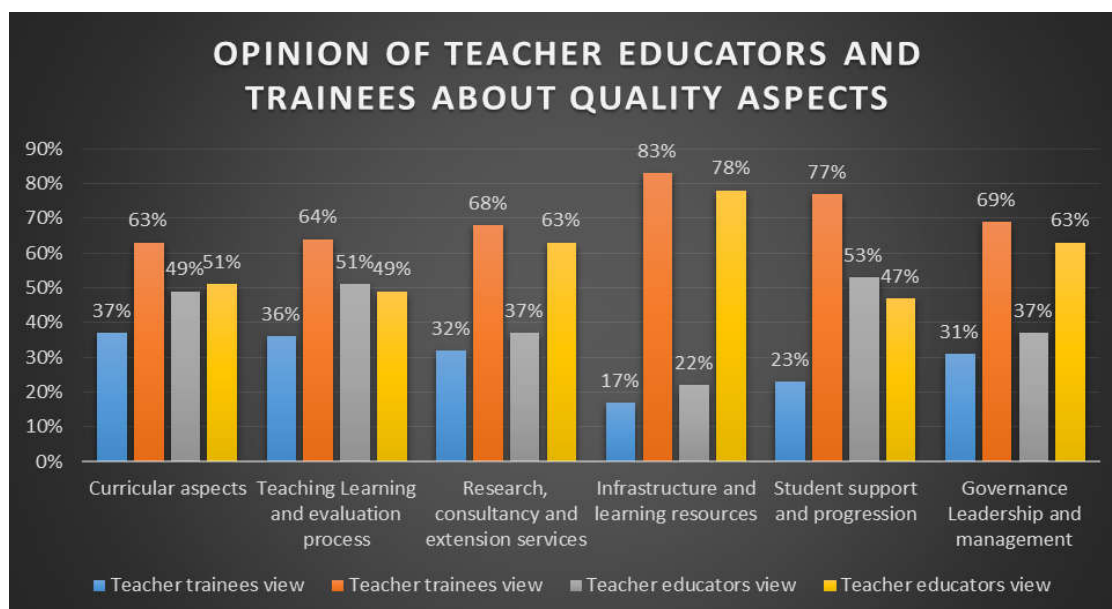
In order to understand the challenges that comes in the way of quality assurance certain quality indicators are to be considered. In this paper investigator tries to gather opinion of elementary teacher educators and teacher trainees on major six quality parameters selected from NAAC and NCTE norms for teacher training institutes. The major six quality parameters selected for the study includes

- Curricular aspects
- Teaching Learning and evaluation
- Research, consultancy and extension
- Infrastructure and learning resources
- Student support and progression
- Governance Leadership and management

Table I: Teacher trainees and teacher educators view on major quality aspects of elementary teacher training

ITEM	Teacher trainees view		Teacher educators view	
	Adequate	Inadequate	Adequate	Inadequate
Curricular aspects	37%	63%	49%	51%
Teaching Learning and evaluation process	36%	64%	51%	49%
Research, consultancy and extension services	32%	68%	37%	63%
Infrastructure and learning resources	17%	83%	22%	78%
Student support and progression	23%	77%	53%	47%
Governance Leadership and management	31%	69%	37%	63%

Graph I: opinion of teacher educators and teacher trainees about quality of elementary teacher education programme



The above results show that teacher trainees are not satisfied with the quality of elementary teacher training in Kerala. Teacher educators think Teaching, learning, student support and progression have adequate quality. Teacher educators shares same view with teacher trainees in case of curricular aspects, research, consultancy, extension services, infrastructure, Governance, leadership and management. Following are the abstract view of the teacher trainees and teacher educators on the quality aspects of elementary teacher training in Kerala.

- Teacher educators and teacher trainees agree on the fact that, quality improvement is necessary for feedback mechanism and Institution-school-communication in curriculum design and planning.
- Teacher trainees are somewhat satisfied with evaluation scheme but they are disappointed in the quality of professional development programs, teaching-learning innovations, appraisal techniques and personality development programs in elementary teacher training institutes. As per teacher trainee perspective there is a deep void in quality aspects of curriculum transaction and evaluation.
- Teacher educators think research related activities are highly in adequate in their institutes while extension activities like contribution to NGO’s, GO’s, NSS and NCC are somewhat enough. But teacher trainees evaluate as extension activities are very few in their training college.

- Teacher educators are not satisfied with the availability and optimal use of infrastructural facilities also, majority of teacher trainees opined that the availability and quality of infrastructural facilities in the institutions were not satisfactory.
- Teacher educators view on student support and progression is of average quality except placement services, but teacher trainees think otherwise. As per teacher trainees, quality improvement is required for feedback mechanism, counselling, placement assistance and recreational facilities in their teacher training centre.
- Trainees and trainers are mostly not satisfied with quality of organization management, except teachers think faculty recruitment; welfare and collaboration with SCERT, NCERT and NIEPA are satisfactory.

D.Ed. principals view on status and challenges of elementary teacher education programme in Kerala:

Based on the interviews conducted with the heads of elementary teacher training institutes, following issues or challenges are existing in current elementary education system.

- The curriculum is too difficult to complete in the prescribed time.
- Current curriculum gives more importance to theory over practical.
- Proper study materials are not available.
- Teaching aptitude of recently joining teacher trainees is all time low in the history of this course.
- The curriculum increases the burden on teacher educators.
- With current strength of teacher educators in Teacher training institutes, most of the teacher educators has to handle multiple subject, even some subjects they are not familiar with.
- The ICT facilities available in the teacher training institutes are inadequate.
- Most of the teacher educators unhappy with their wages.
- Local governing bodies are neglecting teacher training institutes.
- Trainings given by DIET and SCERT are not enough to fulfil the requirements in the latest curriculum.
- Quality of public education system is very low, which is directly reflected on the quality of trainees.
- The majority of people in the society treats public education system and syllabus in Kerala is not adequate.
- Elementary teacher training institutions are the most neglected area of education neglected by the governing bodies of education in the state.
- Number of students available in the practicing schools is very less, which is deeply impacting the quality of practice teaching.
- The frequent syllabus changes in the public education system in Kerala, contributed in lowering the quality of education system.
- The valuation system of secondary and education system in Kerala is too liberal that, it is passing the students they are not able to read and write properly.

Suggestions for enhancing the quality of elementary teacher education programme:

Teacher educators and prospective teachers are not confident about the quality aspects of their institution. To save elementary teacher education system from deterioration of quality, should act swiftly. The following suggestions, investigator formulated based on the study will help the quality assurance of our elementary teacher education institutions.

- The method of teaching in the teacher education institutions should be reorganized according to the changing demand of education system and innovative measures should be introduced.
- The admission procedures of D.Ed. course should be completely restructured so that only those who have aptitude of teaching are able to take admission in this course as the increasing number of colleges of D.Ed. has made this course accessible for everybody.
- Now a day the number of self- financing colleges are mushrooming like shops and they have made it as their money making factory which detrimental for education in future. Therefore, for regular inspection should be done to ensure quality in teacher education. The affiliating bodies for teacher education should frame such parameters which can enhance the teacher education program in qualitative aspect rather than quantitative aspect.

- The training or the teaching practice of teacher trainees held in the school should be closely associated with teaching staff in education colleges in planning the content to be covered and method to be used by the teacher trainees to have useful implications for school rather than disturbing their routine schedule. Moreover, the real teaching practice should be supervised by the teachers in a systematic way so that it fulfils the objectives of teacher training.
- The whole system of education is changing at a greater speed. The teacher education department should conduct research on teaching curriculum and evaluation procedure in the regular university departments.
- Teacher educators must be well qualified and experienced with language proficiency. Teacher educators to be trained in the use of ICT.
- Professional development of teacher educators should be given more importance Refresher course should be organized frequently for teacher educators.
- Availability and condition of infrastructural and instructional facilities should be improved.
- The declining number of students in government schools also badly impacting the quality of practice teaching. Government should take necessary steps for attracting more students to government schools.

Conclusion:

From the current investigation it is clear that the elementary teacher education system in Kerala is suffering series of critical quality challenges, starting from the quality of freshly joined student teachers, in adequate qualification of teacher educators, to disregard from the governing bodies. With liberalisation and globalisation of economic activities, the demand for teacher education having quality at nationally and internationally acceptable standards has increased. Quality is not an act; it is a habit. It generally signifies the degree of excellence. Quality process should begin very early in the teacher training institutions to nurture qualified professional teachers. Based on the opinion of our teacher educators and trainees, we need to improve quality from recruiting faculty, selecting students to implementing modern managerial practices in institutions. Collective efforts from NCTE, SCERT, managers, principals, teacher educators and teacher trainees will undoubtedly improve the quality of our elementary teacher education system. Qualified professional teachers from good quality institutions will contribute greatly in building an excellent elementary education system as well.

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