

# Suggestive Systemic Reforms for Improving the Quality of Teachers

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## Abstract

The paper critically analyses the quality deterioration of the teacher preparation programme keeping the ultimate aim of teaching in mind. The qualities that a teacher should possess were discussed followed by the role and relevance of accreditation in maintaining quality. The shortcomings of accreditation are highlighted. The importance of attractive remuneration for teaching profession is stressed. The author tries to highlight the lacunas in teacher education programmes with a stress on the significance of support mechanism and professional development programmes for novice teachers. The role of teachers in the society should be kept in mind, right from the selection of teacher trainees to teacher education institutions till they are evaluated finally to make them fit for the purpose. The paper suggests a revamping of the teacher education programme as well as the accreditation procedures and stress that it should be more realistic.

**Key Words:** *Accreditation, quality, quality of teachers, teacher education*

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## Concept of quality

“No nation can rise above the quality of its education system” (National Policy on Education, 2005, as cited by Olakulehin 2007). This universally accepted statement underlines the significance of the quality of education systems for the development of nations across the globe. One among the crucial component that contributes to the quality of education system is its teachers. But from where these teachers are moulded? Answer is obvious: The teacher education institutions. So the nation’s development, could be economical, political or intellectual, whatever it may be depends on the academic accomplishment of the citizen of that nation and the corner stone of this concept is nothing but the quality of teacher preparation programmes.

When we discuss quality in the context of education, we consider it as a relative concept rather as an absolute. It is something, which is ascribed to it. That is, we can tell that a product/service is of good quality if it meets the specifications that have been laid down for it. Quality in this view is not

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the end in itself but a means by which the product is judged to be up to standard. In this view, the product or service must do what they claim to do and what their customers expect, which demands that, the product/service must be 'fit for their purpose'. Hence *measuring up to specification* and *meeting customer requirement* are the two aspects that come under the relative meaning of quality (Rao, 2007). If the learning strengthens the capacities of children to act progressively on their own behalf through the acquisition of relevant knowledge, useful skills and appropriate attitudes (Bernard, 1999), then we can say that the education is having good quality. No matter even if adequate facilities are available, the education of the students becomes ineffective unless there are teachers who have imagination and competence to get the children to use them properly (Sharma & Venkateshwarlu, 2007).

Do we have a real schema when we talk about the quality of teachers? It varies among individuals. In broad sense we can say that the highest quality teachers are those who, are capable of helping their students learn, and have deep mastery of both their subject matter and pedagogy (Darling, 1997). Some important traits that a student would like to be there in his/her teacher have been identified through research studies. Some of them are cheerfulness, good nature, and understanding and are capable of motivating them to work with pleasure and having a commanding respect. The viewpoint of students may not match with the views of head of the institutions or that of educationalists. In a study conducted by Clapp (as cited by Bennion, 2005), the educational administrators were asked to indicate ten most important qualities in a good teaching personality. Optimism, enthusiasm, sincerity and scholarship were some among the traits suggested. The Commission on Teacher Education (1938-43) appointed by the American Council on Education carried out an elaborate and exhaustive study on the qualities needed by teachers for the modern school. Based on this study 12 qualities were identified to be important for a successful teacher. Some of them are community mindedness, skill in cooperation, skill in mediating knowledge, understanding children and faith in the worth of teaching (as cited by Carri, 2012). Even though the study can be considered as outdated, the traits identified are still relevant. In the words of Joad, (as cited by Tiwari & Singh, 2008) "Teaching is not everybody's cup of tea". A teacher should possess a sterling character and certain physical, intellectual, social and emotional qualities, which are pre-requisite for success in teaching.

### **Pitfalls in quality assurance mechanisms**

Whether our quality assessment and accreditation procedures holds good in making our novice teachers in to a teacher who is capable of satisfying the demands of the various stakeholders of education, or at least, the most important stakeholder, the student? Is accreditation really doing any help in improving quality of teachers? I do agree to the significant contribution of accreditation to maintain a minimum standard of the institutions and the programmes offered. But it does not guarantee that the teachers coming out from those institutions which are accredited high are the best teachers and those novice teachers, who complete their teacher training from other institutions are good for nothing. Both institutional and programme accreditation, which are for accrediting entire institution and programme within an institution respectively (Kaplin & Lee, 2007) are the major accreditation procedures used to assure the standard of institutions including teacher education. I feel that its scope is limited when our aim is something beyond. Our aim is to develop 'fine tuned' teachers, who can make the students comfortable and happy and at the same time develop them in to future citizen who are able to lead a meaningful life both in individual and social perspective. They should be able to reach to their goals, through academic accomplishments, should be able to show empathy to (all types of) sufferers around them, take part in the process of development of the nation in a meaningful way, have the capacity to practice the values and enjoy the rich culture preached by the society and at the same time, should be able to respect and appreciate others. This has been rightly pointed out by Mahatma Gandhi in an article on education in *Harijan* in 1937, which read as: "By education I mean an all-round drawing out of the best in child and man-body, mind and spirit. Literacy is not the end of education or even the beginning." (as cited by Kumar, 2011). Does accreditation alone can help to achieve this objective? Accreditation is used to check the performance both quantity (increased access) and quality (relevance and excellence of academic programmes offered) of higher

education (NAAC, 2012). National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) further elaborates that the accreditation status indicates that the particular Higher Educational Institutions, meets the standards of quality as set by the Accreditation Agency, in terms of its performance, related to the educational processes and outcomes. An institution has to project their quality to attract good students and more funds (Mishra, 2006). An accredited institution can use their accreditation status as a strong hold in the never ending competition among institutions for good students (Carri, 2012). The trustworthiness of accreditation would again be questioned since it is not a continuous process and there is no mechanism by which the performance of an accredited institution is to be measured in between the accreditation cycles. The possibility of creating and presenting spurious and exaggerated data during peer team visit is not an impossible task for an unscrupulous institution (Carri, 2012).

## **Quality of Teachers**

All individuals and their needs, demands and aspirations are all differ from one another. A teacher should be able to cater the varying needs of individuals and at the same time should be able to inculcate a universal brotherhood in them. If a teacher succeeds in doing this, then he/she can be called as a 'good' teacher or a teacher having quality. When people describe teachers who had the greatest influence on them, they invariably describe teachers who were caring, passionate about their subject, and good at getting them to do their very best (Asia Society, 2011). It is now widely acknowledged that the most effective pathway to improved student learning outcomes is the quality of teaching, especially teachers' ability to motivate and facilitate such learning (Niland, 2009). Teacher quality is a function of several factors: teachers' status, remuneration, conditions of work and their academic and professional education (NCTE, 2009). From an international perspective, there is no dearth of policies regarding quality of teachers. Each year new policies are added to the quantum. But various policies lack interconnectedness. All operates in their own watertight compartments. We are in need of a coherent policy strategy that will work to enhance teacher quality. Important interconnections and the required evaluation of policies have yet to be forged (Hirsch, Koppich & Knapp, 2001). How we can have good quality teachers? This is the central challenge facing countries across the globe as they seek to create world-class education systems to prepare all their students for the fast-changing global knowledge economy (Asia Society, 2011). The issue is explicitly stated by Fred van Leeuwen, the general secretary of Education International in his opening remark during the International Summit on Teaching Profession (March 16-17, 2011). He mentioned that while there is a shared understanding about the importance of enhancing the quality of teachers, there is not necessarily agreement among all the stakeholders about either the definition of "quality" or how to measure it. He mentioned that passion and communication are the most essential ingredients of teaching, but are not easily measured.

The arguments so far throw light on the inability of different existing mechanisms to assure the quality of teachers. What we need is a holistic approach. Once our objective is clear, there cannot be any confusion regarding the action. In my view, the process of making of a teacher should have three broad aspects: firstly the selection of right people, then the provision of suitable training and finally on the job support.

## **Ground realities**

In many of the countries, teaching profession is the least favoured profession because of the meagre remuneration. Only if people are attracted to the job, we can think about the stringent selection procedures and training. Low teacher salaries have been viewed by many as a prime deterrent to attracting a large number of quality teachers (Hirsch, Koppich & Knapp, 2001). There are counter arguments too, that, in most countries, teacher salary is not related to the perceived quality of his or her work (Wikipedia, 2012). What I feel is that in normal cases, where the teachers are getting a moderate salary, there may not be a correlation between salary and quality. But in case of under paid teachers (which is common in private schools offering education without government's support), I strongly feel that there is a correlation between salary and quality, since under payment and lack of job security influence job satisfaction negatively (Anjaneyalu, 1968, Schmidt, 1976, et al.as cited by Rao, 2004). Marketing, engineering and IT professions when offering excellent pay packages for their employees, who might have a mere Bachelor's degree in the allied discipline, a teacher, who has to put

more years in his/her studies start with a very less salary. Average beginning teacher salaries are about \$7,500 less than the expected starting salary in marketing and \$15,000 less than that of computer scientists (American Federation of Teachers, 1999) Even though this finding is more than a decade old, it is still relevant. In India, a teacher in high school get a salary of about Rs. 95,000- 4,87,000 per year where as a software engineer in a private sector receive Rs. 2,44,000-13,72000 per annum (Pay scale Inc, 2012). Employers come in search of engineering graduates whereas teachers have to go from pillar to post to get a job. Then how teaching profession could be attractive? We always forget the fact that had there been no good teachers, there would not have efficient engineers and doctors! The first and foremost step towards quality improvement of teachers should be taken from the side of governments. The salary of teachers, who are putting the foundation stone on which the next generation grow, should be increased. It should be at least at par with the salary of civil servants. Among them, the primary teachers should be paid the most considering their crucial role in children's development. Once the job become financially lucrative, many of them opt for it.

### **Improving the quality of teachers: suggestive systemic reforms**

People who are selected into teacher preparation programs need to be able to handle challenging circumstances and contexts far beyond what they will receive in their training (Feiman-Nemser, 2003). Many countries have adopted an initial selection procedure to choose teacher aspirants. Casey and Childs (2007) determined that teacher preparation programs use grade point average (GPA), standardized test scores, written profiles, letters of reference and so on for selection of student teachers with more dependency on GPA. Some countries, like India, are considering the grade/mark that a student had secured in the graduate or post graduate degree level examination. But is these exams contribute in some way to identify the calibre of a person to become a good teacher? The pattern of recruitment of teacher aspirants should be revamped. Finland's approach of teacher aspirant selection can be considered as a good model in this context. Masters degree is mandatory to join for teacher education programme, even for primary teachers. Then the applicants must go through two examinations: content as well as pedagogy. This may not be applicable for all the countries, but an in-between path can easily be adopted. Keep the minimum qualifications laid down by various nations intact. Then make it sure that no students who are performing average or below average in the qualifying exam should not apply for teaching profession. By this way we can assure that the teacher aspirant's content knowledge. Then develop a teaching aptitude test suitable for the context of respective nations and administer it to the students centrally. Almost all the nations have the manpower to do this task. For example, India is conducting National Eligibility Test for selection of teachers to colleges and universities. The aptitude test can also be done in the same manner. The test's objectivity can be maintained if it is objective type and adopting Optical Mark Recognition (OMR) mechanism.

The quality of teacher depends on the content knowledge of teachers, the programme of teacher education which train them to become teachers and the personality traits of the student teachers (Carri, 2012). So the quality of the programme cannot be under estimated. The significance of induction (Ashby et al., 2008, Huling-Austin, 1988), the internship programme (teaching practice in real school settings) and curriculum of teacher education and the evaluation of student teachers are discussed by many in detail. The programme, that has to be transacted by various teacher education institutions if lacks quality, then our efforts would be futile. The quality deterioration of the teacher training programmes in India has been rightly pointed out by National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE), India in its Curriculum Framework for Teacher Education (2006):

... Teacher education institutes merely fulfil the formality of completing the prescribed number of 'lesson plans' with little concern for preparing teachers for constantly demanding and fluid class room situations. The rapid commercial mushrooming of private 'teacher education shops' has further accentuated such divides. (CFTE, 2006, pp. 18-19) .

The recent National Curriculum Frameworks for Teacher Education (NCFTE), 2009 brought out by NCTE states that the teacher education programmes in India are becoming weak both in theory and practice. This quality deterioration of teacher education programme can be seen across the globe. Desimone, Smith, Baker, and Ueno (2005) found that the “gross teaching patterns” across 38 nations are almost same. Can assessment and accreditation is able to contribute anything to quality improvement of teacher education programmes? The studies of Borman and Kimball (2005) and Rivkin, Hanushek, and Kain (2005) suggested that constructing measures of teacher quality is a challenging task because of the lack of consensus on what constitutes a qualified teacher. The accrediting agencies use measurable parameters to standardise a programme/ institution. But the quality of teacher is predominantly built up around constructs which are difficult to measure. The available literatures on quality assessment of teachers mainly depend on standardised tests for doing the same. How far is this able to catch the reality? In this context my suggestion is that let the accreditation procedures be there as a benchmarking mechanism for the inputs that has to be there in every teacher education programmes. But what we need is a meaningful implementation of the programme. Never let the student teachers alienated from practice. Theory and practice should be blended in such a manner that the student teachers should be able to develop their knowledge and understanding gained in the teacher education institutions in to application level. Provide opportunities to use their higher order thinking skills (HOTS). The significance and value of HOTS is clearly mentioned by various researchers such as Carrol, 1989; Cotton, 1997; Ennis, 1993; Glaser & Resnick, 1991; Haladyna, 1997; Howe & Warren, 1989; Huberty & Davis, 1998; Kauchak & Eggen, 1998; Kerka, 1986; King, 1997; Marzano, Brandt, Hughes, Jones, Presseisen, Rankin, & Suhor, 1988; Patrick, 1986; Siowck-Lee, 1995; Young, 1997 (as cited by King, Goodson & Rohani n.d.). This will contribute much towards a change in the outlook of student teachers and their developing teaching abilities.

The next mile stone to achieve is a revamping of evaluation pattern and system of teacher education programme. It was found through researches that the teacher evaluation systems are incapable of measuring teacher quality accurately because they have failed to discriminate effective and ineffective teachers, and have not aided in developing a highly skilled teacher workforce (as cited by Marzano, 2012). The evaluation system followed in teacher education programmes (in India) is too information-oriented, excessively quantitative and lacks comprehensiveness (NCTE, 2009). Our evaluation paradigms of teacher education programme have to be overhauled. NCTE (2009) in its NCFTE again points out that the present evaluation protocol has no place for evaluating the development of attitudes, dispositions, habits and interests that are significant for a teacher. Even though the document specifically speaks about Indian context, it is true with other nations too. The HOTS should find a place in the evaluation. The aim of evaluation should not only to measure the content knowledge but should check the required level of development of a student teacher in to a novice teacher also. Both measurement and development are important aspects of teacher evaluation (Marzano, 2012). Both issues should be addressed by a good evaluation strategy but main stress should be on development rather measurement.

Teacher preparation programme provide a license for a novice teacher to teach which is almost similar to the issue of a driving license. The later is more practice oriented and the former, theory oriented. The real practice of teachers starts when they join in schools as teachers. A rash and reckless driver's license can be cancelled, but what about teachers who spoil a whole generation? Teacher education programme is not the end but is only the beginning. They will face all the challenges of teaching when they join as novice teachers in schools. Traditionally, novice teachers are given the heaviest workloads and the most challenging classes, receive minimal support from administration, often struggle to deal with student discipline problems, feel a lack of influence on school policy, and receive low compensation (Clark, 2011). Now they are entering in to the next round of 'storm and stress' which in another context they had faced in their adolescence. During adolescence they had their parents, teachers and peers to guide and direct, but now they are alone. It is also mentioned that the real test of the skills and abilities of teacher candidates is not at the completion of their training, but when these teachers begin to teach varied and diverse learners within unanticipated circumstances and contexts (Clark, 2011). Need of supervision and guidance to novice teachers by senior teachers worth

mentioning. Novice teachers should strictly be under the supervision of senior teachers at least for a year. Quoting Robert Frost, a novice teacher too has “miles to go before” they become worthy teachers. In some high-performing countries, teachers begin professional service with one or two years of heavily supervised teaching— often receiving a reduced teaching load—and are mentored by master teachers (Asia Society, 2011). Lesson study method, where a group of teachers review their lessons and make improvements, is adopted in Japan. This will provide an opportunity for self reflection too. Singapore also has provision for 100 hours professional development in a year for teachers. But Finland believes in selection of right persons for teaching and providing right training and then provides the teachers with full autonomy. (Asia Society, 2011). When there is a mentor teacher, who can guide and support the novice teachers in their routine teaching assignments, novice teachers would be able to work more efficiently. When I started teaching for the first time, I got a mentor teacher (of course, it was not a mandate but I was fortunate enough to get someone). It helped me a lot to understand the system and to develop an acceptable work culture.

If we really want to develop quality of schooling, the quality of teachers should be improved. It calls for a better visualisation of the requirements and the goals of the nation. We need to take action. The job of a teacher is more prestigious than any other job, I believe, and the educated people should be attracted to it. Make the job promising by providing better salaries. Select the aspirants judiciously. We do not want lots and lots of trained professionals. We need trained ‘teachers’ who can properly facilitate and guide the child towards a developed and successful adult by providing inputs for their all-round development. (Carri, 2012). Strict selection blended with a meaningful training and evaluation surely helps for quality improvement of our teachers. If we can provide on the job support at least for some time, I am sure that the teachers’ quality will improve manifold from its present level and we can provide the best teachers to our next generation. I do not feel that a standalone assessment and accreditation will not hold good to do this task. It has been forecasted by various government agencies across the world that each country is in need of more number of teachers. This does not mean that we should sacrifice quality at the cost of quantity. But a good teacher, I feel, even without any support mechanisms can do miracles.

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