December 1994

Elementary teacher education in Pakistan: What is needed

Yatta Kanu
Aga Khan University, Institute for Educational Development, Karachi

Muhammad Memon
Aga Khan University, Institute for Educational Development, Karachi

Follow this and additional works at: http://ecommons.aku.edu/pakistan_ied_pdck

Recommended Citation
Available at: http://ecommons.aku.edu/pakistan_ied_pdck/116
ELEMENTARY TEACHER EDUCATION IN PAKISTAN: WHAT IS NEEDED

Introduction

Public education is an issue which carries serious consideration in most countries. In the developing countries, especially, the past two decades have seen much attention being paid to the improvement of the quality of basic education in primary schools through the improvement of many facets of education (e.g. more and better school buildings, better teaching and learning resources, better teacher preparation, curriculum improvement, more community involvement in schools, etc.).

Among these facets teacher education has been identified as the single most important variable in any effort aimed at improving the quality of education. The assumption undergirding the emphasis on teacher education is that the quality of education which children receive is directly linked to the knowledge, intelligence and the professional skills, attitudes and beliefs of teachers. In short if young people are to experience the best education possible, we must provide the best education and training to those who will teach them.

In Pakistan the educational system has been described as being "in a state of crisis". (USAID BRIDGES project). The predicament of

*Aga Khan University Karachi, Pakistan.
teacher education, within this dismal scenario, is particularly severe, requiring immediate attention to the type and quality of the initial teacher preparation which teacher training colleges provide and ensure that practising teachers continue to gain access to professional development opportunities.

The newly established Institute for Educational Development (IED) at the Aga Khan University in Karachi is playing several interventionist roles to address the acute and appalling problems in the educational system of Pakistan. These roles include providing in-service education for practising teachers (through an intensive 18 months master's degree programme), working directly with schools to improve school contexts, and conducting research related to teaching and teacher education in Pakistan and other developing countries. During the months of March and April 1995 the IED carried out a research among two government primary teacher training colleges in Karachi. The purpose of the research was to identify and describe the existing learning and instructional milieus of Government elementary teachers' colleges in Pakistan and, through that means, provide baseline data which might serve as a starting point for intervention (where necessary) in order to improve the quality of teacher education offered in elementary teacher training colleges.

Problems

Apart from data collected on staff characteristics (see page 4), duration of the teacher education programme, certification procedures and the general ethos of the colleges the following questions were investigated during the research:

1. What selection criteria do the colleges follow in recruiting candidates for the programme?

2. How do lecturers (teacher trainers), college principals, managers and students perceive the role of the school and therefore, that of teachers?
3. What courses are offered in the programme and how are they delivered?

4. To what extent do the skills and competencies offered in the programme help prospective teachers in coping with actual classroom teaching in Pakistan?

5. What kind of resources and opportunities exist to support teaching and learning and the development of the teacher trainers?

6. How is the teaching practice organized and how are novice teachers inducted into the teaching profession?

7. What measures, if any, can be taken in order to improve the quality of the teacher education programmes offered in elementary colleges?

Research Methodology

Selection of Colleges

Two government elementary teachers' colleges located in Karachi were selected for this research. Both colleges offer the one year Primary Teaching Certificate and the Certificate in Teaching. The colleges select 75% of their candidates on merit basis; the remaining 25% are selected from among untrained teachers who are already practising, on the recommendation of the District Education Office and The Directorate of School Education and in consultation with the heads of the colleges. The researchers' criteria in selecting the colleges included the following: number of years for which the college has been established (one old and the other new); male-female variation (one college catered for only male students and the other for females); similarity of courses offered; willingness of the college to participate in the study; easy access in terms of distance.

Data Gathering: multiple techniques of data gathering were used for this research. They were: Questionnaires, interviews, non-participant
observation of classroom lessons, informal conversations and examination of documents such as the colleges’ curricula and past test papers.

Questionnaires on staff characteristics and items based on the research question were distributed to all the staff of the two colleges (N=32). 2 college principals, 12 lecturers and 8 students volunteered to participate in the interviews and informal conversations. A total of 10 classroom lessons were observed over a period of two days.

Data Analysis

This was a baseline study to provide information which might be useful for intervening (where necessary) to improve elementary teacher education in Pakistan. Data consisted of answers to questionnaires, interview transcripts, and field notes from observations and informal conversations. The use of different data collection methods as well as different periods for data gathering made possible the comparison and validation of data (method and time triangulation). At the pre-analysis stage data obtained through the questionnaires were analyzed by using quantitative content analysis. This was done mainly to achieve some "orderliness and a certain degree of formalization of the analysis process before preceding to deeper analysis and interpretation of results" (Miles and Huberman, 1984, P.20). After the information from the questionnaire results had been analysed the findings were compared and complemented with the findings of the interviews and conversations.

The questionnaire and interview data were first classified into categories based on the research questions. Next, the information from the interviews and conversations on each category was put together on paper, read several times, analyzed and interpreted. The analyses and interpretations were guided by theoretical assumptions derived from current literature on teacher education and the researchers’ own knowledge about teacher education in the developing countries and their long experiences as teachers and teacher educators. Data from
the observations and documents were used to compare and complement results derived from the analysis of the questionnaires, interviews and the informal conversations and they served as a frame of reference or context for the interpretation of data.

Findings and Discussions

Several findings, highlighting the need for improvement in order to achieve better quality teacher preparation resulted from the research. A few of these findings which are considered salient are succinctly presented here.

Staff Characteristics

For the study, staff was defined as staff members of the college whose assignments included activities deliberately intended to prepare candidates for the occupation of teaching. Among these are principals of the colleges, lecturers, cooperation teachers and supervisors of student teachers.

Characteristics included the staff’s academic and professional qualifications, teaching experience, knowledge, skills; attitudes, commitment and dispositions.

The study revealed that the academic qualification of the staff included B.A., B.Sc., B.Ed. and M.Ed. all obtained from universities and colleges in Pakistan. 60% (N=19) of them were professionally trained teachers while the rest were not. Among these, 40% (N=13) considered their qualifications relevant to the work they were doing (i.e. teacher educators) but they would welcome additional training through in-service. Some were teaching courses for which they had no academic or professional qualification and when asked why this was the case, it was revealed that the principal had asked them to teach these courses because there was no one in the college qualified to teach them (e.g. child Psychology was taught by a graduate in Chemistry; Social Studies was taught by a graduate in
Biology; English Language Arts was taught by a Science teacher chosen to teach English because his spoken English was considered to be good).

All of the lecturers teaching courses for which they were not trained (N=8) thought that they needed training in the subjects they were required to teach - especially in the content and methods areas.

80% (N=10) of the 12 lecturers interviewed did not have any background in primary school teaching and had not been specifically trained as teacher educators. They expressed the desire to experience training in primary methods and teacher education because they did not have access to professional texts such as educational journals and articles, research reports or attendance at conferences and discussions where professional issues are dealt with.

Courses Offered and Teachers’ Knowledge

The courses offered by the two colleges included English, Mathematics, Social Studies and Science as well as foundation courses such as Perspectives of Education, Child Development and School Organization. The research revealed that the knowledge of the lecturers in their various subject areas was limited, sometimes inaccurate and most times out dated due to lack of resources such such as current literature and lack of professional development opportunities. Social Studies teaching, for instance, was limited to the material that was written in the textbook which was being studied and lecturers did not have any idea about how the curriculum of Social Studies could be enriched to supplement the prescribed textbooks.

In Mathematics a similar situation was observed where lecturers revealed clear gaps in thier knowledge about certain mathematical concepts such as fractions and ratio.
Gaps were also observed in the teaching approaches used by the lecturers. Teaching consisted mainly of the transmission of information from textbook to student. For instance what little material was available on Social Studies was simply transmitted to students in a non-problematic manner. Skills such as group-work, cooperative learning, conducting inquiry, decision-making and developing democratic values, all of which are required in order to enable students to function adequately in today's world were markedly absent in the preparation of the prospective Social Studies teachers. Science was taught mainly theoretically with not much opportunity for practical work. Mathematics was taught through a method where the prospective teachers generally followed the worked examples of the lecturer rather than the lecturer providing classroom opportunities for the teachers to construct their own meaning of mathematical concepts (an approach which they could use in their own teaching after the programme).

Clearly there was need for lecturers to upgrade both their knowledge of their subjects and the strategies used to teach the subjects.

Assessment and evaluating procedures

The learning of the prospective teachers was tested mainly by testing how well they had mastered the information transmitted to them by the lecturers. Testing for deeper conceptual understanding by asking higher order thinking questions was not observed as part of assessment in these colleges. This suggests the need for training in testing and questioning skills. In addition there were no mechanisms in place for evaluation the teacher education programmes being offered in the colleges. Provision should be made for such an evaluation in order to assure quality. While external evaluations may be costly and sometimes unreliable, alternative means of evaluation could be employed. For instance, the prospective teachers studying in the programme and the schools which later employ them could be asked for their views and opinions about the quality of the programme.
The teaching practicum and induction of novice teachers

These areas were also seen to require improvement. Interviews with principals and lecturers revealed that there were no specific schools identified to work with the elementary colleges where this research was carried out. Students were sent to any schools which would have them for the teaching practicum. In many cases schools refused to have them. The schools which accepted them had no knowledge about the type of teacher preparation provided by the colleges. As such ideas which the student teachers brought to the schools were either rejected or left untried. The supervision which student teachers experienced from their visiting lecturers was mechanical and devoid of constructive feedback which could lead to the improvement of the prospective teachers. Once the teachers graduate from the teacher education programmes, no support system is provided for them by the colleges or schools where they start teaching. They learn the practical aspects of teaching on their own and, in my experience, such learning could sometimes be so daunting and frustrating that some of the new teachers abandon the teaching profession. This suggests the need for current approaches to supervision and induction through which meaningful feedback is provided for the development of the prospective teachers and a caring, friendly and supportive atmosphere when they start teaching.

Staff and Students Perception of the Role of Schools

From interviews with lecturers, principals and students, and looking at the colleges' curricula it can be concluded that teacher education focused on preparing teachers to pass on to students textbook information, and the values and norms in Pakistani society. This perception largely sees the school's role as that of cultural reproduction. Emphasis in teacher preparation was, therefore, on prospective teachers mastering required information and becoming skilled at the techniques and strategies required to transmit such information, norms and values to students. The role of the school and, therefore, the teacher as social reformer and change agent through reflection on practice and the initiation of change did not surface as a
goal for teacher education during the interviews and conversations. Since the achievement of an improved society through appropriate educational practice should be one of the major aims of education in any society, it is suggested that lecturers be given training opportunities which foster such conceptions of education.

**General ethos of the colleges**

The quality or tone of the relationships among lecturers, between lecturers and students and between lecturers and principals needs improvement. When lecturers spoke about each other, they seemed to see each other as competitors rather than supporting each other and sharing ideas, materials and teaching problems. A hierarchical type of relationship, which discourages mutual respect and cooperation was observed to exist between lecturers and students and between principals and lecturers. Training, therefore, is needed in ways of fostering more collegial and supportive relationships among lecturers and more respect for students.

**Resources**

The two colleges seemed to have certain adequate infrastructures such as buildings with large classrooms and office spaces. However, meaningful teacher education requires a lot more than large buildings. There should be reading materials to support teaching and learning, photocopying services to provide reading materials for lecturers and students, computers, over-head projectors for effective classroom teaching, videos and television sets to bring the world outside to bear on classroom teaching. Such resources, however, were found to be lacking in the colleges we studied. Lecturers (teacher trainers) also revealed that very little or no opportunities existed for their professional development.

**Skills and competencies offered in the programme**

All the prospective teachers interviewed (8) expressed the need for more in-depth knowledge in their subject areas especially in
Mathematics and Science in order to be able to teach these subjects well. They did not necessarily expect to get all of such knowledge from their lecturers but if resources such as reading materials were available, they could improve their own knowledge and thus enrich the existing information in the textbooks. A desire for a variety of instructional strategies was also expressed by both prospective and experienced teachers in the programme (as opposed to relying mainly on the transmission mode of teaching). They wanted to make classroom teaching and learning more interesting. The teachers also expressed the desire to be taught how to create their own teaching/learning aids in order to enhance their teaching performance.

Conclusion

As the title of this study suggests, the researchers were concerned with what was needed to improve teacher education in government elementary teachers' colleges in Pakistan. As such, data collection mainly focused on what was lacking in the preparation of elementary school teachers. Such a focus in no way denigrates the tremendous amount of good work done in the colleges under difficult conditions such as lack of resources, low staff morale and generally poor conditions of work and service for staff. The study is significant in that it provides baseline data which might serve as a starting point for any attempt to improve the education of elementary school teachers in Pakistan.

Reference