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A paradigm shift on policy and regulations of teacher education in India: An analysis

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Abstract

Education is a very important aspect for development of any nation and it depends on the quality of teachers. Creating such teachers is a major challenge for any governments across the globe today. Systematic and well planned Teacher education programmes are required today. Teacher education programme has to be studied, reformed, rethought and reoriented today. It's a challenge for every country to provide well trained and effective teachers; it is an area of concern for degrading values and questions about purpose and goals of education for society; and it is a research problem involving educational questions, conditions, issues and concerns. In India, during the pursuit of this reforming and restructuring and in the light of various policy papers and documents like- Right to education act 2009, NCTE regulations 2009, National Knowledge Commission report, NCF (2005), Acharya Rammurti Samiti Report (1990), Kothari commission report (1964-66) etc., the Teacher education curriculum and regulations have witnessed a paradigm shift in recent years. Though some of the problems have also been there like updated curriculum, duration and quality of internship, in-service teacher education, lack of practical aspects and teacher education through distance mode are debatable issues. The paper reviews and discusses policy and regulatory changes or reforms in teacher education in India that have taken place in the last one decade, arguing that it is a highly contested ground in India that is closely attached with the way the academic networks and coalitions work in the field.

Keywords: Teacher education, policy & regulatory changes

1. Introduction

Teacher education is a major concern globally. The policy contestations in the area, that are shaped by a lack of consensus on what constructs adequate teacher preparation, are progressively intensifying with the restructuring of teacher education across different contexts. The concept of teacher preparation is being debated with a range of disagreements on the content, standards and nature of teacher education is being discussed in various other countries. At the same time, quality of good teacher is increasingly being seen as an imperative to meet the changing landscape of educational and social aspirations and the demands of the global 'knowledge economy.' Thus teacher education is getting more attention in the policy space. These matters having direct bearing on teacher education policy and have highlighted that policy decision-making in teacher education is not just an implication driven exercise but is highly and fundamentally political (Cochran-Smith 2013)^[2]. This analysis also applies to the Indian teacher education regulatory and policy contexts.

Teacher education in India is regulated by the NCTE that gained a statutory status in 1993. Its main objective is to attain planned and coordinated development of teacher education through the development and implementation of Regulations (Norms and Standards) for teacher education institutions seeking recognition for starting teacher preparation programmes. Until 2014 there were three i.e. 2005, 2007 & 2009 successive regulations of the NCTE, each varying from the previous. The reasons for developing new regulations have not been stated publicly by the NCTE. However, the fourth set of regulations of 2014 was much talked about in the public domain.

This regulatory change emanated from two related national frameworks for reforms in teacher education -the National Curriculum Framework for Teacher Education (NCFTE), 2009 (NCTE 2009), and the report of the Justice Verma Commission (JVC) on teacher education in 2012 (MHRD 2012). These two of are set against the backdrop of larger education policy transitions in India. Two of these significant transitions are given below.

2. Major reforms in Teacher Education in India

Firstly, the challenges of expansion and of assurance of quality in school education system have made structural modifications or reforms in teacher education an imperative. Education

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sector of India has undergone unprecedented changes since the last national education policy (1986–92), and especially since the introduction of the economic reforms of the 1990's. In this duration, there has been a massive rise in the social and economic aspirations leading to multifold increase in the demand for education across the unequal social fabric of India. Thus there has been expansion and diversification of education at all levels accompanied with concerns about “quality” and “equity” in education across levels, especially at the school level.

In this situation, there are two major policy-related developments in school education that have come about in the past decade (having substantial implications for teacher education). These are: the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009 (RTE), and the National Curriculum Framework 2005 (NCF) (National Council for Educational Research and Training, 2005). On one hand, RTE is meant to operationalise Article 21A of the Constitution of India that makes elementary education a legal right of the children of ages 6 to 14 years. On the other hand, NCF 2005 outlines the constituents of ‘quality’ of the educational or curricular experience that elementary schools should provide. Both the documents together aspire for a child-centred environment in elementary classrooms. In this relation, JVC and NCFTE Report chart the corresponding revamping of teacher education in the country to reform teaching–learning in schools. Both these frameworks represent how the concerns for quality in school education have given momentum to the long-pending reform in teacher education in the country.

Secondly, the concerns that NCFTE and JVC report emanate from are not only structural in nature but also emerge from regulatory issues that have ramifications for managing commercial interests (and thereby quality) in the field. These two frameworks are mainly informed by the fact that as of today teacher education is “predominantly in the private sector, accounting for about 92 percent each of teacher education institutions and student intake. About 88 percent of teacher education institutions offering diploma programmes and about 96 percent of those offering Bachelors of Education are in the private sector” (Menon and Mathew 2016: 150). The JVC Report, in particular, was set up by the Supreme Court in view of the case regarding granting of recognition to 291 private teacher education colleges in Maharashtra “to examine the entire range of issues which have a bearing on improving the quality of teacher education as well as improving the regulatory functions of the NCTE” (MHRD 2012: 3).

After the submission of the Justice Verma Commission Report, the Supreme Court constituted a committee to develop an action plan that outlines the processes and timelines required for the implementation of the recommendations. Following this action plan, NCTE constituted various sub-committees, including sub-committees for designing curriculum frameworks for various teacher education programmes, to work on the different recommendations. This resulted in the NCTE's Regulations (Norms and Standards), 2014 (NCTE 2014a). Brief summary of the major reforms suggested in NCFTE and JVC Report that were also pursued by the NCTE sub-committees is presented below.

2.1 Broad Contours of Reforms

In spirit, both NCFTE and JVC Report envision professionalization of teacher education in the country.

There is also a fair degree of overlap in the recommendations of the two documents, particularly with regard to the curriculum for teacher education programmes. In fact, Justice Verma Commission Report recommends that NCFTE be taken as the guiding framework for curriculum reforms. This correspondence between JVC Report and NCFTE (and NCF and RTE) has been analysed as an outcome of the overlap in the members constituting the committees or/and the academic networks among the committee members (Verma 2015) ^[14]. As a result, both the documents broadly suggest the changes that have been described below.

2.2 Reform in the curricula

NCFTE explains its aim being to provide “directions towards change in the structural aspects of teacher education at elementary, secondary and post-graduate levels” (NCTE 2009: iv). The framework visualises a change in the profile of teacher education in the country by proposing reforms in the contents, teaching-learning and professional rigour of the curricula. These reforms have been contextualised by NCFTE in the problems of the ‘conventional’ teacher education that are seen as being of awful curricular quality (2009: 52). The main principles of curriculum reforms that were proposed included the following: (i) A holistic approach to curriculum; (ii) an emphasis on engagement with theory and foundational perspectives on education; (iii) preparation for future teachers to be reflective, humane and professional practitioners; (iv) longer and intense internship/school experience; (v) preparing would-be teachers to organise teaching-learning in a child-centred manner; (vi) stage specificity in training for various school levels and (vii) location of teacher education programmes in interdisciplinary situation (2009: 23-24 and 52-55). The details and modalities of these curricular ideas were operationalised by different NCTE subcommittees in the context of their respective mandated areas of curriculum design. To a great degree the constitution of these subcommittees represented or retained the academic networks or coalitions seen in NCFTE and JVC.

2.3 Increased duration of teacher education programmes

From NCFTE possibilities of two kinds of initial teacher education programmes emerge: (i) second bachelor's degree of two-year for initial teacher preparation at the elementary and secondary school levels; and (ii) four-year (or more) integrated first bachelors model for both the levels. In addition, JVC also points towards the necessity for two-year Master of Education programmes and NCFTE recommends sandwiched postgraduate courses of three years' duration towards developing a specialised cadre of senior secondary school teachers and teacher educators. Before these regulatory changes, the durations of Masters of Education and Bachelors programme were one-year each. After the year 2014, the duration of these programmes was enhanced to two-years each across the country. This recommendation is based on the assumption that longer duration programmes will provide sufficient time and opportunity for thorough engagement of the future professionals-in view of a larger objective of professionalising teacher education programme.

2.4 Reformulation of the regulatory mechanism

The changes recommended in Justice Verma Commission covered a broad range so as to reshape the way NCTE functions. These included amendments in the NCTE Act,

1983, establishing a vigilance cell within NCTE, tenure of the chairperson and appointment of the NCTE Council, and changing the norms and standards. These regulatory changes as well as those introduced through the norms and standards for different teacher education programmes designed by different subcommittees of NCTE also became the core of debates and discussions. While these debates were not resolved, they brought out the complexity of the regulatory structure, changes and decision-making process.

2.5 Upgrading teacher education programmes

NCFTE and JVC both recommended that to address pre-service quality issues, teacher education (especially elementary level) be upgraded to the level of degree programmes as against largely being offered through diploma programmes. The stated rationale of JVC and NCFTE for this was that since a large number of present institutions are stand-alone institutions they remain isolated from an interdisciplinary ecosystem that can only be provided in a university. This recommendation put forth an uphill task for both the NCTE and the central and state governments as such upgradation of programmes (mostly offered by private institutions) calls for structural changes.

3 Teacher Education Policy: Political and Under Contestations

At each stage of arriving at the regulations pertaining to the above reforms through the work of different subcommittees, there were debates to the extent of being seen as “wars” regarding the nature of systemic overhaul & future directions of teacher education. On one hand, these debates pointed towards rampant commercial interests in teacher education and poor regulation in the sector by the NCTE reflecting adversely on the quality of teacher education programme. On the other hand, these also demonstrated that regulation and policymaking in teacher education is a highly disputed field with many conflicting interest groups (such as professional collectives of teacher educators, the private sector, and sectors within governments) jostling for more control and a greater voice (Menon and Mathew 2016: 164).

Qualifications and Requirements for BEIEd and DEIEd Programmes (NCTE 2014c). Along with these debates, the recommendations of JVC presented several challenges or issues. Two of the prominent ones included-(i) curricular revisions and (ii) upgradation of stand-alone institutions/programmes to university level.

The upgradation of stand-alone teacher education institutions to university level has not yet been started. As can be expected, the proposed upgradation of institutions to university level would not be a simple linear process. This is mainly because the teacher education system is networked with a variety of institutions and structures (for instance, with examination boards and teacher recruitment systems), and the changes that JVC Report proposes would need a complete overhaul in these networks and structures. Also, the important variations in the teacher education system and networks across different states makes it difficult to adopt a standard route to implement the change.

While the upgradation in public-funded teacher education institutions may be achievable in a phased manner, it is particularly challenging in the case of private institutions that constitute the majority in the system. This is because it will pose challenges of upgradation of faculty and institutional contexts of curriculum transaction and

development, and a probable shift in institutional location. All of these have considerable cost implications. The option of phasing out all stand-alone institutions and launching fresh teacher education in interdisciplinary environments potentially has a greater number of problems, particularly of political nature given the private stakes in the sector. At the very moment, the assumption underlying this recommendation that the programmes located in interdisciplinary environments utilise their ecosystem well, may not be unequivocally correct (Srinivasan 2015) ^[13].

The challenge related to curricular reformation originated from the fact that this was the first time that programme content became a subject matter of the NCTE regulations. It is difficult to achieve any curricular “reform” within a prescriptive framework. The NCTE regulations for individual programmes were detailed to the extent of stipulating course titles, weightages apportioned to various components of the programme, transaction modalities and qualifications for teaching different courses. Teacher education programmes as envisioned in JVC Report and NCFTE would have demanded that teacher education institutions engage in conceptualisation of the programmes afresh. Modifying the existing curriculum by a mere expansion in the existing programmes (in terms of time-duration, addition in the number of courses, etc.) would have diluted quality and rigour, and would reproduce the existing problems. Thus, the decision of regulating the broad template of curricula appears to be a logical route. However, this involves a cautious consideration and fine balancing so as to ensure institutional autonomy in curriculum design. It also requires engaging with the concern that a simple adoption of the given curricular prescriptions would not lead to a reform and transformation that is generated from within the institutions and thus may be difficult to sustain in the long run.

4. Conclusion

The policy direction in teacher education programme is set for another round of changes. The Govt. of India is drafting a new National Education Policy that will revisit reforms in teacher education. From a study of this National Education Policy related documents made public by the government, it has come across that the JVC and NCFTE approach has been overlooked therein (Sharma 2016) ^[1]. Also, as per media reports the process of revising the teacher education curriculum and regulations is on simultaneously in the NCTE (Economic Times 2018). There are indications of a key reshaping of the key ideas that were instituted through the recent regulations—an example of which can be seen in the new regulations for a four-year teacher education announced by the NCTE in 2018 (NCTE 2018). It is unlikely that these new developments are only omissions and responses to some needs and further help in understanding how teacher education policy and regulatory decision-making in India is not only a neutral domain of knowledge; rather it is essentially political and constantly under contestations.

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