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TEACHER TRAINING IN ODL MODE:WEAKNESSES, STRENGTHS AND SUGGESTIONS

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Introduction:

When the country realized the significance of Education for All, there came up the dearth in the number of teachers in the country, And Education is considered as the backbone of any society and is accepted as the fundamental right of each individual. Teacher training programme is an important aspect for any education system. Due to the limited resources in any common teacher training programme, the teacher training programme through the open distance learning are more relevant now a days. Only enlightened competent and emancipated teacher can meet the aspirations of society by providing quality education to learner. This is being possible only if teachers are well trained through effective teacher education programmes. The standard of teacher education programmes determines the quality of training provided to teachers. The maintenance of standard and quality in teacher education programmes has of- late become more challenging in view of the demand for training from large number of teachers. This demand cannot be fulfilled by formal teacher training institutes, but can be met through distance education. However doubts about the teacher education programmes through distance mode persist. Therefore it was felt desirable to mode in a phased manner. On the basis of the findings, suggestions for improvements in the major aspects like faculty strength, preparation of quality course material and its delivery by strengthen student support services and through effective monitoring and evaluation system have been offered. It has been further suggested that a critical mass in the faculty of education as suggested by National Council of Teacher Education (NCTE) is needed to ensure professional inputs quality maintenance. This article interrogated the possibilities of teacher education through ODL that can generate long-term and sustainable outcomes for learners, their families and their communities in India.

The Problem:

Teacher education and open and distance learning (ODL) are separately complex and critically important fields of endeavour. Used together, they have the potential to enhance the effective, efficient and equitable provision of education and to maximise access to such provision by various categories of disadvantaged learners. What are the challenges to use ODL to design, implement, evaluate and enhancing teacher education? This article takes up this fundamental question from varied perspectives. We have space here to sketch only a broad overview of the situation. If we turned to the six goals of Education for All as outlined in the Dakar Framework for Action (UNESCO 2000), we perceive some of the complexity of the challenges facing efforts to attain those goals:

1. Expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantages children;
2. Ensuring that by 2015 all children, particularly girls, children in difficult circumstance and those belonging to ethnic minorities, have access to and complete free and compulsory primary

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education of good quality;

3. Ensuring that the learning needs of all young people and adults are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life skills programmes;
4. Achieving a 50% improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015, especially for woman and equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults;
5. Eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2015 and achieving gender equality in education by 2015, with a focus on ensuring girls' full and equal access to and achievement in basic education of good quality; and
6. Improving all aspects of the quality of education and ensuring excellence of all so that recognised and measurable learning outcomes are achieves by all, especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills.

While these are clearly highly diverse statements of intention traversing a widely ranging terrain, they are linked by common reliance on a highly skilled teaching force attentive to the specific needs of these various categories of learners, and able to deploy strategies that are successful in meeting those needs.

This reliance in turn relies on the teachers' own needs- in terms of initial pre-service training and continuing professional development- being fulfilled. According to UNESCO's Institute for Statistics (2009), half of the world's countries (i.e., 96 out of 195) need to expand their stock of teachers significantly if they are to enrol all primary school age children by 2015. Sub- Sahara Africa has the greatest need for teachers: its stock of teachers needs to be increased to 3.7 million by 2015(indicating a gap of 1.2 million teachers), if the Education for All goals is to be met by 2015. Similarly, the Arab states region will require 282,000 additional primary school teachers by 2015, while South and West Asia will require 240,000 additional teachers. Enter ODL, while it is important not to see ODL as a panacea that can redress existing socio-economic inequities and political instability easily, the opportunities for large-scale educational provision afforded by information and communication technology (ICT) and other technologies deserve to be recognised and considered carefully. Moreover, it is not only the technological dimension that is significant: ODL is designed to break the demand for face to face attendance at a particular institution, which places additional obstacles in the way of streamlined access to such education. This form of learning is therefore intimately connected to efforts to democratise educational provision. Again, enthusiastic and energetic teachers are needed, both as participants in and purveyors of ODL. Sharma (2001) concluded the maintenance of standards and quality of teacher education programme, this demand can fulfilled by formal teacher training institute, but can be met through distance education. On the basis of the findings, suggestions for improvements in the major aspects like faculty strength, preparation of quality course material and its delivery by strengthening student support service through effective monitoring and evaluation system have been offered.

Need and Importance:

According to the UNESCOs' report (2009) Institute for statistics (USIS) projecting the Global Demand for Teachers: Meeting the Goal of Universal Primary Education by 2015, 10.3 million teachers will be needed worldwide by 2015 if universal primary education is to be attained. The USIS report (2009) observed that: "Of the 10.3 million

teachers needed, 8.1 million will be deployed to maintain the current capacity of education systems. About 2.2 million recruits will be needed to expand education systems in order to achieve Universal Primary Education. In other words, one in five teachers that need to be hired by 2015 will be part of global efforts towards EFA. This reflects the massive investment which is required by governments. This perspective highlights the dramatic burden for Sub-Sahara region. The region needs to recruit and train about 1.1 million teachers to maintain the current situation in the classroom, which already falls short in terms of education quality. But to attain UPE, these countries must recruit an additional 1.3 million teachers, bringing the total to 2.4 million. In short they will need to recruit almost as many teachers in just eight years as are currently teaching in classroom across the region."

This huge need for teachers in India, Africa and other developing countries is alarming if viewed in the context of the limited capacity of teacher education institutions to address it while simultaneously upgrading the large proportion of untrained or unqualified teachers already in the system and providing adequate opportunities for teachers' continuing professional development. Now the most countries have made solid progress towards the achievement of universal primary schooling by 2015, the world faces two other major education challenges. The first, which results partly from the success of the campaign for primary education, is to give older children and young adults opportunities for secondary schooling. This is a massive task. One estimate puts the number of 12 to 17 year olds who are not receiving education at 400 million (Binder 2006).

Scarcely less daunting are the second global challenge – and the primary motivation for this article – which is the need to recruit and train many millions of teachers. UNESCO estimates that some 10 million teachers must be recruited and trained in less than a decade. They will be needed to: replace the large number of teachers due to retire in many countries; complete the drive to universal primary schooling, particularly in India, Africa and South Asia; and address the challenge of secondary schooling (UNESCO 2008). Sadly, because the status of the teaching profession has declined in all but a few countries, recruiting teachers on this scale may prove to be "mission impossible". However even if we can recruit them, it will certainly not be possible to train them using the traditional methods of institutional pre-service education. Open and distance learning (ODL) must be harnessed to the task because many countries have already found that it allows them to provide training of consistent quality to large numbers at low cost. As far as India is concerned ODL can play a winning game to eradicate many problems related to teacher education.

UNESCO has provided a useful analysis of the elements that make for educational quality. Well-trained teachers feature high on the list- provided that their training focuses as much on classroom realities as on pedagogical theories. This is where ODL comes into its own. It not only enables in-service teacher education to take place in the schools, but also, through the growing use if information and communication technology (ICT), it makes possible the creation of virtual communities of practice in which working teacher can learn from experienced practitioners and from each other.

Teacher Education: Purpose and Content

In comparing international experience it is useful to draw two distinctions: first

between the initial education and training of teachers and their continuing professional development and second between pre service and in service activities. The two sets of distinctions do not overlap: while many teachers are trained before they start their service, others begin work without teaching qualification and get their initial training in service. Programme of continuing professional development have been offered for various different purposes that include raising the skills of the teaching force generally supporting curriculum development and enabling teachers to undertake new roles. In practice some of these distinctions may be blurred. Teacher education generally includes four elements improving the general educational background of the trainee teachers; increasing their knowledge and understanding of the subjects they are to teach; pedagogy and understanding of children and learning; and the development of practical skills and competences. The balance between these four elements varies widely. An early distance education programme in India for example concentrated on raising teachers own educational background seen as highest priority.

Meaning of Teacher Education:

It is well known that the quality and extent of learner achievement are determined primarily by teacher competence, sensitivity and teacher motivation. The national council for teacher education has defined teacher education as – A programme of education, research and training of persons to teach from pre-primary to higher education level. Teacher education is a programme that is related to the development of teacher proficiency and competence that would enable and empower the teacher to meet the requirements of the profession and face the challenges therein. According to the Goods Dictionary of Education Teacher education means, "all the formal and non-formal activities and experiences that help to qualify a person to assume responsibilities of a member of the educational profession or to discharge his responsibilities more effectively."

Teacher education encompasses teaching skills, sound pedagogical theory and professional skills.

Teacher Education = Teaching Skills + Pedagogical theory + Professional skills.

Teaching Skills would include providing training and practice in the different techniques, approaches and strategies that would help the teachers to plan and impart instruction, provide appropriate reinforcement and conduct effective assessment. It includes effective classroom management skills, preparation and use of instructional materials and communication skills.

Pedagogical theory includes the philosophical, sociological and psychological considerations that would enable the teachers to have a sound basis for practicing the teaching skills in the classroom. The theory is stage specific and is based on the needs and requirements that are characteristic of that stage.

Professional skills include the techniques, strategies and approaches that would help teachers to grow in the profession and also work towards the growth of profession. It includes soft skills, counselling skills, interpersonal skills, computer skills, information retrieving and management skills and above all lifelong learning skills.

Changing context of Teacher Education in the Indian Scenario:

The well established tradition of teaching and learning in India has retained its inherent strength even under adverse circumstances. The post independence period was characterized by major efforts being made

to nurture and transform teacher education. The system of teacher preparation has come under considerable pressure as a result of the expansion and growth of school education through efforts to universalize elementary education. Having inherited a foreign model of teacher preparation at the time of independence from Britain in 1946 major efforts have been made to adapt and up-date the teacher education curriculum to local needs, to make it more context based, responsive and dynamic with regard to best meeting the particular needs of India. The current system of teacher education is supported by a network of national, provincial and district level resource institutions working together to enhance the quality and effectiveness of teacher preparation programs at the pre-service level and also through in-service programs for serving teachers throughout the country.

List of Indian open universities who are providing teacher education:

- Andhra University School of Distance Education (AUSDE), Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh.
- Annamalai University Directorate of Distance Education (DDE) - Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.)
- Bangalore University Directorate of Correspondence Courses and Distance Education, Bangalore, Karnataka
- Bharathiar University - School of Distance Education - Bachelor of Arts (BA) - Education
- Bharathidasan University - Center for Distance Education - Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.)
- Himachal Pradesh University International Centre for Distance Education and Open Learning, Shimla, Himachal Pradesh
- Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU), New Delhi
- Jamia Millia Islamia Centre for Distance and Open Learning (JMI-CDOL), Delhi
- Kakatiya University School of Distance Learning & Continuing Education, Warangal, Andhra Pradesh
- Karnataka State Open University (KSOU), Mysore, Karnataka
- Kota Open University (KOU), Kota, Rajasthan
- Madhya Pradesh Bhoj (Open) University (MPBOU), Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh
- Maharshi Dayanand University Directorate of Distance Education, Rohtak, Haryana
- Panjab University Department of Correspondence Studies, Chandigarh
- Tamilnadu Open University - Bachelor of Education - Distance Mode (BEd (DM))
- Sri Padmavati Mahila Visvavidyalayam Distance Education Centre, Tirupati, Andhra Pradesh
- Sri Venkateswara University Directorate of Distance Education, Tirupati, Andhra Pradesh
- University of Calicut School of Distance Education (UCSDE), Calicut, Kerala
- University of Jammu Directorate of Distance Education, Jammu
- Yashwantrao Chavan Maharashtra Open University (YCMOU), Nasik, Maharashtra.
- Uttar Pradesh Rajarshi Tondon Open University. Allahabad, Uttar Pradesh.

Open and distance learning:

Activities of open and distance learning have build up a body of experience from which can draw a threefold case for the relevance and legitimacy of open and distance learning. First the record of open Universities and dual mode universities teaching both conventionally and at a distance shows that students can achieve results comparable with those of conventional institutions. Second distance education has powerfully effective in reaching large audiences who could not meet their educational needs by attending conventional institutions. Third where open and distance learning offers opportunities for student interaction with tutors it allows open ended dialogue often regarded as the touchstone of legitimate education

Weaknesses:

- Quality and effectiveness of trainee teachers through open distance learning is not as good as normal trainee teachers.
- It is taking long duration than the normal teacher training.
- In open distance learning mode lack of class room study it relay only the assignments and examinations.
- Teacher training through open distance learning mode fulfil the quantity of the teachers but not the quality which is essential part of the education system.

Strengths:

- Teacher education through open distance learning mode fulfils the requirement of teachers thus maintaining the teacher student ratio.
- The teacher education programme through open distance learning is not very costly so it is very effective and purposive.
- Exploring the effects of high volume teaching assignments on research and teaching effectiveness would be informative. If economic issues continue to drive institutions of higher education, potential difficulties need to be seriously researched, anticipated and countered.
- Investing in faculty training, staff development, and a strong faculty support staff appear to be necessary expectations to help offset the increased demands on tenured professionals in order to decrease the amount of preparation time required and to increase mutual understanding of faculty and institutional objectives.
- Distance education is popular today because it is believed to be more cost effective for the institution than traditional education. Through one time capital investments, more students can be enrolled in classes taught by one professional.
- Teaching at a distance to a large number of people through the mass media has no possible comparison with traditional education.

Suggestions:

Above discussion suggest the need for more training for faculty members who are expected to teach distance learning classes. Because of the time requirements for preparation of classes and the inability to use many of the teaching strategies perfected in the traditional classroom, opportunities to learn and developed more effective delivery strategies should be afforded permanent faculty members. While the economics of distance education has been embraced by

many university administrators, longitudinal studies need to be done to determine the long term consequences involved with the increasing demands on tenured faculty members. Exploring the effects of high volume teaching assignments on research and teaching effectiveness would be informative. If economic issues continue to drive institutions of higher education, potential difficulties need to be seriously researched, anticipated and countered. Investing in faculty training, staff development, and a strong faculty support staff appear to be necessary expectations to help offset the increased demands on tenured professionals in order to decrease the amount of preparation time required and to increase mutual understanding of faculty and institutional objectives.

Conclusion:

All experience has demonstrated that open and distance learning can be effectively deployed for teacher education. While it has been regarded as temporary expedient, adopted, dropped and sometimes readopted, the evidence on its effectiveness is in fact robust enough for it to be developed and treated instead as a regular part of national system of education. Distance learning methods can be used for all four components of teacher education for general education, to strengthen teachers' knowledge of the subjects they will teach, in teaching pedagogy and child development, and as a guide towards good classroom practice. While the evidence is limited it is generally positive teachers can learn through these methods, and high success rates have been widely reported. The evidence on costs shows that open and distance learning can be at an economic advantage as compared with conventional education, although it will not always do so. In their planning, administrators need to strike an appropriate balance between the educational arguments for using sophisticated technology and providing ample, individual, face to face support to learners and the economic arguments for containing costs, even for elements that are educationally. International experience has demonstrated that open and distance learning can be effectively deployed for teacher education. While it has often been regarded as temporary expedient, adopted, dropped, and sometimes re adopted, the evidence on its effectiveness is in fact robust enough for it to be developed and treated instead as a regular part of national system of education.

Successful programmes have in common that students were motivated, that they benefited from good tutorial support, and that the logistics worked well. Logistics caused particular problems in relation to the supervision of teaching practice, and this has been a persistent them from the earliest projects on. Conditions for success and appropriate organisational structures, beyond the scope of this paper, are explored in more detail in UNESCO's teacher education guidelines: using open and distance learning. The record shows that distance learning methods can be used for all four components of teacher education for general education, to strengthen teachers' knowledge of the subjects they will teach, in teaching pedagogy and child development and as a towards good classroom. While the evidence is limited generally positive teachers can learn through these methods, and high success rates have been widely reported. The evidence on costs shows that open and distance learning can be at an economic advantage as compared with conventional education, although it will not always do so. In their planning administrators need to strike an appropriate balance between the educational arguments for using sophisticated technology and providing ample, individual, face to face support to learners and the economic arguments for containing costs,

even for elements that are educationally attractive.

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