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Mahesh Chand Sharma



Indira Gandhi National Open University
Maidan Garhi, New Delhi-110068 (India)

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MAHESH CHAND SHARMA

School of Education, Indira Gandhi National Open University, New Delhi, India

Abstract: Teachers have an important role to play in making education relevant to the needs of the emerging modern society. Only enlightened, competent and emancipated teachers can meet the aspirations of society by providing quality education to learners. This is 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 standards 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 can not be fulfilled by formal teacher training institutes, but can be met through distance education. However, doubts about the quality of teacher education programmes through distance mode persist. Therefore, it was felt desirable to conduct an indepth study of a teacher education programme (B.Ed) offered through distance mode in a phased manner. This paper presents the findings of the study conducted under Phase 1 with a focus on 'a status survey of teacher education programme (B.Ed) through distance mode,' offered by, State Open Universities and Correspondence / Distance Education Institutes.

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 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 the National Council of Teacher Education (NCTE) is needed to ensure professional inputs and quality maintenance. Due importance to practical components of the programme i.e. practice teaching, school-based and community-based practicals is given.

Introduction

Teacher education programmes have always been considered as important professional programmes for training of teachers. The standard of teacher education programmes determines the quality of a training provided to teachers. The maintenance of standards and quality of teacher education programmes have of-late become more challenging in view of increase in the number of students, explosion of knowledge and advancement of technology.

The demand for large number of trained teachers have always attracted the attention of educationists and policy makers. The Education Commission (1964-66) also recommended the role of correspondence/distance education for providing in-service training to teachers working in secondary, higher/senior secondary schools so that back log of untrained teachers could be cleared. As a consequence of these recommendations massive enrolment was made in B.Ed.by Directorates of Correspondence Courses of formal universities and State Open Universities during the nineties of the last century.

This affected the quality of teacher education programmes adversely, and attracted the attention of teacher educators, researchers and national bodies like National Council of Teacher Education (NCTE) and Distance Education Council (DEC) in IGNOU. In view of the deterioration in the standards of teacher education programmes, particularly the B.Ed through distance mode, it was felt desirable to study the various factors affecting the teacher education programme (B.Ed) through distance mode. The present study was an attempt in that direction. This study has been planned under three phases. Phase 1 of the study was concerned with the status survey of teacher education programmes through distance mode. In this paper the methodology, findings and suggestions emerged from the survey of B.Ed. programmes through distance mode has been discussed.

Need for the study

A review of research studies conducted in India and abroad (Mishra, 1993; Rao, 1994; Sharma, 1997; Khan, 1998; Chale, 1995; Gunawardena; 1997 and Jourtshoo, 1997), indicates that distance/correspondence education has been found to be effective for teacher training programmes, especially for in-service training of teachers. This may be due to the fact that in-service trainee teachers had no initial training and practical experiences. It is further observed that the distance mode of teacher training can be used not only for refreshing/upgrading competence and practical skills of teaching but also for development of desired competence and skills required for effective teaching. This would be possible, if quality learning material, effective delivery and monitoring system, based on modern technology are utilised in a proper way. For this, a status survey is needed in order to know about the present situation in the various institutions, and suggest a model for effective teacher education programmes through distance mode. The present study is an attempt in that direction.

The need for teacher education through distance mode is increasing mainly on three fronts:

- untrained teachers who are already teaching in schools but are without a B.Ed. degree;
- fresh graduates who want to become teachers; and
- teachers who are already trained but need upgradation of their professional skills.

Clearly, training needs of all aspirants such as the above and teachers who need higher level skills of teaching can not be met by conventional teacher training institutions. Therefore they need to overcome the distance barrier, time barrier and financial barrier with the help of an alternative mode.

These barriers can be effectively overcome by distance mode of education and training. Education by distance mode has already established its credibility but the perception of many in this field is that teacher training through distance mode can not be effective. They doubt about the standards of teacher training through distance mode. Hence a systematic and indepth study was to probe these perceptions, particularly focussing on the following issues:

- the status of distance education mode vis-à-vis correspondence education mode for teacher education programmes;
- the feasibility of teacher education programmes through distance mode;
- the long term potential of distance mode for teacher education programmes;

- evaluation of the effectiveness of teacher education programmes offered through distance mode.

Considering the magnitude of the above mentioned issues, a comprehensive study was planned in three phases as mentioned below:

- A survey of the present status of teacher education programmes through distance mode;
- A study of the feasibility of teacher education programmes through distance mode;
- An evaluation of the effectiveness of teacher education programmes offered through distance mode.

An attempt has been made in this paper to present the findings of the Phase-I of the study which is mainly concerned with the survey of present status of teacher education programmes offered through distance mode. Due to time constraints and other factors, this phase of the study was limited to B.Ed programme through distance mode.

Specific Objectives

Since the study has been planned in three phases, the specific objectives for the first phase of the study only are listed below:

1. to find out the strengths and weaknesses of the present teacher education programmes through distance mode;
2. to examine the teaching-learning methodology adopted by the correspondence/ distance education institutions for their teacher education programmes;
3. to analyse the types and quality of instructional materials, feedback and evaluation process, audio visual support and personal contact programmes;
4. to suggest improvement in teacher education programmes offered through distance mode;
5. to utilise findings/ suggestions for improving teacher education programmes in the second and the third phases of the research study.

Research Methodology

The Research Methodology followed in the first phase of the study was descriptive in nature as it involved status survey. The various stages followed in the study were:

- Review of related literature
- Development of questionnaires
- Visits to institutions and interviews with students and faculty members
- Collection of course material

- Compilation, Analysis and Interpretation of Data
- Findings and Suggestions

Sampling and Tools Used

Eight Correspondence Course Institutes / Directorates of Distance Education of formal Universities and the state Open Universities offering B.Ed. through distance mode were selected for the study. The heads / programme coordinators / faculty of all these institutes were requested to send the filled in questionnaires. But four Correspondence Course Institutes / Directorates of Distance Education of formal universities and four State Open Universities responded. The responses were received from 14 faculty members and 30 students of Open Universities (OUs), Correspondence Course Institutes (CCIs) / Directorates of Distance Education (DDEs).

The response rate was rather poor. It was, however, made up by discussions with faculty members during the visits to four CCIs / DDEs and Open Universities.

The tools used were: structured interviews and two questionnaires - one for faculty and one for students. The various areas considered for structured interviews and questionnaire were:

- Student Profile
- Staff Development (Teacher Profile)
- Preparation and Delivery of course material
- Student Support Services
- Monitoring and Evaluation
- Finances

Data collected on the above areas with the help of tools were analysed in terms of frequency and percentage of each item of the questionnaire. The major findings of the analysis and suggestions based on them are presented in the following paragraphs.

Findings

Students Profile

- All the students enrolled for B.Ed. programmes were graduates but 25% of them were not regular working teachers. In fact, majority of the students admitted by the CCIs were pre-service teachers, although the requirement for admission was teaching experience of one to two years.
- The enrollment in CCIs / DDEs during 1996 was high but it declined in 1997. In the Open Universities, enrollment of students remained constant. This was due to the restrictions / conditions imposed by the norms of NCTE.

- Open universities and CCIs / DDEs do not have region-wise reservation, but some of the CCIs / DDEs and OUs have provision of reservation for women, widows, tribal and other disadvantaged groups. All the CCIs/ DDEs have reservation for SC and ST students (i.e. the under privileged groups in the social hierarchy).
- Performance of students of the Open Universities was comparatively better than those of the CCIs / DDEs.
- CCIs/ DDEs do not have study centres but organise face-to-face interaction through Personal Contact Programmes at PCP centres. The Open Universities have study centres as well as PCP centres.
- Majority of CCIs / DDEs and Open Universities have English and Hindi as medium of instruction. Some of them have regional languages also as medium of instruction.

Staff Development

- There exists a large variation in the faculty strength of CCIs/DDEs and the open universities. In most of the CCIs/DDEs, the faculty strength varies from 1 to 3. But in the open universities, it is more than 3 in some cases. Most of the faculty members are qualified in the discipline of education as per UGC norms.
- Only a few faculty members in CCIs/DDEs and the Open Universities have formal qualifications in distance education. They seldom participate in research seminars / conferences / workshops on teacher education and distance education. They are also not involved in research work.
- Data reveals that the faculty members of CCIs / DDEs and OUs generally devote most of their time in the preparation of course material and maintenance of courses. A few faculty members of OUs are involved in the development and preparation of video / audio programmes.
- All CCIs / DDEs and OUs have inadequate faculty strength.
- Most of the faculty members of the OUs and CCIs/ DDEs are willing to participate in governing bodies / academic councils. As regards their prospects of promotion, they are hardly optimistic.

Preparation of Course Material

In CCIs / DDEs, the curriculum of courses for B.Ed. programme are designed by the respective boards of studies. In the Open Universities, the Academic Council is responsible for designing the curriculum.

- In developing the course materials, both outside experts and internal faculty are involved.
- Most of the course materials are written in text book style, and some of the materials are in correspondence format, though this format lacks the characteristics of self-

instructional materials. Very few of the course materials developed by the OUs have followed self instructional format and principles in developing instructional materials.

- Majority of the students graded the material fairly high. They could understand the materials only after putting in more efforts and taking help from teachers at PCP centres / study centres.
- It has been observed that improvement on the various aspects of the materials such as the format, presentation style, illustrations and examples, language and self-check exercise is very much needed.
- Assignments are not provided to a majority of the students of CCIs/ DDEs. However students of OUs do get assignments.
- The course materials are generally sent by post in one or two installments. However, no despatch schedule is provided to students in advance by any institution.
- No audio / video programmes to supplement the course materials are provided to students of CCIs/DDEs. Neither has any attempt been made to get student feedback on the quality of the print materials for their revision.

Students Support Services

- Most of the CCIs / DDEs do not have study centres / regional centres. Only two DDEs have a provision of study centres. Open Universities provide study centres. Two of the Open Universities have a provision of regional centres also.
- The study centres of the Open Universities are equipped with library facilities, but audio /video cassettes are not available in adequate numbers.
- One or two staff members are employed on part time basis in most of the study centres. During the PCPs, local teachers are engaged for tutoring –counselling.
- The durations of PCPs organised by CCIs / DDEs range from 2 to 36 days. In the case of the Open Universities, the durations of PCPs vary from 12 to 48 days.
- Students regularly attend PCPs, but do not attend counselling at study centres provided by some Open Universities. The reason may be that attendance in PCPs is compulsory but not so in counselling sessions.
- Most of the students were satisfied with the guidance / interaction provided in the PCPs. But some of them were unhappy with the teaching at PCPs when it was not relevant to the content. Ordinary type of teaching was done at PCP / study centres. Practicals were not dealt with properly during PCPs. Due to overcrowding of students at PCPs / study centres, individual attention to students was not possible.
- A few assignments are provided during the PCPs held by most of the CCIs / DDEs. These assignments are not checked and the feedback is not provided to students.

Some of the Open Universities provide assignments, but feedback to students is lacking.

Monitoring and Evaluation

- There exists no monitoring systems at the personal contact programme centres or study centers of the CCIs / DDEs and the Open Universities. Only those incharge of PCP centres submit the reports on the activities after the completion of PCPs.
- Most of the CCIs / DDEs engage secondary school teachers to guide the activities at PCPs. The Open Universities engage teacher educators and also school teachers during PCPs.
- Assignments are not provided by CCIs / DDEs. The Open Universities provide the assignments which are evaluated but no timely feedback is provided to students.
- During practice teaching, a few lessons are supervised. However 2 to 3 lessons per teaching subject are discussed by teachers during PCP. Dissatisfaction with regard to practice teaching and its supervision was expressed by the students.
- Most of the CCIs/DDEs have provision of terminal assessment only. Continuous assessment does not exist. However, in most of the Open Universities provision of 30% continuous assessment and 70% of terminal assessment exit.
- In CCIs / DDEs and the Open Universities, the assessment is done by the internal faculty and outside experts. But as the strength of internal faculty is inadequate, a large number of outside faculty are involved in the assessment exercise.
- The practical works of B.Ed. programme like school based activities, co-curricular activities and action research are not given proper attention.

Finances

- In the CCIs / DDEs and the Open Universities the fees ranges from Rs. 3,500 to Rs. 5,000 for one year of B.Ed. programme. However, one of the Open Universities mentioned that an amount of Rs. 10,000, as fee, is charged for B.Ed. programme of 2 years duration.
- Students fee is a major source of income for all the CCIs / DDEs and the Open Universities.
- The surplus amount recovered through fee is not utilised for the development of Departments / Schools of Education of CCIs / DDEs and the Open Universities, but is diverted to other activities of the universities concerned.
- The Open Universities have provision for fee concession only to students with disabilities.

- CCIs / DDEs have suggested that UGC should give them more funds, while the Open Universities are in favour of charging more fees from the students.

Suggestions

On the basis of the above findings, the following suggestions are made to improve the effectiveness of teacher education programmes through distance mode in future:

Student Profile

- Admission criteria to B.Ed. programme should be followed strictly and consistently, which means that if the B.Ed. programme is to be designed for in-service teachers with minimum of 2 years experience, it should be strictly adhered to while admitting students.
- The enrolment of students should be limited keeping in view the organisational capacity for programme delivery of the CCIs/DDEs and the Open Universities where the present enrolments on mass scales affect the quality of teachers education programmes.

Staff Development

- There is a need to have 'a critical mass' in the faculty of education for ensuring professional inputs and quality maintenance. B.Ed. programme being a professional programme, it should emphasise development of skills and competencies through practical activities. To do that, more qualified faculty is required for course development and effective delivery. It is a fact that distance education programmes involve the external faculty for course development and delivery but still there is a need for a certain minimum strength of full time faculty to ensure that the programme is properly delivered and its quality is maintained. The faculty of CCIs / DDEs and the Open Universities also said that faculty strength is inadequate. It is, therefore, suggested that minimum faculty strength may be ensured in the Departments of Education for smooth running of B.Ed. Programmes.
- Faculty should be regularly oriented with the concepts, characteristics and recent trends in distance education through orientation courses/workshops and seminars. The faculty should also be encouraged to undergo courses leading to degree / diploma programmes in distance education offered by Institutes of distance education (e.g. PG Diploma and M.A. in Distance Education offered by IGNOU).
- Adequate participation of faculty in the academic bodies like Boards of Studies and Academic Councils is also desirable.

Development and Delivery of Course Material

- The course material must be designed in self-instructional format. The shortcomings in content-coverage, learner friendliness and culture sensitivity etc., are to be removed. The practice of student feedback should be stressed for revision and improvement of course materials.

- Preparation of Audio/ Video programmes to supplement print materials needs urgent attention as these programmes incorporate field reality and help in making the curricular inputs more authentic and effective.
- Regular feedback must be provided to students. For this, assignments should be provided and they should be made compulsory for all students. These assignments should be evaluated without delay and qualitative feedback be given individually to students.

Student Support Services

- Each CCIs / DDEs must set up at least 5-20 study centres depending upon the enrolment and student clusters in different areas.
- Sufficient number of staff be provided at study centres to look after various functions of the study centres.
- The study centres / PCP centres should not be overcrowded with too many students. To attain a reasonable degree of quality, a maximum of 100 students only should be taken in a study centre.
- In study centres, the traditional mode of teaching is not to be followed. It is desirable that the information transaction should be largely through self instructional materials and the contact time should be devoted to effective interaction involving reflection, sharing and experiential learning.
- The duration of PCPs should be adequate with a minimum of 300 hours of contact. The small group interaction involving 20 students per group should also be encouraged. Practical aspects of B.Ed. programmes should be given more emphasis during PCPs.

Monitoring and Evaluation

- There should be an effective monitoring and evaluation mechanism to ensure the smooth working of study centres and PCP centres. This system must involve faculty of Department of Education and staff working at study centres, regional centres and PCP centres.
- Continuous and comprehensive evaluation is needed for practical work like school-based practicals, community-based practicals and practice teaching. The practice teaching is to be organised throughout the academic year, so that it can provide complete and comprehensive school based experiences. It should not be seen merely in terms of delivering / teaching the specified number of lessons. Since the students are practising teachers, practice teaching should provide them the opportunities for critical reflection of their own styles of teaching related to the corporate life of the school. To assure this, a definite weightage of 30% for continuous assessment and 70% for term end examination for theory courses and 100% weightage for practical work for continuous and comprehensive evaluation is required.

Finances

The fee structure needs to be rationalised and be proposed on the basis of the operational costs incurred on theory and practical courses of teacher education programmes.

The surplus amount accrued through fees collected from B.Ed. students should be invested for professional development of faculty, quality maintenance and for providing better facilities to students.

Conclusion

On the basis of the findings of the present study, it may be concluded that present practices of Teacher education programme (B.Ed.) offered through distance mode need improvement in essential aspects. To establish credibility of Distance mode for professional programme like teacher education, it is recommended that a "critical mass" of core faculty i.e. 10 faculty members be provided to ensure quality maintenance and professional inputs. There is an urgent need to bring improvement in preparation and delivery of course material. Student support services need special attention. Due importance must be given to the teaching of practical components of the programme, and a provision of continuous and comprehensive evaluation should be made. Further, to ensure smooth conduct of practicals, effective monitoring and evaluation system is very much needed. Moreover, the savings from students fees may be utilised for faculty improvement, quality maintenance and providing better facilities to students by enriching delivery systems and transactional strategies of the institutions concerned.

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[**Mahesh Chand Sharma** is a Reader in Education at School of Education, Indira Gandhi National Open University. Area of specialization – Educational Technology, Teacher Education. Address for correspondence: School of Education, IGNOU, Maidan Garhi, New Delhi-110068, India].