

Secondary Teacher Education in Sikkim

A Field Study

MADHULIKA S.PATEL*

SAROJ PANDEY**

Abstract

Since the implementation of NCF 2005 the school education system has undergone a major shift in the content and pedagogical approach of teaching and learning. The NCF places demands and expectations on teachers which require them to de-learn their traditional approaches of teaching-learning and relearn new methods and approaches. In the process of education, however there is a chain of connecting agents: teacher educators, teachers and students. What and how students learn is affected by the knowledge structure of their teachers, who in turn are largely dependent upon our teacher education programmes for grounding and legitimising these knowledge structures. Teacher education institutions in this context play a key role in the process of quality improvement at the school stage. This symbiotic relationship between education and teacher education calls for change in teacher education curricula in tune with school education curricula to ensure effective implementation of policies.

The quality of teacher education, however is a matter of concern all over the country but more so in the north-eastern region which suffers from the problems of insurgency, violence, geographical remoteness, and lack of proper connectivity and communications with rest of the country and inadequate infrastructure facilities. The problem is further aggravated due to unqualified/under qualified teachers at various levels of education. The preliminary review of literature reveals lack of comprehensive data on the teacher education curriculum of the North-eastern region. There is lack of such information for Sikkim state also. Therefore, there was urgent need of a comprehensive study for quality

* Associate Professor, Department of Teacher Education, NCERT, New Delhi-110016

** Professor, School of Education, Indira Gandhi National Open University, New Delhi-110068.

improvement of teacher education system in Sikkim. The present paper is focussed on the curriculum backdrop and tries to explore the existing secondary pre-service teacher education in the north-eastern state of Sikkim along with the constraints experienced by the state in organising pre-service teacher education programme. It also tries to suggest suitable interventions for introducing desired changes in the curriculum and implementation of teacher education programme in Sikkim.

Need and Justification

Since the implementation of NCF 2005, the content and pedagogical approach of teaching and learning has undergone a major shift in the school education system. The NCF 2005 places demands and expectations on teachers requiring them to de-learn their traditional teaching-learning approaches and to relearn new methods and approaches. However, the process of education involves a chain of connecting agents i.e. teacher educators, teachers and students. What and how students learn is affected by the knowledge structure of their teachers, which in turn is largely dependent on the teachers' education programmes. The teachers' preparation programmes have an effect of grounding and legitimising the knowledge structures in them. In this context, the teacher education institutions have a key role towards improving the quality of education at school stage. This symbiotic relationship between school education and teacher education curricula ensures effective implementation of policies and achieving desired results.

The quality of teacher education continues to be a matter of concern all over the country and more so in the north-eastern region which suffers from numerous problems like regional violence, geographical remoteness, lack of proper connectivity and communications with rest of the country and inadequate infrastructure facilities. The problem is further compounded due to unqualified / underqualified teachers serving at various levels of school education. A preliminary review of the teacher education institutions and teacher education curricula of the north-eastern region reveals that out of the total 73 secondary teacher education institutions in Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura and Sikkim, majority of institutions (64) are private institutions. Very scanty information is available about institutions in terms of any comprehensive study which can provide relevant information about the curriculum and the efforts made by these institutions to revise/modify curricula in tune with the

emerging perspectives, nature of school experience programme, evaluation system being followed, quality of the reform efforts, and constraints experienced by the teacher education institutions in this region. The National Council for Teacher Education, NCTE conducted a survey of teacher education institutions in 1999 and the NCERT commissioned a multi-centric research study on teacher education programmes of several states in 2006 but these studies included only a few institutions in the state of Assam excluding all other states and Union Territories in the region. The lack of systematic and comprehensive information is a limitation in planning quality improvement of teacher education in the north-eastern region.

The present paper is focussed on the curriculum backdrop and tries to explore the existing pre-service teacher education for secondary school teachers in the north-eastern State of Sikkim along with the constraints experienced by the State in organising pre-service teacher education programme. Suitable interventions are suggested for introducing desired changes in the curriculum and implementation of teacher education programmes in the state of Sikkim.

Methodology

The quantitative data was collected on questionnaires prepared using

survey method. All the secondary teacher education institutions of Sikkim were approached to provide information on various dimensions of teacher education such as the admission criteria, course structure and duration, transactional approaches, school experience programme, evaluation procedure, professional preparedness of faculty members, research and innovations undertaken by these institutions, infrastructural facilities, and financial and academic constraints etc. The quantitative data was corroborated and supported by qualitative data obtained through field visits to institutions in the state by the investigating team and holding focussed group discussions, and interviews with the faculty members and concerned functionaries. The data obtained through quantitative and qualitative methods was triangulated and given suitable statistical treatment to arrive at conclusions.

Teacher Education Curriculum in Sikkim

The study combined both the quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection to get a more realistic picture of the teacher education curriculum being followed in Sikkim. Therefore, field visits were carried out in the state of Sikkim. The investigators interacted with different stakeholders like the

principal, teachers, student teachers and the university Department of Education wherever possible to have a holistic view of how the teacher education curriculum is developed and practised in the state, what are the impediments in practising the curriculum and how the quality of

The team visited all the three institutions Loyola College, Harkamaya College, Government B.Ed College, and Loyola College.

The Focus Group Discussion was done on the basis of certain guidelines developed for the purpose,

Table 1

Demographic profile of teacher education institutions of Sikkim

<i>Name of College</i>	<i>Year of establishment</i>	<i>Year of starting B.Ed programme</i>	<i>Total student intake</i>	<i>Number of Faculty members</i>
Harkamaya College of Education, Samdur Tadgong	2003	2003-04	100	12
Loyola College of Teacher Education	1993	1994-95	100	10
Soreng College of Teacher Education	2009	2010	100	07

input can be improved to assure the quality of output.

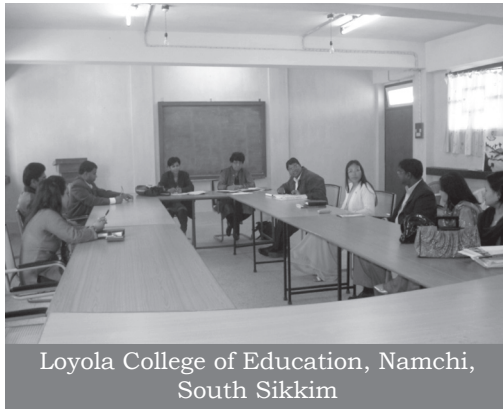
Sikkim is located in the lap of mountains and is one of the most beautiful places of India. The literacy rate of Sikkim has seen a phenomenal rise from 68.81 percent according to 2001 census to more than 82 per cent in 2011 Census (Census of State: Sikkim). Sikkim has three teacher education institutions offering B.Ed degree. These are:

- Loyola College of Education, Namchi, South Sikkim
- Harkamaya College of Education, Samdur Tadgong, East Sikkim
- Sikkim Government B.Ed. College, Soreng, West Sikkim

and included the curriculum being followed in the institution, its year of revision, the procedure followed in the revision of teacher education curriculum, the involvement of teacher education institutions being visited in curriculum revision process, teaching-learning process being followed in the teacher training institution, provision and practice of school experience programme, evaluation procedure, research and innovation undertaken by the teacher educators, linkages of teacher education institution with other state level institutions and university, and provision for

professional development of teacher educators of the institution. The opinion of student teachers about the B.Ed. course, its transaction, and appropriateness for contemporary needs of schools had been taken through interaction with students. The results of Focus Group Discussion with principals and teacher educators of the state are presented below:

rural background and facing language problems as the medium of instruction is English at B.Ed. level. In this college 20 per cent candidates are in-service teachers nominated by Sikkim government; 80 per cent are selected through admission test. Most of the student teachers in these colleges are from Social Science background and the state in general also faces shortage of science teachers. The Loyola



Loyola College of Education, Namchi,
South Sikkim



Harkamaya College of Education,
East Sikkim

Focus Group Discussion with Faculty Members of Teacher Education Institutions in Sikkim

Admission Policy

Though the admission at B.Ed. level in any institution is a policy issue determined by the university, yet little variation has been reported by the institutions in the admission policy they follow. While the Soreng College is the youngest amongst all the three institutions, and is a government institution located in rural area having students with

College is the oldest one having minority status. It has 30 per cent reservation for minority, 20 per cent for in-service teachers, 2 per cent for SC, 5 per cent for ST, and 1 per cent for students who require inclusive education. A total of 58 per cent seats are therefore reserved and 42 per cent are open to general candidates. The institution had the provision of Entrance Test upto 2009

but from 2010 switched over to merit based admission process. Harkamaya College is a self-financing institution and has 30 per cent reservation for Sikkim students while 70 students come through open selection.

One of the major problems experienced by all these institutions is difficulty in getting students with minimum eligibility criteria fixed by NCTE, which is minimum 50 per cent marks at the graduation level and institutions felt that further relaxation should be given on minimum eligibility criteria for students in this state.

Curriculum Development

The teacher education curriculum of the state was revised in the year 2009. Since there is no Department of Education in the Sikkim University, the university had framed a committee involving the principals of all the three institutions as well as experts from various parts of the country to revise the syllabus of B.Ed., However the teacher educators observed that the local context has not been significantly reflected in the syllabus though the Sikkim University has introduced Eastern Himalayan Studies as compulsory subject for students at graduate level. The faculty members suggested that contents like history of education in Sikkim; problems of adolescents

in North-Eastern Region should be included instead of general growth and development of adolescent. NCF 2005 was referred to while modifying the curriculum. *The faculty members as well as the principals also expressed the need to remove the rigidity in terms of uniformity of implementation of the teacher education curriculum in the state keeping in view the diversity of student population in the state (based on the discussion with faculty).* The curriculum of the state does not seem to refer to any specific Teacher Education Curriculum Framework suggested by NCTE. None of the NCTE Frameworks recommended 'Principles of Education and Curriculum Development' or instructional Science and Evaluation as the foundation paper.

Curriculum Transaction

Though there is emphasis on adopting more participatory and learner centred method of teaching, involving students in discussion, collaborative learning, role play and working in project modes etc. but the teaching-learning approaches adopted in teacher education institutions in Sikkim remain predominantly lecture-based with students as passive recipients. Sometimes PowerPoint presentations were used by teacher educators in the class. Teacher educators of Soreng, which is located in a rural

area observed that students were very shy and passive due to their background and at times have communication problem as the medium of instruction is English. Students are required to submit assignments and undertake case studies, reports of which are presented and evaluated. These presentations are followed by interaction and discussion. The B.Ed. institutions in Sikkim have provision of community work. Each student has to submit the report of community work which is evaluated and 25 marks are allocated for this work.

School Experience Programme

All the three teacher education institutions follow a similar pattern of School Experience Programme. This includes pre internship phase of simulated practice teaching in the form of micro-teaching by students followed by 30 days of practice teaching in neighbouring schools. The duration of practice teaching is three weeks and organised in one stretch, not in a phased manner. Student teachers practise five teaching skills through 10 (5+5) micro teaching lessons each having a cycle of 20 minutes.

The procedure followed for micro teaching is—

- simulated demonstration
 - Micro-teaching by student teachers
 - video recording of micro teaching lessons
 - discussion based on students' performance and re-teaching
- On the basis of the interaction with faculty members of these three institutions, following conclusions have been drawn pertaining to the school experience programme being practised in the state:
- The simulated teaching on ten identified teaching skills is undertaken in the first semester, and the practice teaching in B.Ed. colleges of the state is done generally in the second semester after completing the theory papers. By that time the schools usually complete the course, consequently the student teachers are required to take revision courses, which creates discipline problems for student teachers.
 - The number of days assigned for practice teaching varies from institution to institution.
 - Herbertian method of lesson planning is still being followed in the state.
 - Supervision of lesson plans is done on the basis of Proforma developed by IGNOU under teacher education programme.
 - No orientation is given to principal and staff of co-operating school on their own roles and responsibilities at the time of practice teaching by student teachers.

- Only a few lessons are supervised by teacher educators during practice teaching.
- The reputation of the B.Ed. College seems to play a role in getting co-operating schools for practice teaching.
- The accessibility, proximity and location, and availability of transport facility, as well as number of student teachers in a particular location play a role in selecting 'practice teaching' school.
- Keeping in view the hilly terrain of Sikkim the distance of 'practice teaching' school from the college is the prime consideration for selecting school.
- Student teachers stay in the school even after their classes and participate in various activities of school, which is evaluated.
- The faculty members suggested the need for modification in the evaluation proforma developed by IGNOU, especially item No. 14 that deals with innovations in practice teaching. It was suggested that this item may be dropped or modified.
- Student teachers are expected to complete assignments, undertake community work of 15 days duration and submit case studies that are evaluated and 25 marks are allocated for it.

Infrastructural facilities

The teacher education institutions in Sikkim in general lack proper infrastructural facilities and library facility. Computers are only used for routine office work and do not form part of teaching-learning process in any of these institutions.

Professional development of faculty members

- The faculty members of all the teacher education institutions expressed concern over the lack of opportunities for their own professional development, which is a major demotivating factor for them. During interaction with teacher educators of the state, it was observed by the investigators that most of the teacher educators were unaware of the emerging trends such as thrust areas of NCF 2005, or Teacher Education Curriculum Framework 2009, reflective teaching and constructivism etc. It was expressed by teacher educators working especially in the private institutions that they are not included in the government initiatives for professional development of teacher educators and therefore do not have opportunities for their professional development, whereas they are equally responsible for quality improvement of education in the state.

- Majority of faculty members of these institutions are not engaged in any research or publication activities except for few individual efforts.
- The faculty members also in general lack knowledge about the teacher education curriculum frameworks, and those who were associated with curriculum development process did not refer any framework though the syllabi of other universities were referred to. In Soreng, which is a government institution, majority of teacher educators were found to be on deputation from schools having no exposure of teaching at any teacher education institution, therefore they experienced difficulty in teaching the B.Ed. students.
- The need for both orientation on emerging issues and concerns of education and teacher education and refresher courses to update knowledge and pedagogical content areas was felt by the teacher educators and institutions of the state.
- There is no provision in these institutions to financially sponsor any teacher educator to attend any seminar or conferences, though they are given duty leave to attend such programmes.
- The teacher educators and principals of all the three institutions strongly expressed

the desire to attend the professional development programmes organised by national organisations such as NCERT or NUEPA etc. The areas in which they need training are micro teaching, action research, innovative practices, and computer application.

Institutional Linkages

There is also lack of linkage between various institutions of the state; even the government teacher education college of Soreng expressed its dissatisfaction with the institutional linkage with SCERT that is only a stone's throw away from the institution. The faculty members have developed linkages with various institutions on personal basis, but all the institutions felt that better linkages should be ensured between SCERT, SIE, SSA and DIETs etc in the state.

What student teachers feel about teacher education curriculum and programme?

As indicated earlier, wherever student teachers were available, their responses were sought on various aspects of the teacher education programme they have opted for, the existing teacher education curriculum, curriculum transaction approaches, school experience programme, duration of B.Ed programme, and evaluation

procedure being followed. The responses received from student teachers of all the three institutions were analysed and the conclusions were derived, as presented below.

Student teachers were more vocal in their views regarding the curricular content and curriculum transaction that speaks of the state of affairs from consumers' point of view. Interaction with students revealed the following :

- The teacher education curriculum being followed in the state appears to be too lengthy and student teachers felt that one year was not sufficient to cover the syllabus. Majority of students, therefore, observed that either the syllabus should be pruned down removing outdated and unrelated content or the duration of the course should be increased.
- Students felt that the paper entitled 'Psychology of Development and Learning (paper II)' is very lengthy and very difficult to complete in one semester.
- Students also opined that paper I dealing with philosophical and sociological perspectives needs overhauling to make it more practice oriented and interesting.
- The transactional approaches adopted by some of the teachers were considered by students as 'very boring' and only lecture based, making it difficult to

understand, and that increased the difficulty level of the course content.

Focus Group Discussion with Student Teachers

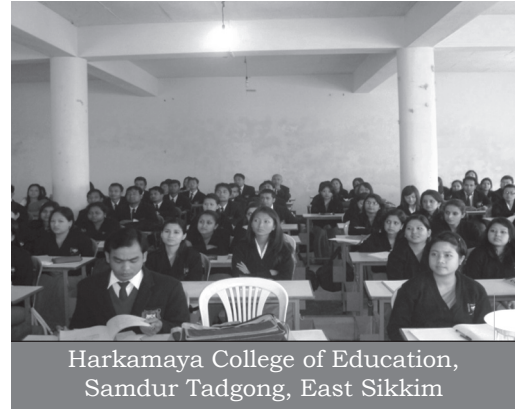
- Student teachers of all the colleges observed that they are left with very little choice in selection of subjects for practice teaching, especially students coming from commerce background, and felt that more flexibility needs to be adopted in this regard.
- One of the crucial observations made by students of all these institutions was lack of systematic effort in practice teaching which the students felt is the weakest link of their teacher education programme. Student teachers, during focus group discussion reported that there was no uniformity in the format of lesson plan that leaves them confused.

One student said –

Before going to practice teaching only demonstration lesson was given, faculty members did not show us the actual format and we were sent to school for practice teaching. Different faculty comes to supervise our classes, and gives us his/her own format. It creates confusion for us... We have only a rough idea of how to develop lesson plans.'



Sikkim Govt. B.Ed. College, Soreng,
West Sikkim



Harkamaya College of Education,
Samdur Tadgong, East Sikkim

- This statement reflects the state of affairs of school experience programme in the state. Students felt that more practical work should be included in the syllabus and theory part should be reduced.
- Student teachers were also very vocal about the infrastructure facilities available in these institutions, specially the self-financing one, which lack proper infrastructure and hostel facility for boys and girls enrolled for the B.Ed. course. Student teachers of one of the B.Ed. Colleges observed that they are forced to stay in hostel as it is mandatory for all students including the local students and exemptions are made only in exceptional cases. They also felt that library should be updated as there are insufficient books in the libraries of these institutions. The student teachers and teacher educators were united on non-availability of the reference books mentioned in the syllabus and observed that it should be modified and be realistic in terms of including available books only.
- Student teachers felt that ICT facilities and its use in classroom transaction should also be improved and labs should be made available to students for practical work.
- The neglect of co-curricular activities in B.Ed. programme was also one of the major concerns highlighted by the student teachers. They felt the need for more thoughtful integration of co-curricular activities in overall B.Ed. programme, essential provision of playground in teacher education institutions with adequate equipment for various sports. It is pertinent to mention here that the norms of NCTE for

giving recognition to any institution to start B.Ed. programme specifies a list of games and sports material and availability of adequate playground, but these institutions did not have sufficient facilities as observed by the investigators during the visit, except the teacher education institution at Namchi which has a big campus.

Suggestions for Improvement in Teacher Education

The study suggests the need for overhauling of teacher education curriculum at the secondary level to address the changes in the current school education system of the country and prepare future teachers to reflect these changes in their classroom practice. Teacher education curriculum of the state of Sikkim needs to be modified in the light of National Curriculum Framework for Teacher Education (2009) developed by NCTE in the background of NCF 2005 and Right to Education Act 2009. This Framework articulates the vision of teacher education as: helping teachers to become reflective practitioners, providing opportunity to student teachers for self-learning, reflection, assimilation and articulation of new ideas, and facilitating student teachers to observe and engage with children and develop ability of critical thinking etc.

The existing cut-off marks for admission to B.Ed. programme are 50 per cent and the institutions feel that sometimes it is difficult to get candidates with this percentage; therefore, there should be relaxation in cut-off marks.

The effort made by the state to modify its curriculum does not address any such change visualised by NCFTE 2009. Therefore, as suggested by teacher educators, a comprehensive effort should be made to bring systemic reform through modification of teacher education curriculum of the state. The curriculum of teacher education should focus on developing life skills, values and peace education, guidance and counselling etc. The applied nature of content taught in various papers should be emphasised.

Teacher educators and students, both felt that the teacher education curriculum of Sikkim is unrelated to the local context and should be modified. The local issues and concerns of Sikkim, especially adolescent problems, should be given more weightage in the B.Ed. curriculum of the state. Context specific issues and concerns of various states of the region need to be highlighted and integrated in more effective manner to help teachers become change agents in the real sense. The present fragmented approach that provides

half-baked information about local issues is not sufficient. The state of Sikkim is suffering from many problems and socio-cultural issues which should find adequate place in the teacher education curriculum.

School experience programme (SEP) is an important component of teacher preparation but has been found to be the most neglected area of the teacher education curriculum. Student teachers of the states where the team visited expressed their concern and dissatisfaction about the way practice teaching is treated in their respective colleges. They were quite vocal regarding the lack of clarity about the format of lesson plan, and method of transaction. It is felt that teacher educators of the region need a professional development programme specifically focussed on SEP. It may tremendously help these institutions if the national level institutions like NCERT, NCTE or any university Department of Education evolves a training programme on SEP for training of teacher educators of the region.

A number of national level initiatives are directed towards quality improvement of education. However, it is pertinent to note that majority of teacher education institutions of the state are private and self-financing which do not come under the preview of any government initiative. This has created a very peculiar situation in

the state. While ensuring the quality of education is the responsibility of all – private or government professional development needs of teacher educators of government institutions are well taken care of, but the teacher educators of private institutions are left on their own.

The faculty members of various private institutions expressed their concerns about lack of opportunities for them to update and upgrade their knowledge and felt that national level institutions like NCERT and NUEPA etc. should organise professional development programmes for both government and private teacher educators keeping in view that they are equal parties in ensuring availability of good teachers in schools of the region.

The teacher education institutions are suffering from non-availability of teacher education candidates from science stream which requires immediate attention to prevent shortage of science teachers in the state in future. This concern also finds a place in the Vision 2020 report but needs to be translated into action.

While teacher educators suggested that the existing one-year duration of teacher education programme is sufficient and should continue, students felt it should be increased to two years. ICT should be an integral component of

transactional approach and teacher educators should be given orientation on ICT integration. There is a strong need to develop close institutional linkages between various institutes

and university Departments of Education of various states to bring quality improvement of education in the region.

REFERENCES

- DELORS JACQUES. 1996. *Learning: The Treasure Within. Report of International Commission on Education for Twenty-first Century*. UNESCO, Paris.
- MINISTRY OF EDUCATION. 1948-49. *Report of the University Education Commission*. Government of India, New Delhi.
- _____. 1953. *Report of the Secondary Education Commission (1952-53)*, Government of India, New Delhi.
- _____. 1966. *Education and National Development: Report of the Commission (1964-66)*. Government of India, New Delhi.
- MHRD. 1985. *Challenges of Education*. Government of India, New Delhi.
- _____. 1986. *National Policy on Education*. Government of India, New Delhi.
- MINISTRY OF DEVELOPMENT OF NORTH EASTERN REGION AND NORTH EASTERN COUNCIL. 2008. *North Eastern Region: Vision 2020*. vol 1. New Delhi.
- NATIONAL COMMISSION ON TEACHERS-1. 1983-85. *Teacher and Society*. Government of India Press, Delhi.
- NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR TEACHER EDUCATION. 1998. *Curriculum Framework for Quality Teacher Education*. NCTE, New Delhi.
- NCERT. 1978. *Teacher Education Curriculum Framework*. NCERT, New Delhi.
- _____. 1988. *National Curriculum Framework for Teacher Education*. NCERT, New Delhi.
- PANDEY, S. 2009. *Teacher Education Curriculum Reform since 1978: A Critique. Teacher Education Reflection Towards Policy Formulation*. (ed.) M.A. Siddiqui, A.K.Sharma and G.L.Arora. NCTE, New Delhi.
- CENSUS OF INDIA. 2011. Sikkim Population available at Web URL: www.sikenvis.nic.in