



OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING MODE PRODUCING PROSPECTIVE TEACHERS VIA TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAMME

Sayka Bano

Assistant Professor,
PG Department,
MIER College of Education
B.C. Road,
Jammu.

ABSTRACT

Teacher education is an integral component of the Indian education system. The constitutional goals, the directive principles of the state policy, the socioeconomic problems and the growth of knowledge, the emerging expectations and the changes operating in education, etc. call for an appropriate response from a futuristic education system and provide the perspective within which teacher education programme needs to be viewed. After independence during 1950s large number of schools were to be established and more teacher need to be appointed every year and regular teacher training institutions were not adequate but large number of untrained teachers were working in schools. Hence the need for training through correspondence –Cum – Contact programme arose during 1960s. The experiment of summer – school – cum correspondence course for awarding B.Ed. degree give rise to a new type of mass scale correspondence cum contact course for B.Ed. degree which was launched by several universities. Open and distance learning system has proven its importance in basic training to teachers and their continuing professional development as well. The present paper explores the five main categories of teacher education in which Open and distance learning provide programmes: initial teacher education, continuing professional development, to reorient teachers for curriculum reform, to support career development and in system building. The paper also throws light on how Open and distance learning system emerged as a potential system through integration of various technologies. The National Curriculum Framework for Teacher Education (NCTE, 2010) also found Open and Distance learning as a powerful instrument for providing professional support to the teacher, particularly with a view to overcome the barriers of physical distance.

KEY WORDS: *Teacher Education, Open and Distance mode.*

INTRODUCTION

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 being possible, only if teachers are well trained through effective teacher education programmes. Just after Independence during 1950's it was felt that in order to cope up with expansion of education a large number of schools were established & more number of teachers need to be appointed every year. The number of trained teacher through the regular teacher training institutions was not adequate. Besides a large number of untrained teachers were still working in schools. Hence the need of training teachers through correspondence-cum-contact programmes arose during 1960's. Central Institute of Education & Regional College of education conducted Summer- School cum-correspondence course (SSCC) for training of untrained Teacher. The experiment of SSCC for awarding B.Ed. degree gave rise to a new type of mass scale correspondence-cum- contact course for B.Ed. degree which was launched by several universities. Similarly in order to keep teachers abreast with the latest development to content knowledge & methodology, in-service training programmes need to be effectively & continually organized by universities. Subsequently, the Correspondence Courses were renamed as Distance Education. Open and distance education refers to approaches to learning that focus on freeing learners from constraints of time and place while offering flexible learning opportunities. The Correspondence / Distance Education mode had some distinct advantages. It could cater to the needs of a large number of clientele at a time. It provide well-structured and validated package of printed learning material. It was possible to enable learners to read and understand these materials at their own pace and time convenient to them. Open and distance learning has been used to provide programmes in five main categories of teacher education: initial teacher education, continuing professional development, to reorient teachers, for curriculum reform, to support career development and in system building. There is inevitably some overlap with these categories. For example, some programmes cater to more than one audience, qualified and unqualified teachers, with the unqualified taking a programme for initial qualifications and the qualified using it to upgrade their qualification. Some initial education programmes can be taken by new recruits to teaching and also by unqualified, but experienced practicing teachers. Also career development might be seen as part of continuing professional development. Initial teacher's education leads to qualified teacher status according to official

standards of a country. It is the first level qualification for a teacher and can be taken pre-service (before teaching) or in-service (while an untrained teacher is working as a teacher).

Both China and Nigeria, high population countries, have long used distance education in this category on a massive scale (China Television Teachers College and the National Teachers' Institute) and it has become an established and institutionalized part of their respective education system. Continuing professional development gives teachers the opportunities to develop new knowledge and skills or extend their existing experience. Distance education is widely used to in this category. Some of these courses are long, structured courses leading to formal qualification such as diplomas or degrees (such as the B. Prim Ed at UNISA in South Africa) while others are shorter, are not award-bearing and focus on discrete area of teacher areas of teacher education such as multi-grade teaching (Tele-SOPT in India). Continuing professional development can be offered as an (on-the-job) in-service activity or out-of-school where teachers do the course in a holiday period or takes time off to attend a teachers' college. Open and distance learning can have a role in programmes of curriculum reform which aim to change the content or process of education. Radio and print have been used in Mongolia (UNICEF/MOSTEC project) to orient teachers to official changes in the curriculum and teaching method. In South Africa, interactive radio is being used to improve the teaching of English and support teachers in achieving this (English in Action, OLSET). Distance education has been used to assist teachers' career development. Teachers need to acquire new skills as they aspire to become a teacher trainer or an inspector, or a college lecturer. A West African distance education project (RESAFAD) which spans several francophone countries give head teachers and aspiring heads the opportunity to take in-service course in school management. System-building programmes focus on building capacity in parts of the education system other than teachers such as distance study-center facilitators, programme managers, school-based mentors. One large-scale distance programme in India (DEP-DEEP) aims to build the capacity of a variety of educational stakeholders at the community, local, district and regional level. This category also includes distance programmes, such the TV series TV-Plus in Brazil, which recognize that in addition to school teachers there are also other educators in the community such as parents, social workers, nurses and prison warders.

OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING AS A POTENTIAL SYSTEM THROUGH INTEGRATION OF VARIOUS TECHNOLOGIES

In a rapid evolution, open and distance learning has changed and has embraced a changing mix of technologies. These have been used for two purposes: to distribute teaching material to learners, and to allow interaction between learner and tutor or among learners. Print, used as the main teaching medium, has remained a staple and printed materials are still used even for online courses, for learners with restricted internet access. Radio and television have been valuable in reaching large audiences and in providing immediacy and a stimulus. Both print and broadcasts can be used to provoke responses by students but are necessarily one-way media.

In contrast, face-to-face contact has proved its worth in maintaining learners' interest, in promoting dialogue and, crucially for teacher education, in allowing for the supervision of teaching practice. Computer-based technologies have been used with four different functions in teacher education. First, they have been used to distribute teaching materials, avoiding mailing costs or the time constraint of broadcasts, though transferring reproduction costs from the teaching institution to the learner. Second, computer-based learning allows simulated two-way communication. Third, where there is internet access, learners can communicate with their tutors or with fellow students, taking part in e-learning. Fourth, teachers or trainers with internet access, can download and use open educational resources. The extent to which it is practicable to use the more sophisticated communication technologies depends on the state of development of the technology within the country concerned. To sum up, the evidence confirms that open and distance learning can reach large audiences and can do so quickly. It has been used by governments to meet the needs of significant proportions of their teaching force. High satisfactory completion rates have been reported for programmes of initial training where teachers were motivated by the prospect of improved status and more pay. There is a much more mixed record for programmes that amounted to secondary-school equivalence and for programmes of continuing professional development. Anecdotal and qualitative evidence, and a small number of research studies, show that it has played a role in raising the quality of school systems and of classroom performance. Looking at the evidence more broadly, it is reasonable to assume that strengthening teachers' education should improve their performance. In a classic study, based in part on experience in the Pacific, Beeby warned that the teacher with a minimal education was "always teaching to the limits of his knowledge. He clings desperately to

the official syllabus, and the tighter it is the safer he feels. Beyond the pasteboard covers of the official textbook lies the dark where unknown questions lurk". Educational change and advance depend on having an education that goes beyond this (Beeby 1966). More recently the expectation that teachers should become reflective practitioners, able to examine and improve their own practice, makes increased demands on their education. Rich-country study evidence reinforces the conviction that better education should produce better teachers. By comparing policies within the United States, for example, researchers found "that the states leading the nation in student achievement and those that have made the most significant gains in achievement are the states that have the most highly qualified teachers and that have made consistent investments in teachers' professional development". Theory and practice confirm that where open and distance learning for teachers is successful, we can expect it to raise the quality of education. ODL is in constant transition. With each new technology available for delivery of learning, investigation is necessary to track costs and make decisions around widespread feasibility for use in teacher training. In 2004, the NCERT in India had to consider how it would train up to 300 in-service high school teachers per year in Guidance and Counseling Skills, when at the time they trained only 35 teachers on their campus in a face-to-face mode.

Demand for the counselors within the school system came from within the secondary school system as well as from Government-mandated changes. Additional salary was expected to accompany any upgrading of skills, so demand was very high across the country. There was also interest from foreign teachers in participating in this programme, as none existed in several South East Asian countries and Africa. It took several years to develop as a mixed print-based ODL programme and face-to-face mentoring programme. Interesting to note is that foreign interest in the programme has increased. This raises two aspects of cost-effectiveness. One is that the fees charged foreign students can aid in a cost recovery. The other is that decisions are needed on how to expand an ODL programme internationally, addressing issues around control, access and the cost of administering such a programme at a distance (Daniel 2009).

QUALITATIVE ROLES OF DISTANCE LEARNING FOR TEACHER EDUCATION

Using distance education for teacher education has potential advantages. It can provide the means of side stepping the slowness and dilution factor of the cascade approach by putting "Information about Curricula and Teaching approaches directly into the

hands of individual Teachers” (Robinson, 2007) and by cutting down the time between learning about new teaching practices and trying them out in the classroom. Distance learning can facilitate school based training, enabling a closer relationship between theory and practice. The shorter lead-time of some distance education, notably broadcasting can help bypass the inertia of the traditional educational system and facilitate the reflection of topical and teacher-led interests. Distance education can also play a role in community development. The establishment of a decentralized distance education structure can also be used for supporting training in general in the districts and serve as a basis for the development of a wider programme of continuing development of teachers. In print-poor countries, self-study materials can become a permanent resource. Experience has shown that the distance education has the potential to act as a second-rate system. But it can also act as an agent for change within a country. In some cases, long-established programmes in open universities (as in India, Pakistan and South Africa) have made, and continue to make, a significant numerical impact on teacher supply. It has also brought benefits of economies of scale. But a shift towards integration with regular teaching structures may, as the evidence suggests, have the effect of liberating distance education from its straightjacket of numbers and costs. Distance can also provide an opportunity to rethink teacher education in terms of content, methods and delivery. Integration demands a closer consideration of the distinctive pedagogical strengths and limitations of each mode and a judicious blend of the two.

In text poor environments print distance-education modules can, as the evidence often shows, serve an incidental dual purpose by providing, a permanent reference source for regular teacher educators, where carefully designed print materials can play a development role by providing learners with exposure to a much range of written genres and registers than is available to them in print-poor environments. They can thus make a contribution to a teacher’s understanding of their own academic discourse community. A judicious combination of the modes, which draws on their strengths, can open up a range of new possibilities. For example, by replacing some formal teaching with self-study components, more time could be made available for the management and expansion of teaching practice or group work. Distance education approaches are not value-free. Its goals often include active learning, learner centered approach, the growth and personal development of individual learners rather than the transmission of information alone. The model of teaching-learning and tutor-learner relationship may stem from a different tradition and set of values too. The goals of primary teachers’ colleges, avowed and

implicit, may be different and often are. Distance education also places new demands on educators who have to learn to do familiar things in new ways.

CONCLUSION

Open and distance learning can be effectively deployed for teacher education. While it has often been regarded as a 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 systems 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 theme from the earliest projects on. 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. There are several examples of consortia formed to share the cost of materials development for ODL as well as the training in the use of those materials. One such example, demonstrating cost-effectiveness through adoption or adaptation by various national governments and local institutions and agencies, is the use of learning materials for both pre-service and in-service teacher education programmes, or the sharing of standard materials by three or four countries within a sub-region. Cost-effectiveness of an ODL programme is not easy to ascertain. Using a strict comparison of expenditures for administration, materials development and delivery of an ODL programme versus the traditional face-to-face model would likely result in a lower per student cost for ODL. This is even further supported when all costs are amortized over the life of the programme. However, if cost effectiveness is to include outputs such as student satisfaction, completion and teacher quality improvement, measures are harder to quantify.

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