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Teacher training: Teacher education in transition

By Muhammad Ali and Reshma Parveen

Teachers' professional education is viewed as one of the most important factors in improving students' learning. Keeping this in view many developed and less developed countries pay significant attention to improve the practices of teacher education. In order to develop capable teachers they make conscious efforts to establish and maintain quality teacher education institutions.

The history of teacher education in Pakistan starts with the establishment of the country. However, this area has been facing various challenges such as lack of consistent policy, inconsistency in curriculum, low resources, lack of quality teachers, low quality of teaching process, lack of standard, etc. Today, a range of public and private institutions are engaged in preparing school teachers. In Pakistan, like many other countries, public institutions are the main source for developing teachers through pre-service and in-service programmes. However, many studies have raised the question on the quality of delivery mechanism of the institutions while forwarding recommendations for improvement.

Historically, different reforms have been brought to improve the condition of teacher education in the country. Currently, teacher education in Pakistan is passing through a transition as an innovation has been initiated by the Government of Pakistan with the support of USAID through their Pre-Service Teachers Education Programme (STEP) project. This reform is attempted in order to improve the quality of teacher education by including different innovations.

In this regard, a new curriculum has been developed for pre-service programmes such as a two-year Associate Degree in Education (ADE) and a four-year BEd (Hons). Effort has been made to design the curriculum keeping in view the modern educational principle along with the contextual relevancy. These programmes are gradually replacing the previous pre-service and in-service programmes such as Primary Teacher Certificate (PTC), Certificate in Teaching (CT) and the one-year Ed programme. In addition, an effort is being made for the accreditation and standardisation of teacher training institutions through this initiative.

The ADE and BEd programme has been initiated in some colleges and will be gradually implemented in remaining colleges throughout the country in the coming years. In addition, to attract the best mind towards the teaching profession a stipend is also offered to student-teachers for providing them financial support.

The significance of such educational innovation cannot be overlooked for improvement of teacher education in the country. However, there are areas that need serious considerations for the effectiveness and sustainability of the new reform initiatives.

Firstly, the new developed curriculum is based on the modern educational principles. Teachers are provided a course outline with the expectation that they will explore the teaching learning material for classroom instructions. However, it was observed that some of the teachers are struggling with identifying teaching resources due to the unavailability of the reference books and lack of Internet facility in their colleges/institutions. This situation may affect the teaching-learning process of the ADE courses. Hence there is a need to provide the reference books and Internet facility to the faculty members in order to make the teaching-learning process smooth.

Second, Internet is considered as one of the important sources for identifying teaching-learning material. However, it was observed that some of the faculty members are not literate in computers and Internet. So they are facing challenges in accessing the teaching-learning resources that are available on the Internet or in soft version. Therefore, the faculty members of colleges need to be helped in acquiring workable computer and Internet skills.

Third, the new curriculum demands new teaching strategies such as collaborative, inquiry and activity-based teaching approach. However, a majority of the faculty in the teacher institutions are not oriented with the teaching strategies demanded by the ADE and BEd programme. Therefore, the professional development of the faculty at teacher training institutions should be given priority along with the curriculum development.

Furthermore, there is a sense of uncertainty about the sustainability of the new initiatives after completion of the Pre-STEP project. Many educational initiatives in the past died away with closure of the projects. Therefore there is a dire need to develop a clear road map for the continuity and sustainability of reforms.

It was also observed that some school teachers are being deputed in teacher education colleges due to lack of adequate number of teachers in there. Due to the different approach of pedagogy and andragogy, these teachers treat the prospective teacher like children, which demotivates them. Thus when the school teachers are deputed in colleges they should be oriented with the andragogy of teaching an adult.

Finally, a sense of insecurity can be observed among the student-teachers about their job prospects after the completion of their ADE or BEd honours. How will they stand apart from the teacher who has done one year BEd and other courses, is a question to ponder upon. A clear policy is required about job opportunities for the prospective teachers so that they can focus their studies.

These issues need to be addressed in order to sustain and maintain the quality of the new reforms. A vigilant plan and sincere implementation will, of course, be helpful in transforming the teacher education practices in the country.

In short, the importance of quality teacher education cannot be overlooked for improving the quality of teaching-learning in the school. The new educational innovation will, definitely, lead to improve teacher education practices in Pakistan. However, there is a dire need to look reflectively at how to sustain the initiatives and make it productive.

The writers are educators.