# Asian Resonance

# Quality Concerns in Elementary Teacher Education
# (A Portfolio Perspective)

## Abstract

This paper presents the quality concerns in elementary teacher education, taking the three domains - cognitive, psychomotor and affective - as bases for the enunciation of various issues germane to quality. It suggests that teachers should be trained to undertake portfolio approach for performing their tasks effectively and efficiently to augment quality education.

**Keywords:** Quality Concerns,  Elementary Teacher Education

**Introduction**

Quality in all walks of life is discussed today by every nation. Everyone admits that quality of education is the base for the quality of human life. Every nation, therefore, strives for improvement in the quality of education, and, in sooth, is primarily to focus emphasis on the quality of teacher education to realize the desired end of education. The teacher education programme, thus, comes in the forefront. Teacher education should always have to solicit answers to four basic questions and offer opportunities to realize them in a great variety of educational situations that is: What are the objectives of education? How do the objectives vary from individual to individual? How can the objectives be achieved? And how does one know that they have been achieved?

The main focus in elementary education laid by the National Policy on Education (1986) is on -"'considerable improvement in the quality of education." This is being done in two ways: (i) improving school facilities through Operation Black Board; and (ii) improving the quality of teachers through their pre-service and in-service education. To improve teacher education at the elementary level, District Institutes of Education and Training (DIETs) have been established at the district level, provided with adequate well-qualified staff, together with better educational provisions for primary teachers of the district.

For quality elementary education, the objectives of elementary teacher education may be classified under three categories:
1. Cognitive (knowledge and understanding);
2. Psychomotor (skills); and
3. Affective (attitudes, appreciation, values etc.).

The quality of teacher education will, prima facie, depend on the quality of students admitted to the teacher education course. Since these teachers may be required to teach upto class VIII, admission is made strictly on the basis of merit, subject to reservation of seats as per the State policy. It is also desirable that candidates are selected on the basis of state level selection test, focusing on teacher and teaching aptitude.

**Mission**

Teaching requires teachers to transform their knowledge into suitable tasks which lead to learning. Effective teaching takes place when the learning experience structured by the teacher matches the needs of the learner, that is, the tasks would develop the individual pupil's knowledge, skills and attitudes in such a way that the pupil learns applying past knowledge as appropriate and laying the foundation for the next stage of learning. A repertoire of teaching methods and strategies does help the student teacher perform effectively. The entire edifice of teacher education rests on the bulwark of effective skilful teaching and, hence, the need for facilitating skill in teaching.

The Curriculum Framework for Elementary Teacher Education focuses on higher level knowledge of the subject matter related to school level content. It includes pedagogical analysis as well, with reference to the

**Dilip Kumar Jha**
Assistant Professor,
Deptt.of Business Administration,
CV Raman College of Engineering,
Bhubaneswar

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appropriate methods of teaching the same. Practical work is another important component of the curriculum that includes Educational Technology, Physical and Value Education and Work Experience. Internship offers the programme on pedagogy.

Pedagogy is the set of theories and the rules governing teaching practice. This important input is being given in phases, viz., Observation of teacher educators' demonstration; Observation of teaching at school; Micro-teaching; Preparation of lesson plans; Preparation of teaching-learning materials; and Practice teaching.

Well-designed curriculum components are to be carried out systematically in the teacher education programme.

## Review of Literature

Electronic portfolios are rooted in the traditions of their paper predecessors. Use of paper portfolios in education dramatically increased in the 1980s and 1990s (Elbow & Belanoff, 1997). In teacher education, performance-based as- sessment in the context of a portfolio allows preservice teachers to demonstrate what they know and what they are able to do. Portfolios, then, can provide a dual focus on basic knowledge retention as well as the application and demon- stration of teaching-related skills that span an entire teacher education program and beyond. One strength of portfolios in teacher education is the connection that students make between their professional growth that occurs as a result of coursework and fieldwork during the process of learning to teach.

Early portfolio leaders suggested a portfolio should tell a learner's story and emphasized the role of the student as author of the portfolio (Paulson & Paulson, 1991). In contrast to the "portfolio as story" metaphor, Wilkerson and Lang (2003, 2004) offer the "portfolio as test" metaphor. In high-stakes envi- ronments like credentialing and accreditation, they argue standards of validity, reliability, fairness, and absence of bias are required to mitigate litigation risk, and stress the need to ensure "contents are rigorously controlled and systemati-cally evaluated" (Wilkerson & Lang, 2003, paragraph 3). In higher education, portfolio adoption has been in response to accountability demands (Yancey & Weiser, 1997).

The portfolio literature offers numerous contradictory findings. For example, portfolios are regarded as useful in promoting reflective practice among pre-service teachers (Avraamidou & Zembal-Saul, 2013; Borko, Michalec, Tim-mons, & Siddle, 2007; Shulman, 2008), but Carney (2011) warns that some preservice teachers are uncomfortable revealing too much of themselves in their portfolio entries. Zeichner and Wray (2016) urge us to move beyond "the obvi-ous conclusions" of greater reflectivity in portfolio authors to examine how the context influences the nature and quality of reflections. The portfolio literature also suggests portfolios are valuable for developing teaching skills (Beck, Livne, & Bear, 2015; Hartmann, 2013; Klenowski, 2011; Lyons, 2008; Shulman, 2009), but portfolios may not be sufficient to document those

skills (Shulman, 2009). Results are mixed as to whether portfolio authors develop technology.

## Evidence

Research studies, focused on the characteristics of educational development in the country, suggest that there has been a 'positive spurt' in quantity and a 'negative spurt' in the quality of overall education. Research carried out with respect to primary and secondary education stages usually concludes that teacher education is the prime subject. It is argued that teacher training seems to have no bearing on what the prospective teachers do in the classroom, when they join their ascribed teaching position after completing the training ritual.

An assessment on the efficacy of teacher education programme revealed:
1. Inadequate demonstration of the basic teaching skills in the actual classroom situation.
2. Mismatch between the optimal teaching competency and the exhibited teaching competency in the actual classroom situation.
3. Incongruence between teaching aptitude and teaching performance.
4. Scanty exposure on practice teaching.
5. Adequate need for essentials on teacher efficiency, viz.,
   i. Learner-centered Management;
   ii. Planning Instructional Management;
   iii. Subject-based Management; and
   iv. Communication Efficacy.

The research findings indicate the need to identify the gaps and explore changes required in the existing education programme that will respond to the actual needs of the natural classrooms. The system of Teacher Education cannot be judged independently to see its value and consequences. It needs substantive documents, that is, the portfolios collected, now and then, as evidence to see the system in its totality.

## Portfolios

Portfolios are collections of purposeful and specialized work, capturing a process that can never be fully appreciated unless one can be inside and outside someone else's mind. They validate current expectations and legitimize the future goals. They tell us what to see and what we wish we would not see. They are a professional looking glass. Portfolios can be developed in each and every context in the curriculum transaction.

Teachers are the key persons in curriculum transaction. They are to perceive every component in the teaching-learning process through portfolios. A teacher education portfolio is designed on eight steps through which the objectives are meticulously spelt out for ensuring quality in elementary education.

The eight-fold' interactive steps in the teacher education portfolio are:
1. Developing appropriate observation strategies for teacher demonstration;
2. Designing and implementing adequate training on classroom interaction analysis;
3. Orienting teachers towards matching learning-styles and teaching-styles;
4. Sensitizing the teacher towards psycho-

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technological principles in the preparation of teaching-learning material;

5. Ensuring competency-based teaching;
6. Observation of video clippings on various teaching methodologies;
7. Reflections on practice teaching; and
8. Incorporation of reflection and inquiry.

The whole system of teacher education functions on the basis of observation and interaction between the teacher educator and the teacher trainees. The teacher educator observes the teaching efficiency of the student teacher. The observations have to be done systematically. A checklist can be developed, incorporating factors for teacher efficiency such as general disposition, subject-based management and support strategies. After an observation, a discussion should follow for explicit assessment.

During micro-teaching, the student teachers should be trained in interaction analysis, that is, in teacher talk and teacher-student talk. Discussion on the analysis will refine teaching competency in actual classroom setting.

It so happens that individuals of differing performance levels as student teachers does not differ in their transfer skills in the school campus. The fact that the teacher is an expert in a subject is no guarantee that the teacher can help others learn the subject. They need thorough orientation on teaching-strategies and learning-styles during internship.

For effective teaching, Teaching-Learning Materials (TLMs) offer the support and help render the learning process comprehensive. Hence, teachers should be sensitized on psycho-technological dimensions in the preparation and utilization of TLM in the teaching process.

Many a time, practice teaching remains merely a ritual. And so, teachers may not differentiate on skills and competencies, general competency and specific competencies. Their main focus is only on marks-based achievement rather than on competency development. Hence, the displayed TLMs in the classrooms are displays in name only and the teachers simply remain conventional talk-chalk teachers.

Video clippings on various teaching methodologies in the classroom situations can be shown for the teachers to observe; and the designed observation schedules can be given to reflect immediately. This really helps them understand various concepts like 'child-centered' and analyze the merits and demerits in each methodology.

## Illustrative Portfolios Model

Teachers should be trained to do write-ups, that is, develop portfolios throughout their teaching career. These may be in the form of narratives about teachers' thinking and working styles; their beliefs about learning; the contexts in which they work; their students' characteristics, needs, or experiences; and the evolution that they may have undergone as professionals or as learners. They may also address the curriculum instruction or assessment demands that teacher's face; particularly any pressing concerns; or the questions that frame their professional inquiry. Finally, these narratives might portray the developers' specific learning needs and the kinds of response they would like from a reader. If elementary teacher education is re-designed on portfolios, there is a greater chance for augmenting quality elementary education.

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