



CLASS OBSERVATION OF SECONDARY TEACHER TRAINEES IN TEACHING IN INCLUSIVE SETTINGS TO ASSESS THE COMPETENCY OF TEACHER EDUCATORS OF WEST BENGAL

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INTRODUCTION

Celik, S. (2011) in the article titled “Characteristics and Competencies for Teacher Educators: Addressing the Need for Improved Professional Standards in Turkey” aptly points out- “Significant research efforts in past decades have added a great deal to the body of knowledge about teaching and teachers. However, although the growing interest in trying to uncover the nature of teaching and teachers’ work over the years has brought attention to teaching about teaching, teachers of teachers—who they are, what they do, what they think—and their desired characteristics, have often been ignored in studies of teacher education [...] Thus, it is of crucial importance that the questions are addressed by exploring what contributes to the professional development of teacher educators and by explicitly setting the quality requirements and specific competencies for them.”(p.18)

Correspondingly, questions such as what teacher educators should be competent in, what tasks and competencies teacher educators are expected to possess, and ultimately what it means to be a good teacher educator have rarely been investigated (Koster, Brekelmans, Korthagen, & Wubbels, 2005). Therefore, not surprisingly, very little has been discovered about the quality of teacher education, and hence, that of teacher educators, over the years (Buchberger & Byrne, 1995; Korthagen, 2000; Koster et al., 2005). In India NATIONAL POLICY ON EDUCATION 2016: REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE FOR REVOLUTION OF THE NEW EDUCATION POLICY, published by the Ministry of Human Resource Development, also reflects a clear insistence upon the urgency of rethinking teacher education for inclusion. The following excerpt from the document published by Government

of India on 30th April, 2016, reflects a profound concern for the prolonged negligence of the nature and quality of teacher education and the resultant deterioration of quality of education in the nation:

Section 6.2.10 states – “[...] suffice to say here that majority of teachers lack [...] required teaching skills which has resulted in poor quality of classroom transaction and learning levels” and the Recommendations proceed to assert that “The Committee is convinced that unless there is a competent and committed cadre of teachers, quality of school education cannot improve. The Committee feels there is an urgent need to address the above major issues relating to [...] and professional development of teachers in a comprehensive and effective manner.” (p.). Thus it is seen that the National Policy of Education, 2016 Report clearly recognizes and urges the need to explore the issue of “professional development of teachers” for developing a “competent and committed cadre of teachers”. If teacher education is to be revamped then the quality of teacher educators naturally come under the scanner. In Section 6.3 titled “Teacher Education, Deployment and Professional Development”, clause 6.3.1 asserts clearly – “The poor quality of school education is a direct result of poor quality of teacher education and teacher training” thereby bringing to the forefront the policy emphasis on reconsidering the present state of teacher education and the lack of investigation in the area. The Report continues to identify the poor state of teacher education courses in the nation that implicitly reflects upon the quality of the teacher educators as well: “6.3.2 In their interactions in different parts of the country, the Committee was told time and again of the poor quality of our B.Ed. courses [...] State Governments and NCTE became partners in proliferation of such colleges which were nothing but degree shops.”(p.11) The Recommendations make it clear that it is high time measures were taken to explore and rethink the teacher education system, a fact that justifies the present enquiry into the competencies of teacher educators who are entrusted with the responsibility of preparing teachers for our nation, aspiring to progress towards a new age inclusive society. Clause 6.3.5 asserts: “Our education system has paid a heavy price for neglect of teacher education. The Committee feels that some drastic, even unpopular measures will need to be taken to improve the quality of teacher education and teachers.”(p.12)

The OECD report too had identified the policy orientation towards increased focus on the education of teacher educators, both broadly and for diversity in particular, in order to increase evidence of how they are prepared and how they in turn prepare student teachers and teachers (pp.288-289). Competencies of teacher educators in this regard thus emerge as

crucial. Unfortunately, a lack of significant volume of research on the outcomes and impact of teacher educator development courses and a lack of formal programmes dedicated to teacher educator preparation suggest that educational systems are falling short in a critical way, especially in the area of inclusive education. Interestingly enough though NCTE had issued a directive that only one teacher educator from general teacher education colleges would be trained by Rehabilitation Council of India [RCI] and that person would take care of the compulsory subject of special education in his/her college, it may be noted that such professional knowledge emanated by a single teacher educator may contribute to enhancement of knowledge, but how far that may contribute to improvement of the contemporary scenario for developing competent teachers for a truly inclusive society remains a grey area.

In education, the ultimate concern is the student's learning. For some this means that student achievement is the only true indicator of teacher effectiveness. In an educational management system like teacher evaluation, student achievement must be measured in a manner consonant with the outcomes held to be important. Student achievement can be measured in many ways: comparing student test scores to a national norm; comparing test score gains with those of a comparable class; net gains over time, and so forth (Haefele, 1981). Undeniably, use of student achievement tests has grown internationally, and, increasingly, education policy makers have looked to test results to evaluate student learning and schools. Many schools around the world are now required to report on their performance and to use different forms of internal and/or external evaluation data, including student achievement data, to demonstrate performance. Student data are now readily available, precise, and assumed to be objective, neutral, and comparable. According to this logic, testing gives all stakeholders information about how well teachers are teaching their students to learn. Disaggregating scores by subgroups allows for checks on the progress of groups whose suboptimal performance is often masked by overall averages. Seen in this way, testing provides the critical linkage in accountability for student learning. According to James H. Williams & Laura C. Engel (2013), ministries of education and international organizations are increasingly emphasizing the importance of effective teachers in student achievement. In 2005, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) issued a report, titled *Teachers Matter*, which emphasized the quality of teachers as a key factor affecting student outcomes. **The National Council of Teacher Education [NCTE]** in the first draft

version of **TEACHR FRAMEWORK: A RANKING AND ACCREDITATION FRAMEWORK FOR TEI** published in **JUNE, 2017**, proffers a clear and planned scheme of evaluating teacher educators' performance by video analysis of both the teacher educators' and trainee teachers' classroom transaction as well as by proctored tests administered to students through the net. Thus the implicit acknowledgement of the students' performance, i.e., the trainee teachers' performance as a reflection of the teacher educators' competency is evident. The B.Ed. trainees teaching in real classroom situations are thus observed to study how far they have been trained and developed for inclusive education by the teacher educators. Their nature of addressing diversity in real classroom situation is a reflection of the skill and knowledge of their educators who have taught them how to teach in inclusive settings.

Sample:

150 teacher trainees, both pre-service and in-service, were observed in ten government aided schools in and around Kolkata, capital of West Bengal were observed.

Tool:

For Observation of B.Ed. Trainees in classrooms with diverse learners of Government aided Secondary and Higher Secondary schools, observation sheets based on Competency Rating Scales were developed. The observations noted were both

- Descriptive and
- Reflective [Bogdan & Biken, 1998]

The classroom observation and subsequent analysis was done with the help of an observation sheet constructed by the researcher on the basis of "Student Teachers' Competencies Rating Scale" developed by the Washington Association of Agricultural Educators. The Scale so constructed was named Trainee Teachers' Competencies Rating Scale [Appendix V]. The scale so developed had the following dimensions:

- a. Planning Instruction for inclusive education, that included the following-
 - Instructional design for addressing diversity and inclusion, including planning lessons,
 - developing clear objectives,
 - content management for inclusive education,
 - organization of instructional activities and
 - selection of instructional materials and media suitable for inclusive education.

- b. Implementation of the instructional design, that included the following-
 - Involving all students in class discourse
 - Making modifications and adaptations according to diverse student learning pace
 - Providing meaningful reinforcement to the students
 - Using instructional materials suitably according to the differing needs of the students
- c. Inclusive Evaluative techniques including
 - design of appropriate evaluative instruments according to individual and diverse needs of the students,
 - use of observation to evaluate student behaviour and progress
 - providing thoughtful feedback addressing individual problems with flexibility
- d. Developing professional behaviour conducive to inclusive education that included-
 - self-evaluation for being able to develop inclusive practices through collection, interpretation and consideration of data and feedback
 - relation with diverse students
 - developing self-esteem among diverse students
 - accepting diverse view points from representatives of different socio-economic and cultural backgrounds
 - confident body language and direct eye contact with diverse learners including the ones showing disruptive behaviour demonstrating knowledge of exclusion and inclusive education
 - Receiving cues from class behaviour and analysing weakness or error in own instructional approach

The scale permitted tick marking any one of 5 option given against given parameters and that indicated the teacher educator's performance, and therefore it was actually done while observing the lessons. The scale also had space for reflective critical comments that were put after the class has been observed based on field notes made by the researcher while observing the lesson and the lesson plans observed. In formulation of the Observation Sheet attention was paid to competencies like attitude, skill and knowledge regarding Inclusive Education. Any score against each parameter was not ascribed while classroom observation and only

noted the extent to which the inclusive competencies were reflected by the trainees because students' score based evaluation of teachers have many pitfalls that have been discouraged by researchers all over the world. General observations and field noted were considered better ways of capturing the depth and extent of inclusive competencies of the teacher educators who had groomed these trainees. The tools developed for the study were pre-tested with 15% of the total sample for validation. The feedback from the pilot test was incorporated to further strengthen and finalise the tools.

Data Collection Method:

The researcher visited ten secondary and higher secondary government aided institutions for data collection, and observation. Notes were taken. Two lessons by three hundred teacher trainees were observed with each lesson given forty minutes. The lessons were observed successively with the second lesson observed two weeks after observing the first lesson. Field notes were taken. The researcher's presence in the class may have caused some degree of self-awareness and uneasiness and hence the second observation was done after the first trial observation.

Inter Observation Agreement was attained by urging two colleagues working as teacher educators to observe the classes that the researcher observed. These two observers accompanied the researcher to the class and were provided with the Observation Schedules in which they made detailed notings. After each observation session the researcher discussed the observations with these two colleagues and noted down the common findings and the different observations after detailed discussion with the co-observers.

The researcher also viewed video recordings of the student teachers since there was a possibility of the student teachers getting conscious and artificial with the researcher and the two co-observers physically present in the classroom for observation and so the peers were urged to make video recordings of the student teachers' classes and submit the same in CDs to the researcher. The CDs were viewed and analyzed with the help of the observation schedules and the observations compared with those made in the class observation sessions. Here too detailed discussions were made with the co-observers and major observations noted as findings.

Fifty male and female teacher trainees were observed. They had been groomed for their practice teaching sessions and reflected the knowledge and skill of the teacher educators regarding inclusive education in their classroom transaction style. The scale permitted tick

marking any one of 5 option given against given parameters and that indicated the teacher educator's performance, and therefore it was actually done while observing the lessons. The scale also had space for reflective critical comments that were put after the class has been observed based on field notes and the lesson plans. The researcher did not ascribe any score against each parameter while classroom observation and only noted the extent to which the inclusive competencies were reflected by the trainees because students' score based evaluation of teachers have many pitfalls that have been discouraged by researchers all over the world. General observations and field noted were considered better ways of capturing the depth and extent of inclusive competencies of the teacher educators who had groomed these trainees. As mentioned earlier, two more colleagues serving as teacher educators accompanied the researcher and acted as co-observers for Inter Observation Agreement. Video analysis of the teaching was also done to avoid the possibility of error due to nervousness and self-consciousness of the student-teachers in physical presence of the observers. This observation of videos was used to compare and endorse the observation notes taken in the class observation earlier. After each visit the researcher carefully wrote down the day's events describing the places, objects, conversations, feedbacks and activities. Ideas were also recorded. These constituted the descriptive Field Notes. These, as discussed earlier, were discussed in detail with the co-observers and the findings were noted. These field notes represented the objective recording of the events and captured the action and feedback of the teacher educators in real classroom settings that called for practical strategies and action in addressing diversity. It is understood that a setting can never be completely captured and thus attempts were made to note as much as possible within the parameters of the research goals. Summarized or edited versions of notes were avoided and detail notings were made, as prescribed by Bogdan&Biklen (1998). Abstract words were avoided and the notes were kept specific. The filed notes so taken were, what Bogdan&Biklen (1998) would call "portraits of the subjects, reconstruction of dialogue, description of physical setting, accounts of particular events, depiction of activities and the observer's behavior". (p.48).

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Table 1: Instructional design for addressing diversity and inclusion

| a. Instructional design for addressing diversity and inclusion | Excellent % | Good % | Satisfactory % | Poor | Very Poor |
|---|-------------|--------|----------------|------|-----------|
| i. planning lesson | 0 | 12 | 88 | 0 | 0 |
| ii. developing clear objectives, | 0 | 28 | 55 | 17 | 0 |
| iii. content management for addressing diversity | 6 | 30 | 52 | 10 | 2 |
| iv. organization of instructional activities | 0 | 46 | 30 | 15 | 9 |
| v. Selection of instructional materials and media suitable for inclusive education. | 26 | 50 | 20 | 4 | |

Interpretation:

From Table 1 we get an intriguing insight into the nature of knowledge and skill of the teacher educators who had groomed the trainees . Developing lesson plans which were otherwise rule bound and well organised, failed to meet the needs of children with special needs in most cases. The objectives were not clearly developed at all and reflected a mechanical bend to the learning design instead of clarity of concept and knowledge regarding needs of diverse learners. Content management was otherwise good in many cases but as seen from the table above, only 30% of the trainees were alert enough to organize the content in a way that reflected an understanding of catering to the diverse needs of the learners. Interestingly enough most of the trainees revealed clarity of purpose and understanding of diverse needs in their choice of teaching- learning materials with 26% of them exhibiting excellence and 50% showing good selection and organization. This could be indicative of teacher educators trying to incorporate features of inclusive TLM with knowledge received from compulsory papers on inclusive education that they themselves had not been exposed to in their student life, but were now familiar with , if not very well conversed in, due to

inclusion of the paper in the teacher education curriculum. However this could reflect only a certain degree of knowledge, mostly bookish for the teacher educators since had they been well versed in the parameters of creating inclusive schools , the learning design, transaction strategies planned, specification of objectives and content management planning exhibited by the performing trainees would be at par with the TLM design.

Table 2 : Implementation of the instructional design

| b. Implementation of the instructional design | Excellent | Good | Satisfactory | Poor | Very Poor |
|---|-----------|------|--------------|------|-----------|
| i. Involving all students in class discourse | 4 | 20 | 48 | 20 | 8 |
| ii. Making modifications and adaptations according to diverse student learning pace | 0 | 0 | 20 | 40 | 40 |
| iii. Providing meaningful reinforcement to the students | 0 | 30 | 50 | 20 | 0 |
| iv. Using instructional materials suitably according to the differing needs of the students | 0 | 20 | 40 | 20 | 20 |

Interpretation:

From Table 2 we see that nearly half the trainees, i.e., 48% reflect good practice of in involving the whole class but that this may not be related to a conscious knowledge and skill related to inclusive education may be inferred from the poor performance in making modifications and adaptations according to diverse student learning pace. Only 20% of the trainees show satisfactory performance in this regard. 30% of the trainees show excellence in providing meaningful feedback to the learners, 50% fared satisfactorily and 20% exhibited poor feedback mechanism but it could not be inferred whether that catered to the individual needs of learners with special needs since in their use of instructional material to suit individual needs of diverse learners 40% of the trainees were either poor or very poor performers . They tended to use the instructional material in an uniform manner following certain rules of delivery and transaction and seemed to be ignorant of the skills and strategies of adaptation and modification to meet individual needs of diverse students.

Table 3: Inclusive Evaluative techniques

| c. Inclusive Evaluative techniques | Excellent | Good | Satisfactory | Poor | Very Poor |
|--|-----------|------|--------------|------|-----------|
| i.Design of appropriate evaluative instruments according to individual and diverse needs of the students | 0 | 0 | 20 | 70 | 10 |
| ii.Use of observation to evaluate student behaviour and progress | 0 | 0 | 30 | 60 | 10 |
| iii.Providing thoughtful feedback addressing individual problems flexibility | 0 | 16 | 30 | 50 | 4 |

Interpretation:

Table 3 reveals that trainees have received very little training in evaluative technique, adaptation to meet needs of diverse learners including those with special needs. In design of appropriate evaluative instruments, trainees showed a tendency to evaluate all the learners in an uniform manner by framing different types of questions which otherwise were relevant in most cases but the questions failed to address the issue of individual needs of differently abled learners. Moreover there was an express tendency of restricting the evaluate instruments and techniques to mostly textual questions only that revealed a lack of knowledge and skill related to different forms of evaluative techniques and instruments for evaluation in inclusive settings. Since only 20% of the trainees revealed a basic satisfactory endeavour I evaluative instrumentation with a sweeping 70% performing poorly and 10% performing very poorly, it was inferred that the teacher educators have not trained them in this aspect and this reflects the teacher educators’ lack of knowledge and skill in the design of instruments for evaluation in inclusive settings to cater to the individual needs of the diverse learners. There was an overall trend of a uniform general textual evaluation to assess how much all the learners, irrespective of their diversity, have learned in the class. Use of observation in class was very poor in general. The 30% teacher trainees who were conscious about the responses ad various nonverbal behaviour in the class tried to rectify, rephrase and modify their transaction but even in those cases the effort was more general and subjective, based on individual trainee’s understanding of his/her flaws rather than a systematic, planned and well informed process of use of observation to evaluate student behaviour and progress .

Almost 60% of the trainees revealed poor understanding and use of observation for evaluative adaptation and resorted to scolding and repressive measures for disruption while 10% trainees seemed clueless and just tried to frame certain purely textual evaluative questions without any consciousness of any verbal or nonverbal response related cues. It revealed that generally they are trying to cope based on purely subjective understanding and consciousness of the class behaviour and have not been trained in addressing the issue from the perspective of inclusive education. The teacher educators have thus not trained the trainees in planned and systematic observation of class behaviour for self-rectification with reference to education of all types of learners including those with special needs. Providing thoughtful feedback showed 30% trainees performing satisfactorily with 50% trainees performing poorly and 4% performing very poorly with only 10% delivering a somewhat satisfactory performance. This may be analysed as a reflection of subjective instinctive ability to respond to students in general somewhat guided by general principles of giving feedback to learners rather than a professional and systematic feedback providing skill developed systematically in the teacher education course to cater to the needs of the learners with special needs. The teacher educators may then inferred to be lacking in the necessary knowledge and skill related to reinforcement and feedback for diverse learners in a differentiated learning environment.

Table 4: Developing professional behaviour conducive to inclusive education

| c.Developing professional behaviour conducive to inclusive education | Excellent | Good | Satisfactory | Poor | Very Poor |
|---|-----------|------|--------------|------|-----------|
| i.Self-evaluation for being able to develop inclusive practices through collection, interpretation and consideration of data and feedback | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 100 |
| ii.Relation with diverse students | 0 | 0 | 30 | 60 | 10 |
| iv.Developing self-esteem among diverse students | 0 | 0 | 0 | 20 | 80 |
| iii.Accepting diverse view points from representatives of different socio-economic and cultural backgrounds | 10 | 30 | 50 | 10 | 0 |

| | | | | | |
|--|----|----|----|----|----|
| iv. Confident body language and direct eye contact with diverse learners including the ones showing disruptive behaviour | 20 | 20 | 50 | 10 | 0 |
| v.Receiving cues from class behaviour and analysing weakness or error in own instructional approach | 0 | 0 | 30 | 60 | 10 |

Interpretation:

From Table 4 we get an idea of the trainees’ ability of developing professional behaviour conducive to inclusive education. Intriguingly all the trainees observed failed in self-evaluation for being able to develop inclusive practices through collection, interpretation and consideration of data and feedback . They taught in the classes with teaching aids trying to implement the constructivist approach of teaching learning but exhibited no awareness of the planned and purposive collection of data and critical and reflective interpretation of data for improving inclusive practices. 30% trainees tried to strike a cordial relationship with the learners in general with no awareness of how to approach special needs learners to facilitate their opening up and inclusion in the general class environment. These trainees seemed sympathetic in their behaviour with the special needs or marginalized learners which is against the basic assumption of effective inclusive settings in which the marginalized learners should feel looked down upon or treated with sympathy that tends to highlight their disability. Again, 60% trainees fared poorly in their effort in building rapport with the students, boiling down their efforts to over indulgence and over enthusiasm that marred the academic quality of the class. Moreover such efforts had no connection whatsoever with building relation with diverse students in inclusive settings. 10% students fared very poorly. The trainees also exhibited poor competency in developing self-esteem among the learners with special needs which perhaps is a natural corollary to their sympathetic attitude to the marginalized students. Lack of empathy mars the sense of self-esteem in the differently abled learners and 80% trainees did the same by trying to be over helpful and sympathetic, thereby performing very poorly repeatedly while 20% fared poorly. This brings to the forefront the critical nature of the teacher educators’ competencies regarding the same , since if the teacher educators had knowledge, skill and proper positive attitude to inclusive education , it would have been reflected in the training of the teacher trainees and would have been reflected in

the performance of at least a considerable few trainees. In accepting diverse view points from representatives of different socio-economic and cultural backgrounds, however, the trainees exhibited tolerance and openness with 10% showing excellence, 30% showing good performance, 50% exhibiting moderately satisfactory interaction and acceptance of different views from learners with only a limited 10% faring poorly exhibiting a strong resistance to any view other than theirs. The number being negligible, it may be inferred that teacher educators have openness of mind to accept different views that have been instilled into the trainees as reflected in their practice. Interestingly enough the confident body language of the trainees and their maintenance of direct eye contact betrayed a sense of self confidence in dealing with diverse learners, though on close observation and in the light of previous behaviours observed and analysed it seemed to be more from a general sound training in teaching skills for regular students in the class rather than confidence about special needs learners. It appeared that the direct eye contact in some cases came as a general unconscious act in the flow of teaching rather than a conscious and confident endeavour in inclusive education. 20% fared excellently though the scope of doubt remained regarding the nature of their confident body language as mentioned earlier, 20% performed well with 50% performing satisfactorily and only a 10% performing poorly. It may be then inferred that eh trainees have been trained well in teaching skill but have not perhaps received specific training in addressing the needs of the differently abled learners. In receiving cues from class behaviour and analysing weakness or error in own instructional approach, the lack of skill and knowledge regarding inclusive education was exposed again with 60% and 10% performing poorly and very poorly respectively and only 10% performing moderately well, i.e., satisfactorily. This only endorses the earlier inference since training in inclusive education would have enabled most trainees to decode nonverbal cues from the diverse learners generated due to different reasons, but only a tendency to decipher disruptive behaviour and explicit cues were observed in general.

Conclusion:

From the analysis above some interesting trends emerge. The trainees had been given demonstration lessons in their teacher education institute and they had also been groomed in simulated teaching in which their individual teaching skills were honed. From the data presented above it is seen that when it comes to teaching with the needs of the students with special needs, most trainees do not exhibit the necessary skill and knowledge of the various

adaptations and accommodations to be made in the transaction to address the individual pace and needs of the learners with special needs. The overall performance of all 150 trainees being so, it may be inferred that this angle was not taught or demonstrated in their teacher education institute by the teacher educators. Besides the approved learning designs also did not show any reference to any slight adaptation or modification either in strategy or in use of learning-teaching material to address the needs of learners with special needs. The study therefore reflects upon the competencies of the teacher educators themselves who had groomed the trainees in the teacher education courses in West Bengal.

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