

**PROBLEMS FOR TEACHER EDUCATION FOR PRIMARY
SCHOOLS IN IRAN: BEYOND
CURRICULUM DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION**

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Abstract

Primary education is the core of development and progress in modern societies. However the quality of teachers who are to ensure the realization of the aspirations we hold for our children has fallen below expectations. This study therefore investigated the entry qualifications, the mode of entry into and the reasons why students enroll in Colleges of Education. The findings showed that majority of the student teachers are not 'good materials' for teacher education and that only a few of them really have the genuine desire to become teachers. Recommendations are made on how to improve on the quality of entrants into the Colleges of Education and the teaching profession generally.

Introduction

Education has become one of the most powerful weapons known for reducing poverty and inequality in modern societies. It is also used for laying the foundation for a sustainable growth and development of any nation.

Primary education in particular is the level of education that develops in the individual the capacity to read, write and calculate. In other words, it helps to eradicate illiteracy, which is one of the strongest predictors of poverty (Bruns, Mingat & Rakotamalala 2003). Thus, Primary education is the only level of education that is available everywhere in both the developed and the developing countries as well as in urban and rural areas (Akinbote, Oduolowu & Lawal 2001). This explains why primary education is the largest sub-sector of any education system and offers the unique opportunity to contribute to the transformation of societies through the education of the young ones (UNESCO 2001).

In realization of the fact that unequal access to educational opportunity is one of the strongest correlates of social inequality, the Federal Government has embarked on a massive expansion of access to primary education. The 1976 UPE and the current UBE programmes were aimed at making basic education accessible to all children of school age irrespective of their social, economic, cultural or geographical backgrounds. As one should expect, there has also been a corresponding expansion of secondary and tertiary education including teacher education in Iran.

However, the quality of primary education has not kept abreast of the expansion in enrolment. Although, this according to UNESCO (2001) continues to be a global concern, yet it is the general belief that the competence of teachers is central to the education of children. In a way therefore, what constitutes competence in teaching is intimately connected with the type of teacher education programmes available for preparing primary school teachers. Therefore one of the problems of teacher education for primary schools in Iran is the poor quality of teachers produced from the Teachers' Colleges (Taiwo 1982).

The Iran Certificate in Education (NCE) has now become the minimum teaching qualification in the country. This implies that no primary school teachers in Iran is expected to possess a teaching qualification lower than the NCE. This could

be regarded as a bold attempt at improving the quality of teachers who will be able to help us achieve the aspirations we hold for our children. In order to achieve this, the number of Colleges of Education has risen from only six in 1976 to about 72 presently (Akinbote 1999). This has led to a mass production of NCE teachers for both the primary and secondary levels of education. May be we have sacrificed quality for quantity in our desire to have NCE teachers for all our primary schools.

Akinbote (2000) has attributed the poor quality of products of Colleges of Education among other things to the quality of students admitted into the colleges. According to him, the lowering of the admission requirements for whatever reasons, has not only affected the quality of the products of the colleges but also the image and prestige of the teaching profession. His position here agrees with the assertion of Liberman (1956) that the quality of the entry qualifications of recruits into a profession is bound to affect not only their efficiency and effectiveness but also the prestige of the profession.

There is probably no other profession that has been scorned more than teaching in Iran. Adeleke (1999) reported in her study of student teachers attitude to teaching that 87% of undergraduate student teachers in the Faculty of Education in one of the first generation Universities would not like to teach at the primary school level. Similarly, she found out that among those who would like to teach at all, 88% would not like to remain in teaching for a long time. If this happens among Education students, one can imagine what will happen among students in other Faculties.

Since one of the causes of the poor quality of products of the Colleges is the low entry qualification it has become necessary to investigate it. Specifically, this study investigated the entry qualifications, the mode of entry and reasons why students enroll in Colleges of Education. The following questions were raised to guide the study.

- What are the entry qualifications of College of Education Students?
- What is the mode of entry into the Colleges of Education?
- Why do students enroll in Colleges of Education?

Methodology

This is a sample survey study in which the questionnaire was the only instrument

used for data collection.

Population/Sample

The population for the study consisted of student teachers in Colleges of Education in the Six South Western States of Iran. Seven out of the thirteen (13) Colleges of Education in the zone were purposefully selected (3 Federal, 3 states and 1 privately owned) Colleges of Education were involved in the study. All the colleges selected have Departments of Primary Education studies and have been producing teachers for at least five years. In all 1200 students that cut across all levels and various departments were involved in the study.

Instrumentation

The only instrument used in the study, College of Education students Questionnaire, was developed and validated by the investigator. The questionnaire consisted of two sections (A) Personal information such as name of institution, department, gender, entry qualification, mode of entry/admission into the college. Section B – consisted of reasons why they have chosen the College of Education.

Procedure

The pilot study was done for the trial testing of the instrument. This was personally done by the investigator in one of the Colleges, which was not used for the main study. One hundred and twenty students cutting across all the levels – 100 to 300 levels were used. Only those who were met in their lecture halls at the time of the visit were given the instrument to complete on the spot. This was with the cooperation of the lecturers. The investigator had the opportunity of having a first hand experience of some areas where the respondents were having problems. The necessary adjustments were made before the main study was carried out.

The main study was carried out with three-research assistants who were all higher degree students in the investigators department. They were given the necessary instructions on how to administer the instruments to the respondents. They were then assigned to the colleges – two colleges to each of them while the investigator handled one

college.

With the permission of the Deputy Provosts of the colleges and the cooperation of Deans of Education, Head of Departments and lecturers, there was no problem in administering the instruments to the subjects. All the levels (100, 200 and 300) students were involved in the exercise, which cut across disciplines. The General Education lecture periods where students from various Departments were present were used. In some cases, the first 100, or less students met in the lecture halls were given the questionnaires to complete on the spot. In all 1,200 questionnaires were properly completed and found useful. The data collection lasted two weeks.

Data Analysis

The data analysis was done by the investigator using frequency counts and percentage. The results are presented in Tables 1-2.

Table I: Distribution of subjects by Qualification, and mode of

Entry N = 120

A Qualification No of subjects %

117

48

10.35

9.75

4.00

86.25

Grade II

Technical

SSCE/OL

Total

1200 100

B No of Credits No. %

372

535

293

31.00
44.60
24.00
3 Credits
3-4 Credits
5 and above
Total

1200 100.00

C Mode of Entry No. %

JAMB

Pre-NCE

789

411

65.75

34.25

Total 1200 100.00

Table I shows that the Senior Secondary Certificate/GCE O/L candidates constituted the highest number of students, 1035 (86.25%) in the Colleges of Education. Similarly majority of the students in the colleges, 535 (44.60%) have between 3-4 SSCE/GCE O/L papers or equivalents, Next to this category are those with between one and three papers 372 (31.00%) while those with 5 credits and above are the lowest (24%).

Table II: Reasons for Enrolling in College of Education

Reasons for enrolling in college of Education No of students

% Rank

1 Personal desire to become a teacher 150 12.50 3rd
2 Just to use the college as a stepping stone 372 31.00 2nd
3 Because there is no other institution that could offer
me admission
525 43.75 1st

- 4 To satisfy the wish of my parents 45 3.75 5th
5 As a result of Encouragement from friends 108 9.00 4th

Total 1200 100.00

From Table II, it could be seen that majority of the student teachers 5.25 (43.75) in Colleges of Education are there because of the simple fact that no other institutions offered them admission. The second most important reason is that they want to use the colleges as a stepping-stone to other institutions 372 (31.0%). On the other hand only 150 (12.5%) are in the Colleges of Education as a result of their personal desire to become teachers. Other reasons are as a result of encouragement from friends 108 (9.41%) and to satisfy the parents 45 (3.75%).

Discussion, Conclusion and Recommendations

Question 1

What are the entry qualifications of College of Education students?

As revealed in Table I, SSCE? GCE/ O/L 1,035 (86.25%) was the highest followed by Grade II, 117 (9.75%) and Technical, 48 (4%) respectively. The original plan of the Colleges of Education at inception was to draw their clientele from among the 'good products' of secondary schools and Grade II Teachers Colleges (Adesina 1977). By good products here, we would take it to mean those with five credits at a sitting including English Language. Therefore to know whether the College of Education students meet this requirement or not, section B of Table I provides the answer. As seen in the table, only 293 (24%) of the student teachers met that requirement. In other words only 24% with five credits and above are 'good enough' for admission into the Colleges of Education.

Question 2

What is the mode of entry into the colleges?

As revealed in Table 1C, majority of the students came in through JAMB, 789 (65.75%) while the remaining 34.25%) came in through the pre-N.C.E programme. That majority came in through JAMB however does not imply they are all good materials. This is because some of the colleges in an attempt to increase their enrolment figures sometimes admit candidates who score as low as 100 marks or even lower in some special subject areas such as the sciences and vocational/Technical Education at the

JAMB Examination (Akinbote 2001).

Question 3

Why do student teachers enroll in Colleges of Education?

Table 2 has revealed that 525 (43.75%) of the student teachers found their ways into the Colleges of Education because there were no other institutions that could offer them admission. On the other hand only 150 (12.50%) came in as a result of their personal desire to become teachers. In other words as many as 87.5% of all the student teachers in the colleges sampled are reluctant or not good enough for other institutions. The implications of the findings for teaching and learning at the primary schools are many. The finding that only 24% of the student teachers had five credits implies that the original plan to have only the good products of our secondary schools admitted into the colleges has not been met. Therefore, we tend to have forgotten that unless many of the best brains can be attracted into teaching to help in the education process, the future will promise nothing but retrogression and disaster.

The disaster is almost here now as majority of the products of our primary schools are neither sufficiently literate nor numerate to be useful to themselves and the society (Yoloye 1998). A Provost of one of the Colleges of Education was reported recently to have openly decried at a graduation ceremony the poor quality of students in his college who could neither read nor write well.

Similarly, the finding that only 150 (12.5%) of the student teachers were in the College of Education as a result of their personal desire to become teachers means a lot. In the first place, it means that the majority of students in the Colleges of Education are the left over, the reluctant and the good for nothing-young men and women who are only out to earn a living out of teaching. Even the good ones, who are probably the 31% who want to use the colleges as a stepping-stone may not remain long in teaching as reported by Adeleke (1999).

There is a popular saying that, as is the school so is the society, and as is the teacher so is the school (Ukeje 1996). This implies that the teacher is the most important manpower needed to develop other manpower in any society. Therefore, as once suggested by the founding fathers of our Colleges of Education, only the good products of our schools should be admitted into the Colleges of Education. The poor quality of

teachers in our schools in recent years has been traced to the quality of entrants into the teacher education programmes. There had been some suggestions on the need to raise the entry requirements into the Colleges of Education so as to improve not only the quality of the products of the colleges but also the image of the teaching profession. According to Liberman (1956), the quality of the entry qualifications of recruits into a profession often affects not only their efficiency and effectiveness but also the prestige of the profession.

The primary school years are very important years in a child's intellectual development. Therefore all primary school teachers should be adequately prepared to teach the school children with diverse interests, and capabilities. It is not enough therefore to fill our classrooms with just anybody that has passed through a teachers college or the university. High quality teacher preparation is necessary for all primary school teachers.

One important step in this direction is the recruitment of good secondary school products into our teacher education programmes particularly at the Colleges of Education. Akinbote (1999) has suggested the upward review of admission requirements into the Colleges of Education. This is to ensure that only the good ones come into the teaching profession. In order to encourage the good ones to go in for the teacher education programme for primary schools, the following recommendations are made:

- That in addition to raising the admission requirements to five credits at SSCE/O/Level, there should be oral and written interview for the prospective candidates into the Colleges of Education.
 - Special scholarship/Bursary awards should be made available for such good candidates who wish to specialize in primary education. This should cover tuition, books and accommodation for the duration of the programme.
 - Appointment to teach at the primary school level should be preceded by both oral and written interview to really ensure that only the good and willing teachers are recruited to teach the young ones. In addition to this, the Teachers Registration Council must license the individual before being offered an appointment.
- Iran needs to ensure not only 100% enrolment, retention and completion rate by 2015 at the primary school level. We should also ensure that the pupils are

sufficiently literate and numerate to be useful to themselves and the society. This can only be possible when we have good teachers with a clear sense of mission and the capacity to learn. It is not possible to reform or introduce any education programme without taking teachers into greater consideration.

Therefore our teacher education programmes for primary education must be repositioned to meet the demands of teaching in which learners take greater ownership of their own learning. A reluctant, left over, not good for anything or half baked teachers will not take us to the promised land. The great aspirations we hold for our children and the future of the country will only be made possible with competent, effective and dedicated teachers.

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