

School Experience Program- Issues and Challenges

Dr. Shalini Gupta

Assistant Professor
Bhavan's Leelavati Munshi
College of Education
New Delhi

Prof. Vibha Joshi

Professor
School of Education, IGNOU
New Delhi

Abstract

Knowledge and technology which is relevant today may become redundant tomorrow. In this, ever-changing, fast-paced world, individuals should be equipped with skills and competencies which will facilitate them for lifelong learning. To develop these skills or qualities in the present generation, schools or educational institutions need to provide appropriate learning experiences to learners. The main torchbearer of a school, who is responsible to provide a conducive learning environment to students is teachers. To fulfill these requirements of good quality teachers, a comprehensive and quality teacher training program is required which aims teachers to be a 21st-century teacher instead of a certified one. To equip teachers with required competencies and skills NCFTE (2009) has laid emphasis on extensive school experience program in pre service teachers training. School experience program gives an opportunity to the student- teachers to blend theories of education into practice. To make teacher training effective, NCTE introduced two years B.ED program all over the country from 2015-16 academic session and duration of school experience program was increased from 20 days to 12-16 weeks. To provide this extensive school experience to student- teachers, partnership with schools is a prerequisite. This study intends to identify and focus on the barriers in the implementation of the School Experience Program. It also intended to seek suggestions for the effective implementation of School Experience Program.

Key Words: School Experience Program, Internship.

INTRODUCTION

In today's world, every individual has to accept one proverb- change is the only constant thing in the world. Knowledge and technology which is relevant today may become redundant tomorrow. In this, ever-changing, fast-paced world, individuals should be equipped with skills and competencies which will facilitate them for lifelong learning. They should be groomed to accept the ever-changing world as a natural phenomenon and try to adapt accordingly. In this era of technology, they should not be taught what is to be learned but the focus must be on how to learn. The areas which should be focused or

developed to ensure their survival in the future are problem-solving, creativity, analytical thinking, collaboration, communication, ethics, actions, and accountability. To develop these skills or qualities in the present generation, schools or educational institutions need to provide appropriate learning experiences to learners.

The main torchbearer of a school, who is responsible to provide a conducive learning environment to students is teachers. They play a major role in the transformation of students. In the contemporary scenario, their task has become much more complex and challenging. On one hand, they have to deal with the students who are enthusiastic, energetic and technology savvy and have access to vast information and on the other need scaffolding at times to be in the right direction. So, the role of a teacher has to change him/herself from a mere information provider to a guide, mentor, scaffolder, facilitator, and mediator who enables them to select, organize, analyze and apply information meaningfully. They need to be lifelong learners and expect their teachers to enable them to collect, compare, collaborate and create new things.

To fulfill these requirements of good quality teachers, a comprehensive and quality teacher training program is required which aims teachers to be a 21st-century teacher instead of a certified one. According to NCFTE (2009), a teacher needs to be prepared in relation to the needs and demands arising in the school context, to engage with questions of school knowledge, the learner and the learning process. The expectations of the school system from a teacher change from time to time, responding to the broader social, economic and political changes taking place in the society. Teachers need to be looked at as crucial mediating agents through whom curriculum is transacted and knowledge is co-constructed along with learners.

To prepare quality teachers, a good teacher's training program is essential. Teacher training programs should equip students not only in the theories of education but also in inculcating competencies and skills required by a teacher. For this, engagement with school is a necessary component. It enables the student-teachers to identify themselves as a member of the school, obtain first-hand knowledge of the life of a teacher, participates in all the activities of the school and acquire professional skills and competencies. According to the Acharya Ramamurti Committee (1990), an internship model for teacher training should be adopted because the internship model is firmly based on the primary value of actual field experience in a realistic situation, on the development of teaching skills by practice over a period of time.

To equip teachers with required competencies and skills NCFTE (2009) has laid emphasis on extensive school experience program in pre-service teachers training.

BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

School experience program gives an opportunity to the student- teachers to blend theories of education into practice. It should expose student teachers in the real life of teachers in the schools. It does not mean taking a few classroom teaching lessons only. In other words, it incorporates multiple components like getting to know the school, observing children, observing teaching and learning in the real classroom, practicing teaching, and developing capacities to think with educational theories and applying concepts in concrete teaching-learning situations, managing classroom learning, evaluating learners and providing feedback, learning to work with colleagues, reflecting on professional practice. This will provide appropriate learning experiences for the student teachers that are critical to the education of teachers. (NCFTE 2009).

According to Chakraborty P, the aim of the internship program is to incorporate teaching skills among student teachers. The internship program is an effective way to give training to the student-teachers about the real world of work. It gives them an opportunity to integrate theory and practice, plan and deliver lessons properly, critically analyze their own and peers teaching styles and improve them in the light of feedback given by supervisors. Through this program, they understand the role and responsibilities of professional teachers. The internship program also gives them the opportunity to understand different aspects of the school program and improve their skills and abilities in the teaching profession. An effective and improved internship program is required in developing student-teachers personalities as true professionals in the field of education.

Qazi, Rawat, Sharjeel, and Devi (2008) believed that B.Ed teaching practice invites the student teachers to exercise all the skills learned in real classroom situations.

Al-Magableh (2010) argues that a well-trained teacher can simplify knowledge for students according to their needs. So, teacher educators should focus on the internship of student teachers.

Chen and Mu (2010) also emphasized the importance of practice teaching. According to them, student teachers will face various classroom related situations when they go in the field and take responsibility.

Parveen and Mirza (2012) emphasized the importance of internship as it ensures the professional preparation of teachers.

Patricia, Anne, Joel (2013) cited if the teaching practice is executed rightly and effectively then it will assist in producing high quality professionally qualified teachers.

Such teachers will be able to play active roles in the development of the teaching process, accommodate rapid educational changes and novel advancements in curriculum and instruction.

In spite of proper planning and its importance, *school internship* is not able to produce the desired results. Various studies have been conducted to study the status of practice teaching in the past. Bhatanagar (1988) viewed 39 studies on student teaching program and other practical works relating to B.Ed. An examination from 1952 to 1978 and concluded that the organization of the student teaching program as the weakest component in the teacher education program. Similarly, studies undertaken on student teaching program in Orissa revealed the defective organization of the program, poor supervision system, lack of co-operation between school and college teachers and use of few selected methods of teaching as the major constraint in the organization of this program.

Mohanty, (1984); Rao, (1985) reported non-attainment of objectives of the practical component due to lack of time.

Shah (1986) surveyed management of student teaching program in India, taking samples from 46 training colleges representing 13 different states and revealed that overall picture on the organization of criticism lesson is not impressive.

Yadav (1980) reported a weak link between teachers of practicing schools and teacher-educators, lack of minimum facilities in the practicing schools and use of only lecture methods by pedagogy teachers as the major constraints ineffective organization of student teaching performance.

Pandey (2010) suggested that there is need to put greater stress on the functional aspect of training. The duration of practice teaching should be increased to six months of rigorous internship in some allotted schools. During this period the trainee should be in full supervision of practicing school's Principal and do all the work right from taking attendance to conduct of examination, and organization of co-curricular activities. She suggested that all the trainees should teach at least five lessons using sophisticated educational technology available in training college in simulated situations.

Das (2010) as reported in the handbook—“Internship in Teaching”(NCERT) has clearly indicated that internship should be properly designed in order to provide each pupil-teacher with a broad and comprehensive experience in the development of teaching competency far beyond the practice teaching. Internship places the pupil-teacher in the school situation as a full-time apprentice for eight to twelve weeks in which s/he is

initiated in the art of teaching. The pupil-teacher works in the practicing school or better called cooperating school as a full-time teacher and participates in all other activities of the school; because it is felt that teacher training can never become effective unless the schools become active partners in the teacher education and internee in these schools made to feel like a regular teacher for, at least, the duration of her/his stay there. In fact, the co-operating schools serve as links between laboratory condition (teacher-education institutions) and real conditions (schools or colleges).

To make teacher training effective, NCTE introduced two years of B.ED program all over the country from the 2015-16 academic session. According to NCTE, *student-teachers would observe the teaching-learning process in the real classroom situations, co-curricular activities and life of a teacher in the school at large in the first year. In the second year, student- teachers would be offered extensive internship in the form of school experience program. During the Internship, a student-teacher will work as a regular teacher and participate in all the school activities, including planning, teaching, and assessment, interacting with school teachers, community members, and children.*

To provide this extensive school experience to student- teachers, partnership with schools is a prerequisite. The common obstacle found in this component is non-cooperation of most of the schools. Schools were reluctant to give required classes even for one or two weeks in the one year program. To provide such an experienced teacher training institutes should partner with schools who are willing to collaborate and provide the required experiences to student- teachers. They should share the vision of NCTE and responsibility of Teacher Training Institutes to implement the internship component as per NCTE regulations in the interest of national development.

To make the collaboration between school and teacher training institutes, teacher educators play a very important role. They are the ones who have to guide schools through the requisites of the school experience program. Schools have to accommodate their school timetables. For each academic session for a teacher preparation program, a school has to accommodate ten student- teachers for a duration of approximately 15-16 weeks or about four months in the school and provide conducive learning opportunities so that they are sensitized to acquire required skills and competencies and positive attitude of an effective teacher. This brings the following questions in our mind- Do these schools exist?

Do schools and their Principals share the responsibility of training student- teachers?

What are the common challenges faced by teacher educators in the proper implementation of school experience program?

The inception of two years B.Ed curriculum has been in practice from the last three years, so it's the right time to analyze the challenges faced by teacher educators in the implementation of School Experience Program. Certain questions need to be answered and analyzed at this point in time to make teacher's training more meaningful.

This study intends to identify and focus on the barriers from the eyes of teacher educators as supervisor's which led to the implementation of the School Experience Program. It also intended to seek suggestions for the effective implementation of School Experience Program. This study tried to analyze the above mentioned two issues related to the School Experience Program (SEP) by answering the following questions.

1. Are supervisors able to supervise all their classes properly and give due feedback to the student- teachers?
2. Does student- teacher get enough time to reflect on her practices and discuss it with peers and mentors?
3. Does student teacher get enough time and guidance to develop the required skills and competencies for the School Experience Programme before going to school?
4. Do schools readily or willingly give permission to conduct the School Experience Programme in their school?
5. Do student- teachers are engaged in all school activities of the school and regarded as a regular teacher?
6. Does student- teacher able to use different approaches or methods of teaching and evaluation in the classrooms?
7. Does student- teachers get time to reflect on the acquired experiences in the school and share the same with school teachers, mentors, supervisors, and their peers?

In the B. Ed program, School Experience program or internship can be divided into three stages such as:

- (1) Pre-internship stage,
- (2) Internship stage, and
- (3) Post-internship stage.

The pre-internship stage includes activities or tasks aim at preparing student- teachers for real classroom teaching in the schools, selection of the schools for the internship, dividing student- teachers into small groups, orienting and training in the unit and lesson planning, planning of co-curricular and extracurricular activities.

The internship is a field experience for student teachers in which they work as interns in the schools as regular teachers which includes practice teaching and participation in all the activities of the school.

The post-internship activities cover the reflections on the school experiences and preparation of a portfolio or final report of the internship.

METHODOLOGY

This study intends to use the experiences of teacher educators as school supervisors. Therefore, an explorative and experiential method was used to record the data. An open-ended interview schedule containing ten questions on School Experience Program (SEP) was prepared. Data was collected from forty (40) teacher educators from different teacher training institutions affiliated to Guru Gobind Singh Indraprastha University, Delhi. All the teacher educators interviewed were supervisors in their respective schools during school experience program. Qualitative analysis was used to analyze the data.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The study was aimed at analyzing SEP in the manner it is visualized by NCTE. The analysis was done for three major phases

1. Pre-internship stage or preparation stage for School Experience Program
2. Internship stage or implementation stage of School Experience Program
3. Post-internship stage or follow up stage of School Experience Program

1. Pre-internship stage or preparation stage for School Experience Program

Preparation of student- teachers for SEP- Generally in this phase, student- teachers is introduced with the concepts of unit planning and lesson planning, teaching skills through micro teaching and teaching practice through simulations. This phase is also used by teacher educators to select the schools for an internship, prepare student-teachers to conduct various activities/assignments in the school and assigning schools to student teachers.

Most of the teachers felt that the time allocated for the preparation of student- teachers for SEP is quite less.

Preparing student teachers for the school needs time and resources. Orienting them in preparation of unit plans and lesson plans, practice in teaching skills through micro teaching and simulations is time-consuming. Teacher educators felt that they could not give individual guidance to each and every student because of time. The number of students per pedagogy subject is quite high sometimes (the teacher-student ratio goes up to 1:60 in some subjects). They also felt that they could not equip students in hands-on training in innovative practices like project-based learning, inquiry-based learning, etc. in such a short span of time. Bhargava A. (2009) also observed that less preparatory time before teaching practice results in anxiety in the student- teachers.

Selection of schools-Each teacher training institute with the strength of around 100 student teachers needs at least 8-10 schools for the SEP. Taking permission from the school to conduct SEP in their school is a big hurdle. The attitude of most of the Principals of self-financed schools is not very positive towards SEP. Either they don't allow student teachers to do their teaching practice or if they allow student teachers, they are mostly given substitution classes with no definite timetable. To take permission from government schools, teacher educators have to approach directorate which allows only 5-6 students per school for practice teaching. The teaching environment in government schools is better for student- teachers as they are given the responsibility for teaching.

Allocation of schools to the students is a hurdle again. Considering the distance from the school to their home, specific requirements of the schools in terms of a number of students, subjects taught by student- teachers, class or medium of instruction, all have to be taken into account while the allocation of schools to the student- teachers.

The academic calendar of schools and colleges of education lacks coordination: This has been cited by a research study by Chennat (2014). Schools reopen after summer vacation in July, and during this time colleges of education prepare their students for SEP - Training in teaching skills, preparation of lesson plans, teaching aids preparation, microteaching, and simulations.

Extensive training is needed to prepare student-teachers for practice teaching. Because of which colleges of education could send student teachers only in mid-August. Academic calendars of schools and colleges differ to the extent that when trainee teachers go for teaching practice in the schools, teachers are busy in completing their syllabus for the first term and do not allow the student- teachers to teach. In most of the schools, student-teachers were asked to take substitution periods that too for revision. This makes the practice of teaching just a core. It loses all its essence. Students never get

exact exposure and accountability of responsibilities of a full-fledged teaching and other related activities. In some schools, student- teachers are given topics and periods to teach and accountability is set on them. Exposure of this type where they are considered as teachers gives them confidence in conducting classes as a professional teacher.

2. During School Experience Program

Allocation of classes- During SEP, three-fourths or 75% of the schools under study do not allocate proper periods to the student-teachers. They are given only substitution periods and asked to revise the topics or content already done by the regular teachers. Student-teachers are not given prescribed syllabus in three-fourth or 75% of the schools and hence they lose interest in teaching and essence of practice teaching gets lost. Bhargava (2009) pointed out that often schools give classes to student-teachers according to their convenience and depending on a number of teachers on leave. Most of the schools do not want to disturb the time-table of the school. In about 37% of schools, student-teachers were given primary classes to teach. In some schools, classes were allotted to student-teachers in the morning and no consistency is maintained in allocating classes, for example, a student-teacher who had taught class 6th a day before will be allotted class 9th another day. Due to this student-teachers were not able to plan their lessons properly. This is seen as the major problem by most of the teacher educators. Also a number of periods allotted to one student-teacher sometimes go up to eight (8) in such schools, then the major issue is when will the student teacher prepares his/her lesson plan, seems to be a big question?

Role of school teachers as Mentors- Generally school teachers do not play any role in guiding student teachers in all the schools under study. In fact, they discourage student-teachers to use innovative methods of teaching. They usually sit in the classes to maintain discipline. They do not guide them in applying their knowledge. Supervisor supervises student-teachers in all subjects which leads to dilution in feedback according to Cheenat(2014). Nassem and Anas (2011) cited that this type of supervision provides descriptive criticism rather than constructive feedback. Most of the teacher educators have felt that they fail to guide student-teachers sometimes if he/she belongs to different school pedagogy subjects.

Role of supervisors- Teacher educator who is a supervisor in the school has to deal with about 10-15 student-teachers in a school: Generally, student-teachers belong to different school subjects. It is very difficult for the supervisor to supervise all the classes of student- teachers and give them feedback and guidance effectively and regularly. They

hardly get time to discuss lesson plans with the student-teachers. Sometimes 4-5 students are teaching simultaneously in one period. So, it becomes really difficult to provide detailed feedback to the student-teachers. Therefore the quality of mentorship gets deteriorated or ineffective, was mentioned by almost all the supervisors.

Treatment given by schools- About two-thirds (63%) of the schools under study consider student- teachers as a burden. Only 12.5% of schools under study welcomed the student- teachers and treated them as regular teachers. 37.5% of the schools did not provide them with the basic facilities like proper seating space to sit and discuss among themselves as well as with their supervisors. They are not guided by the subject-teachers of the school. While in 12.5% of schools, all the staff members and students gave respect to the student-teachers. They treat them as assets and help them in every possible way. About 50% of the school teachers, do not give trainees their classes, they talk to them rudely even in front of the students. Teachers discourage them to use new methods in the classroom and ask them to teach by conventional methods. This de-motivates budding teachers to practice innovative methods in classroom situations. Student- teachers are even not involved in the staff meetings, although about 50% of the schools have involved them in Parent Teacher Meetings by assigning them different duties.

Conduction of assignments- Assignments are given to the student-teachers is many. Some of them are not even related to their school experiences. Most of the schools do not give any importance to these assignments and do not provide them with the requisite help.

Non-academic duties were given to student-teachers-All the schools under study assigned non-academic duties to the student - teachers like floor duties during lunch breaks and dispersals, duties in conducting co-curricular activities, invigilation duties and so on. This helps student- teachers to experience the life of a teacher. This may help student-teachers to understand the diversity of roles that a teacher plays in the school.

Conduction of lesson plans- It has been found that freedom to experiment innovative instructional methods were not given in almost all the schools. Even if they used student-centric methods, they were asked to maintain silence in the classroom. They were asked to read from the book, dictate or write back exercises on the board. Schools accept pin drop silence in the classes, so using child-centric pedagogy becomes unviable for the student-teachers. Some of them tried to use different assessment techniques in their classes. Some schools do not have required infrastructure like smart boards, A-V room besides overcrowded classes, so students were not able to practice new methods.

Responsibility of the school- Most of the schools do not feel that training future teachers is their responsibility. They do not take any interest in the activities related to the training of teachers. Only Principals of 12.5% of schools realize that their involvement in the training of teachers is very important and they extend their help whenever required.

3. After School Experience Program

Feedback from the school- No mechanism is in place to take feedback from the schools. Schools should be made an integral part of teacher training institutes. Demands of the school system should be included in the curriculum of all teacher training programs.

Time for discussion among the student-teachers and with teacher educators- After the completion of the internship duration in each semester, student-teachers are not given enough time to share their experiences with peers and teacher educators. They were asked to prepare and submit a report in the fourth or final semester only. This again dilutes the essence of teaching practice as a core component of the SEP.

SUGGESTIONS

Preparing student-teachers for school experience program (SEP) needs an ample amount of time and practice at a regular interval in the entire duration of the teacher preparation programs. Hence its components should be distributed in each semester rather than clubbing them in only one semester. Practice in teaching skills and innovative methods of teaching should be given due emphasis. Flexibility in lesson planning, encouragement to use various methods as per their suitability in terms of themes, number of days spent in the school should be the prerequisite of a school experience program rather than the number of lesson plans to be prepared and transacted in the class in order to provide a wholesome experience to student-teachers. Another point is that SEP in a school should start in July. The academic calendar of colleges of education should match with that of the schools so that student-teachers could be accommodated well in the time table of the school. Principals and senior teachers of the SEP schools should be oriented before the session starts. They should be given the responsibility to guide student-teachers in the school.

Regular periods allotted in the time table, at least two per day should be given to the student- teachers with the prescribed syllabus to transact in the real classroom situations. The student-teachers should be held responsible for student's learning. They should be assigned and involved in all the activities of the school like a regular teacher. Subject teachers of the school should be oriented in innovative practices and their experiences

and expertise should be utilized by the colleges of education. They should be like a mentor to the student-teachers. A provision for mentorship certificate from the colleges of education should be provided to these teachers. If the subject teachers of the school participate as a mentor with the supervisor, mentorship would be qualitatively better and student-teacher will be trained in a collaborative and effective manner. Student-teachers should be involved in all the activities of the school. Student-teachers should be given a suitable place to sit and discuss their plan and reflections with their mentor teachers and supervisors. If the school realizes their role in the preparation of teachers and work collaboratively with colleges of education, the provision of quality training will be a reality to the future teachers. Assignments should be spread over four semesters so that student-teachers could concentrate on the entire SEP activities like classroom teaching-learning, use of innovative practices and building a harmonious relationship with the students. Student-teachers should be given due freedom and support to use innovative methods of teaching. The school principal and teachers should be oriented for this before the start of the SEP.

Provision of feedback from the school about the student-teachers should be the necessary element of this program. Student-teachers and supervisors should also provide feedback about the school to the Principal. It should benefit both of them to improve their services for their respective students. In this way, a symbiotic and reciprocal relationship could be established between schools and colleges of education to make teacher education better. Student-teachers should be given enough time to share their experiences and reflections with their peers in other schools and teachers.

CONCLUSION

The studies related to the problems of implementing SEP in B.Ed one year program also cited some of the problems mentioned above. In spite of increasing the time period of school experience program in 2 years B.Ed from 20 days to 16 weeks, the same barriers still exist which make this program just a formality to complete course work. Proper preparation of student-teachers before the school experience program (SEP) and collaboration with the schools should be taken as important factors in the implementation of school experience program.

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