

Perspectives on Teacher Education in South Asia: A Comparative Review

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Abstract

With the political shifts in twentieth century, South Asia has witnessed rapid socio-cultural and educational transformation. At this backdrop, the study aims to review the efforts made by South Asian countries for quality enhancement of teacher education recently. This thematic review of policy documents, reports, and articles representing eight countries revealed that though South Asia is rich with socio-cultural, economic, and topographical diversity, there are some convergence and divergence in terms of investment and environment offered to teacher education. For instance, Nepal, India, Sri Lanka, Maldives and Bhutan have provided better opportunities for teacher education and pre-service and in-service training and development, while teachers in Pakistan and Afghanistan have not made substantive progress. Except Pakistan and Afghanistan, all other countries have strict criteria for enrollment in teacher education programs, teacher recruitment, and licensing. These countries also provide motivating environment with the provisions of training and development, and awards and recognition. Whereas Pakistan and Afghanistan are facing two-fold challenges: nominal investment in teacher development and reconstructing the infrastructure damaged in decade-long armed struggle. The article concludes with the recommendation to increase investment in teacher education as developed and motivated teachers contribute to the overall transformation of education sector in South Asia.

Key Words: *South Asia, teacher education, training and development, education policy, teacher recruitment, licensing.*

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Introduction

South Asian countries are prosperous with socio-cultural, ethnic and linguistic diversity. Yet, there are so many commonalities in terms of lifestyle, economic status, and educational standard (Agnihotri,2020; Shapiro & Schiffman, 2019). With decolonization and restoration of democracy, there has been drastic improvement in education system in the region. Though a lot of changes are taking place in teacher education, paucity of succinct article on comparative study on the issue is evident. It becomes imperative, therefore, to explore the status of teacher education comparing provisions among the countries so that reformation and overall transformation of education would be possible. Therefore, this thematic review presents the comparative study of education policy of eight South Asian countries namely Nepal, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Maldives, Sri Lanka, Bhutan and Afghanistan with a focus on teacher education.

This article is based on the readings of policy documents available in the website of ministry of education of eight South Asian countries, research articles on education policy, and educational reports. The article first sets the scene by shedding light on the socio-cultural and educational context then on provisions and opportunities for pre-service and in-service education in the region. Further, the article focuses on teacher recruitment and licensing for quality enhancement, training and development opportunities for lifelong learning, challenges, awards and recognitions to motivate teachers for better performance, followed by conclusion and implication.

Socio-Cultural and Educational Context

South Asia is characterized by socio-cultural, ethnic, linguistic and geographical heterogeneity within and among the countries (Gair, 2011; Garg, 2014). Same applies with education. For example, Nepal, India, Pakistan, Bhutan and Afghanistan are constituted with diverse topography and climatic conditions whereas Sri Lanka and the Republic of Maldives are multi-island nations situated in Indian Ocean. Maldives alone consists of an archipelago of around 1200 small coral islands to mention its unique topography (Maldives Ministry of Education, 2019).

South Asian countries witnessed rapid political shift in twentieth century with its resultant impact on socio-economic (International Growth Center, 2010) as well as educational sector (Sarangapani & Pappu, 2021). All the countries in South Asia except Nepal was

never formally colonized (Crews, 2018) – earned independence and democracy was established. With the political alteration, even social and educational transformation took place gradually. While other countries in South Asia were decolonized, Nepal witnessed political upheaval resulting the restoration of democracy.

In Nepal, access to education was privilege of the elites till 1950. However, with the establishment of Nepal National Education Commission in 1956, and the first education system plan in 1971, educational development took momentum with increased access to education to general public (Nepal Ministry of Education, 2016). Similarly, in Bhutan, modern education was provided to public only after 1961. Before that the mode of education was monastic (Royal Government of Bhutan, 2019). With the initiation of systematic socio-economic development plan of 1960s, Royal Government of Bhutan has given high priority to education. (Royal Government of Bhutan, 2020). While the reformation in education was quantitative in the past, the priority in education at present is quality enhancement and sustainable development.

In present context, Nepal's education reform plan abreast three major objectives: post-conflict reconstruction, cash the demographic dividend by providing young generation twenty-first century skills and knowledge, and finally, graduate from least developed country to developing country by 2022 (NIRT, 2016). Similarly, Indian education policy envisions to revamp its education sector with a motive of achieving 21 century educational aspiration and sustainable development goals (SDG) while giving priority to India's traditional values and norms (India Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2020). Even Bhutan has been able to restructure and transform education sector within short span of time. All the countries in South Asia except Afghanistan and Pakistan are able to have qualitative as well as quantitative development resulting the development of human capital to accelerate socio-economic development of the countries.

The landscape of education of Pakistan and Afghanistan seem very bleak. According to Nabi, et.al (2010)., Pakistan lies amongst the countries that have the world's highest out-of-school population. In Pakistan, about 22.8 million children are out of school and among school goers very few achieve basic learning levels. Also, half of Pakistan's adult population is unable to read and write, and the country lacks literate and skilled human resources (Pakistan - National Education Policy Framework, 2018). Afghanistan's picture is bleaker than this. The country's Education Sector Analyses

2016 depicts that though there is significant increment in students' enrollment since 2001, their attendance is depressing. Besides, only 28 percent of instructors have finished 12 years of education in Afghanistan according to UNESCO. Further, half of Afghanistan's instructors have not completed the education level equivalent to post-secondary school of the United States.

Compared to these countries, Nepal and India have moved far ahead with urgent reform priorities in education sector and have introduced National Education Policy 2076. Newly introduced education policy of India considers "teachers and faculty as the heart of the learning process" and provides prime importance to "their recruitment, continuous professional development, positive learning environments and service conditions" (The National Education Policy, 2020, p. 5). Besides, teacher eligibility test (TET) has been activated to cover teachers of all stages of school education. For career management and progression, merit based structure of tenure, promotion, and salary structure has been developed. Further, the newly introduced education policy remarks that teachers be provided with high respect in order to restore the status of education and inspire the best citizens enter teaching profession for the best possible future of nation and the youths in India.

Similarly, National Education Policy 2076 of Nepal aims to reform teacher education programs by providing professional (education) degree only after the completion of academic degree. In addition, the policy has made provision for the universities to complete certain level of research works annually, and has incorporated research, professional development activities, and trainings as part of teacher evaluation so as to encourage teachers for training, self-study and other development activities. Furthermore, by focusing on aspects like motivation, professional integrity, and capacity building, the strategy intends to produce qualified and self-motivated teachers in all of the country's schools within five years. This education policy also aims to evaluate instructors' performance based on the students' learning outcomes. This provision will hold teachers accountable for their students' grades, motivating them to work more to improve the learning environment.

Nepal targets to achieve SDG4 goal of "ensuring equitable and inclusive quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all" (Nepal Ministry of Education, 2016, p. 1) by 2022 and some of the achievements are already evident.

According to SDG Review Report 2020 net enrollment rate in primary education had reached 97.2% by the year 2018/19, which is very close to what Nepal targets to achieve (99%) by 2030. As stated in the review report, the proportion of pupil reaching grade eight is 79.3 percent, while the gross enrollment in secondary education is 60.6 percent by the year 2019.

Likewise, India aims to achieve SDG4 goals by 2030 (India Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2020). According to the SDG Progress Report, 2019, Gross Enrollment Ratio for tertiary education increased from 24.5% in 2015-16 to 28.3% in 2019/20. Similarly, percentage for trained teachers by educational level was 75.49 percent for primary, 78.18 for upper primary, 78.52 for secondary and 64.45% for higher secondary education in 2015/16. Both Nepal and India are committed to achieve SDG goals of providing equitable and inclusive education; and somehow the countries have already achieved these goals.

Pre-service Education

National Education Policy 2020 forwarded by Indian government has set ambitious criteria to be fulfilled by 2030. According to the newly introduced policy, by 2030 the minimum requirement to enter into teaching would be four-year integrated Bachelor Degree, which include a range of content knowledge and pedagogy along with practicum, a dual-major Bachelor's Degree both in education as well as specialized subject, such as, computer science, chemistry, mathematics, language, history etc. Likewise, two-year B.Ed. programs would be offered intended to those who have already obtained Bachelor's Degree in specialized areas other than education. And, those having four years specialized bachelors or masters' degree can take only one-year education degree. Newly offered B.Ed. programs would include most recent techniques in pedagogy, foundational numeracy and literacy, teaching and evaluation skills, teaching children with special need and interest, student centered teaching, and collaborative learning. The course also includes content knowledge relating to environmental awareness and sensitivity towards its conservation for sustainable development. It also expects teachers to be grounded in Indian traditional value system and culture including tribal traditions also being well-versed in latest advanced educational technology and innovative pedagogical approaches. Moreover, in India, all the PhD students are required to complete credit-based course requirements in teaching/pedagogy/

writing relating to their Ph.D. specialization area. Since many research scholars join teaching after the completion of their Ph.D., exposure to pedagogy, evaluation system, curriculum and lesson design is mandatory. They will also have to complete certain hours of teaching practices as teaching assistantship to their supervisors.

Likewise, in Bhutan, teachers are given high priority and a lot of scholarships are provided to teachers mainly in two colleges of education in Samste and Paro which were established in 1968 and 1975 respectively. They offer pre-service programs such as Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) and Post Graduate Diploma in Education (Annual Education Statistics 2020, p. 45).

In terms of pre-requisite to enter into teaching, Education Sector Analyses Maldives notes that minimum qualification of at least diploma is required to enter into teaching. In the same line, as per the National Education Policy 2010 of Bangladesh, primary and secondary teachers take two-month' foundation training whereas college teachers undergo 4 months training. Primary and secondary teachers must have at least Certificate in Education or Bachelor in Education courses available in Dhaka University, Open University, and government training colleges within 3 years after their joining date. In Nepal, Bachelors in Education and Masters in Education is provided by five different universities. Teachers take education degree and license or other specialized academic degree and teaching license prior to entering into the profession. Teachers are required to complete at least secondary education before entering into teaching in the context of Nepal. In Pakistan, a prerequisite professional qualification is required for teaching roles; however, in Afghanistan, the same professional qualification is not required for teaching. Teachers in both countries, on the other hand, are hired after thorough screening and entrance exams. As a result, respondents in both countries recognized the need for professional training (Safi, 2019). The Foundation for Educational Development (AED) (2006) illustrates the major challenges faced by educators in Pakistan, including hypothetical educator training, a lack of responsibility, a lack of impetuses, a lack of desire to pursue a career path, and a lack of inspiration. Likewise, Teachers are bestowed with pedagogical content knowledge and teaching strategies in Teacher Training Schools to grab student attention and motivate them to study and learn. The concept of practical training is novel in Afghanistan's educational system (Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), 2013).

Teacher Recruitment and Licensing

In order to maintain national standards for teachers, The Teacher Service Commission was established and made responsible for licensing and selecting tenured teachers whereas School Management Committee and Local Government is responsible for recruiting temporary teachers in Nepal (Nepal Education Sector Analyses). For quality enhancement of education sector government of Nepal has proposed School Sector Development Plan 2016/17 – 2022/23 that aims at strengthening Teacher Service Commission to conduct licensing and select teachers. Licensing compels teachers to develop themselves to meet national standard. Even teachers' eligibility criteria have been strengthened with the provisions of fulfilling basic qualification and one-year preparatory course to participate in teaching license examination.

Likewise, even National Education Policy 2020 of India aims at strengthening Teacher Eligibility Tests (TETs) so that teachers develop themselves and maintain national standard. Further, they also have made provision of selecting candidates with right aptitude and strong commitment along with classroom demonstration and interview as part of teachers hiring. Further, with the motive of maintaining uniformity and standard of education pre-service teacher education programs will select students with subject and aptitude tests conducted by National Testing Agency keeping in view the linguistic and cultural diversity (India Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2020).

Likewise, Bangladesh has established a separate non-government Teacher Selection Commission to recruit teachers on a merit basis through written and oral tests (National Education Policy 2010). Even Bhutan has set the professional standard for teachers to classify them into different categories in terms of their competence, academics and performance (The Bhutan Professional Standard for Teachers, 2020). The continuum of teachers' career consists of beginning teachers, proficient teachers, accomplished teachers, and distinguished teachers. This continuum outlines standards and expectations of teachers which motivates them to develop themselves to accomplish such expectations. The objective of the Bhutan Professional Standard for Teachers (BPST) is to “Establish a benchmark for recruitment, professional learning, career development, retention, promotion, incentives and rewards (p. 33). Similarly, Afghanistan Ministry of Education 2018 also remarks on making a provision for licensing to maintain national standard for teachers' competency.

Training and Development

National Education Policy (Draft) 2019 of The Royal Government of Bhutan encourages citizens of the country along with its teachers to pursue lifelong learning and literacy. Through this, the country aims to “conserve, strengthen, and promote country’s culture, traditions, and values” (p. 12). However, in the context of Nepal, National Centre for Educational Development (NCED) conducts in-service and pre-service training for lower secondary and secondary teachers particularly. Those pre-service as well as in-service trainings provided by NCED in phases primarily emphasize on “subject knowledge, child-centered and active learning, inclusive education, formative assessment and differentiation to meet the learning needs of every student” (Nepal Ministry of Education, 2016, p. 26). These professional development programs include “one-month in-service certification training, refresher courses and other on-demand short courses including online self-learning courses and courses responding to specialized needs like special needs education” (Nepal Ministry of Education, 2016, p. 76). However, the training is not adequate due to lack of sufficient human capital to fulfill its huge responsibility to train the teachers nationwide (Nepal Education Sector Analyses). Further, National Education Policy of Nepal 2076 also envisions to develop teacher development centers into academy so that provincial governments in consultation with local governments will make an agreement with academy to provide training and development programs. Besides, even local governments in coordination with schools can run teachers’ continuous professional development programs, customized trainings, workshops, seminars, observation visits, reflections, networking opportunities and joint research.

Likewise, National Education Policy 2020 of India promises to provide teachers opportunities for continuous self-improvement and update with the current innovations and development for their advancement. The policy has forwarded a concrete plan for establishing an online learning platform so that teachers can exchange best practices and innovative ideas. The policy also envisions of providing regional to national and international workshops, seminars and online teacher development modules. In addition, every teacher is expected to participate in at least 50 hours long continuous professional development activities for their own update and growth. These learning opportunities cover current pedagogical content knowledge such as competency-based learning, formative and adaptive assessment, experiential learning, and sports-integrated, arts-integrated and storytelling-based approaches.

Compared to provisions for teacher development in Indian education policy, existing teacher training system of Bangladesh is traditional and loaded with theoretical knowledge which is insufficient and incomplete. According to National Education Policy 2010, 14 government training institutions, National Academy for Educational Management and, Training Institute for Madrasa Teachers are responsible for providing training and development opportunities to teachers in Bangladesh. Apart from that, 106 private teacher training centers have been providing training services. However, the standard of training is unsatisfactory. Keeping in view the current scenario, the education policy aims to encourage universities to initiate realistic and effective training to novice teachers. In addition, Bangladesh also plans to establish government training institutions with the residential facilities to trainees to enhance the effectiveness of such programs.

Likewise, according to Sri Lanka Ministry of Education (2013) seventeen National Colleges of Education (NCoEs) and 11 Teacher Training Colleges are offering pre-service diploma in teaching courses and two-year training program to in-service teachers respectively. Besides, four Departments of Education in the universities are also offering training and Bachelor of Education programs. Further, in-service trainings to enhance skills of the teachers are conducted by In-Service Advisors on a regular basis at zonal level. Most teachers in Sri Lanka have got training from either National Colleges of Education (NCoE) or Faculty of Education in University. National Colleges of Education (NCoE) offers diploma courses of three years' duration while Teachers' Training College (TTC) offers two years course. Graduate teachers first achieve a degree in specialized area from recognized university and then receive post-graduate diploma in education to become eligible and professionally qualified. (Sri Lanka Ministry of Education, 2013). With a vision of being education hub in South Asia, Sri Lanka has established a South Asian Teacher Development Centre with financial assistance of UNESCO, and a group of teacher educators from Maldives have already started taking a course on project management (Sri Lanka Ministry of Education, 2016).

Even National Education Policy (Draft) 2019 of Bhutan maps clear plan for professional development of teachers and teacher leaders. It envisions to provide opportunities, programs and support systems for continuous development and enhancement of leadership capacity with a focus of women leadership development, leaders with disabilities, and leaders from different socio-cultural and economic backgrounds. Additionally, Ministry of Education is committed to continually enhance

the competency of teachers through national level professional development programs since 2016. It is mandatory to all the teachers to participate in eighty hours long professional development programs in a year according to Bhutan's Teacher Human Resource Policy 2014. Out of eighty hours total training in a year, 40 hours training is offered through Ministry's coordination, whereas 40 hours will be offered locally in a cluster and school level. Further, teachers' are also having opportunities to update and upgrade their qualifications with Bachelors and Masters' degree at Paro College of Education (Annual Education Statistics 2020, p. 43). Though Bhutan, Nepal, India and Sri Lanka have clear policy regarding teachers' development, Pakistan, Maldives and Afghanistan lack clear plans and policies regarding this. However, National Early Grade Reading Policy of Afghanistan mentions that teachers' professional development and instructional support will be provided to early grade teachers.

Challenges

Though attempts are made to improve quality of teacher education and thereby overall education sector, South Asia is facing a lot of challenges. For instance, in Nepal, teachers' salary consumes more than 70 percent of the total budget of education and consequently very least amount is invested in teachers' professional development and growth. Next, there is a lack of effective performance management, career paths, incentives and rewards for teacher motivation. Additionally, though various training and development opportunities are offered ranging from child-centered and activity based learning, there has been least transfer of these skills into classroom teaching-learning in Nepali context (Nepal Ministry of Education, 2016). Parallel situation is evident even in Pakistan though multiple reforms to improve pre-service and in-service teacher training programs and recruitment of teachers have been conducted (Pakistan Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training, 2018).

In terms of investment Bhutan stands on top investing around 20 % of the total national budget in education, whereas Afghanistan and Pakistan are lagging behind. For example, Pakistan's total investment in education is very minimal (around 7% of the total budget of the country) compared to other South Asian countries (Nepal 10.92%, Maldives 11.28%) and Sri Lanka (Pakistan Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training, 2018). Afghanistan's condition is not different than Pakistan. Due to decade long armed struggle and invasion of the US almost 50 percent of the schools lack usable

buildings whereas more than 60 percent of the schools lack sanitation and electricity (Afghanistan Ministry of Education, 2018). In contrast to Afghanistan and Pakistan, expenditure in education in Nepal and Bangladesh is slightly better with 10.92% and 11.91% of the total budget respectively. However, out of the total budget of education, more than 70 percent of it is spent on teachers' wages and salary in Maldives (Maldives Ministry of Education, 2019) and same applies to Nepal as well.

Award and Recognition

Most of the countries in South Asia (Nepal, India, Bhutan, Maldives, Sri Lanka) have provision for recognition and special awards to motivate teachers for lifelong learning, dedication, and commitment to their profession. For example, Sri Lanka awarded 1200 teachers and principals along with privena teachers with Prathiba Praba Recognition (Sri Lanka Ministry of Education, 2016). Likewise, National Education Policy (Draft) (2019) clearly states that “ministry of education shall provide incentives to attract and retain education personnel to remote locations, high altitudes and boarding schools” (p. 16) in Bhutan. Similarly, National Education Policy 2010 of Bangladesh notes that teachers will be honored and encouraged for remarkable contribution. In the same line, Indian education policy of 2020 remarks that teachers with outstanding performance must be recognized, promoted and incentivized with salary raise. Further, in order to encourage talented students from rural setting to enter into teaching profession merit-based scholarships are offered to four years integrated B.Ed. programs.

Conclusion

With decolonization and restoration of democracy, a lot of attempts are made for qualitative as well as quantitative transformation of teacher education in the region. In the changing political and social context, new education policies, strong criteria, and standards for potential teachers are introduced with reform priorities. Moreover, different independent teacher selection commissions, provisions of licensing and standardization of teachers, training and development opportunities as well as awards and recognitions have motivated teachers and thereby contributed to quality enhancement. However, investment in education in South Asia is not satisfactory except in Bhutan. Hence, it is recommended to all the South Asian countries except Bhutan to increase the investment in teacher education so that different lifelong learning and development opportunities can be provided to pre-service as well as in-service teachers for quality enhancement of education in South Asia.

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