

## **QUALITY EDUCATION: THE KEY ROLE OF TEACHERS**

***Dr. Precious Sheron, Associate Professor***

***Ms. Navninder Kaur, Assistant Professor***

***Desh Bhagat University, Mandi Gobindgarh (PB)***

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The World Education Forum in Dakar in 2000 did not only emphasize the need to achieve education for all, but also noticed the need to improve the quality of education. The Forum made the following recommendation: “Improve all aspects of the quality of education to achieve recognized and measurable learning outcomes for all- especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills”(Dakar Framework for Action. Article 7, World Education Forum, 2000). Article 28 of the convention on the Rights of the child states the child’s right to education and the state’s duty to ensure that primary education at least is made free. In Article 29 of the same Convention, the states are requested to recognize that education should be directed at developing the child’s personality and talents, preparing the child for active life as an adult, fostering respect for basic human rights and developing respect for the child’s own cultural and national values and those of others (United Nations, 1989).

### **WHAT IS QUALITY**

Whenever quality in education is discussed it may be important to reflect on what is understood by the term “Quality”. Many education, researchers and politicians have tried to define this term and a number of different definitions can be found in the literature.

### **WHY THIS DISCUSSION ON QUALITY?**

- Education over the last decades has developed towards lower quality.
- It is an expression of an increased concern about education, the quality of education and the best way of spending money in education.
- The increased focus on education is a part of a process of restructuring the public sector, cutting public spending and introducing private solutions (Snyder, Fredriksson & Taube, 2004).

### **The Need to Improve Quality**

In the SACMEQ (Southern Africa Consortium for Measuring Education Quality) project, covering five countries in Southern Africa (Mauritius, Namibia Zambia Zanzibar and Zimbabwe). It was found that the level of reading skills among the students was very low. In only two of the five countries, Zimbabwe and Mauritius, at least half of the student achieved what was referred to as basic readings skills. Only in Zimbabwe, did more than a third of the students reach what was referred to as desired reading level.

## WHAT ARE THE CHARACTERISTICS OF A GOOD TEACHER

Recalling the attempts to define quality of education in section 2 it is of crucial importance to reflect on what is needed of the teacher to provide quality education. There have been many attempts to list the characteristics of the good teacher. Sometimes such lists tend to give a picture of a kind of superman/superwoman and may be more discouraging for teachers than helpful. In spite of that risk it may be of interest to look at some of the more, enlightened attempts to describe the good teacher.

### Different Description of The Good Teacher

The OECD report Quality in Teacher (1994) define teacher quality in five dimensions:

- Knowledge of substantive areas and content;
- Pedagogic skill, including the acquisition and ability to use a repertoire of teaching strategies,
- Reflection and ability to be self critical, the hallmark of teacher professionalism,
- Empathy, and commitment to the acknowledgement of the dignity of other,
- Managerial competence, as teachers assume a range of range of managerial responsibilities within and outside the classroom. (OECD, 1994, pp. 13-14)

**The report adds:** These dimensions of teacher quality should not be seen in terms of narrow behavioural competencies, but more in terms of dispositions. Teacher quality should be regarded as a holistic concept, i.e. as a gestalt of qualities rather than as a discrete set of measurable behaviours. To be developed independently from each other. The integration of competencies across these dimensions of teacher quality is thought to mark the outstanding teacher.”

- Organizing student learning opportunities
- Managing student learning progression
- Dealing with student heterogeneity
- Developing student commitment to working and learning
- Working in teams
- Participating in school curriculum and organization development programmes.
- Promoting parent and community commitment to school.

### Different Perspectives on The Good Teacher

Quality can be regarded from different perspectives. For many student quality is a fair system where their skills are awarded are awarded and where their achievements are acknowledged. For example, a Scottish student in grade 2/3 thought that a good teacher is very clever, doesn't shout, helps you every day is not bossy, has faith in you, is funny. Is good at work tells you clearly what to do, helps you with mistakes, marks your work helps you to read helps you spelling and has got courage.<sup>1</sup> (MacBeath et al, 1996,p.55) for parents quality means a school where the students are safe and where they can learn in a stimulating environment. For many teachers quality is a school where the students want to learn and where the working conditions are good.

## HOW CAN TEACHERS IMPROVE QUALITY?

What can teachers do themselves to improve quality? In this section three issues will be discussed

- Quality awareness
- Professional ethics
- Professional freedom

### Quality awareness and self – evaluation

Of general importance for teachers' ability to improve of education, is the ability to reflect on their own teaching, critically examine the methods used and looking for alternative ways of teaching (as mentioned above) To create an increased "quality awareness" among teachers and help teachers to improve their teaching methodology and skills may be of crucial importance to improve quality in education. One major way of doing this is to systematically evaluate the own teaching and its results.

## WHAT CAN GOVERNMENTS DO TO SUPPORT TEACHERS?

Quality education is not only a responsibility of the teacher. There must be a public responsibility to ensure all citizens the right to receive quality education. Such an important matter cannot be left to individuals, private companies or to the market. To create quality education it is necessary to establish a good practice and to meet demands at all levels (the classroom, the school/institution and the educational system in which classrooms and schools/institutions exist). It is not possible in the long run to establish good teaching in the

Classrooms if schools and the educational system as a whole are functioning badly. Even if individual teacher are able to establish good classroom practice in spite of badly functioning school/institutions and non –supportive educational authorities, this can only last for short periods. There are many examples of teachers trying to do their best in spite of lack of support from local and national authorities. Such situations too often end with stress and the burn-out of the teachers. There are also bound to be problems in a system with an excellent curriculum, but where teachers are not provided with the necessary moral and financial support needed to implement it. In order to support teacher in their efforts to improve the quality of education governments and relevant education authorities must:

- Provide education and professional development of high quality to the teachers;
- Provide teachers and schools with the resources necessary to offer quality education
- See that teachers have a salary comparable with other professions requiring the same level of qualifications and responsibility; and
- Ensure that teacher receive the moral recognition appropriate to their level of qualification and responsibilities.

**Attractiveness of the profession:** To achieve an attractive profession there ought to be more applicants for the initial education than places available. An education that prepares the teachers in an adequate way to do their future job in a competent manner will be attractive. To increase teachers' awareness about corruption. It is necessary to include issues related to how to fight corruption in teacher education. This means both in pre-service teacher education and in- service training. Those who are studying to become teachers have to be made aware of the problems related to corruption and how they can fight against it, but also those who are

working as teachers need to be reminded and get support. In- service education should deal with anti- corruption issues, sometimes as a specific topic, but perhaps in most cases as an integrated topic when other issues are dealt with. In a world where international relations and connections are getting more important and complex it is of crucial importance to make it possible for teachers to broaden their outlook and learn more about other countries through study visits and exchange programmes.

### **The status of teachers**

The joint ILO/UNESCO Committee of Experts on the application of the Recommendations concerning teacher personnel concluded in their 8<sup>th</sup> meeting report: “There is limited evidence of any general improvement in the status of teachers and their overall conditions of service” (Joint ILO/UNESCO committee of experts on the application of the Recommendations concerning teaching Personnel, 2003, paragraph 37) Teacher have a key position in all kinds of education. No measures are possible to improve education if the teachers are not thought of

Most reforms and improvement strategies have to deal with what is education authorities and governments must ensure that teacher have the right to form and control their own representative organizations have the right through their organizations to undertake comprehensive collective bargaining and where necessary industrial action and have the right to be consulted and to participate in the process of formulating educational policies. The obvious relation between motivation and good working conditions is a strong argument for improving the status of teachers. In order to improve the status of all teachers world wide education authorities, governments and inter- governmental organizations must ensure that teachers receive the moral and material recognition appropriate to their level of qualification and responsibilities.

### **WHAT CAN TEACHER UNIONS DO TO SUPPORT QUALITY IN EDUCATION?**

The teacher unions view of quality is informed by the principle that education must be relevant to the needs of individuals and of society and must be available to all, at any age and whatever one's economic position as a right. Unions also realize that there is a close link between the status of teachers. Teachers working conditions and the quality of education. Geographic areas, levels and subject areas, based on an equitable system of teacher placement and mobility, incentives to work in unattractive areas or shortage subjects and targeted effort to deal with the impact of HIV/AIDS and overcome gender in- equilibriums;

- Improve quality teacher and learning environments, including adequate infrastructure, appropriate class sizes (teacher/pupil ratios) which strengthen professional teaching standards and child- centered learning and sufficient teaching materials;
- Raise and maintain high professional standards for teachers, including respect for codes of ethics;
- Strengthen and institutionalize social dialogue mechanisms between education authorities and teachers organizations so as to fully involve teacher directly and through their unions or associations, in educational decision- making on EFA plans, implementation and monitoring

### **Fighting corruption**

Another issue which teacher unions have to address and which they increasingly have started to address is how to fight corruption in education. Many teacher organizations make different

in- service programmes available for their member some of these programmes are on trade union matters and other on professional issues. Issues on corruption in education could be integrated in both these types of programmes. There are also other ways in which teacher organizations can deal with these issues. Many organizations have in recent years been involved in discussions on professional standards and professional ethics. Fighting corruption is certainly a part of that discussion. It is important for teacher organizations to explore different types of actions which can be taken in order to fight corruption. In general, three paths can be followed;

- Promoting professional ethics.
- Organize and support training activities.
- Push for the inclusion of anti-corruption education in the curriculum.

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