Importance Of Initiatory School Experience Programme In Teacher Education: Perspectives Of Student Teachers In Central University Of Orissa

Abstract
This paper describes the opinion of Initiatory School Experiences (ISE) of trainee teachers of Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) programme in Central University of Orissa (CUO). The emphasis of this study was to find out how trainee-teachers acquire initiative school experience in terms of understand different school systems, to observe the teaching learning process, interact with the professional teachers; school researchers and interact with different school children. The study employed a qualitative design with the use of interviews and focus group discussion as the main means for collecting data. A total number of 96 trainee-teachers are participating and involved in the focus group discussion and interviewed. Data obtained was analyzed using thematic analysis. It was revealed that trainee teachers perceived field experience to be very important to them in terms of helping them develop professional proficiencies. Among such professional proficiencies cited by trainee -teachers included: the development of pedagogical skills and improvement in content knowledge; development of social skills; and acquisition of work experience.

1. Introduction
Teachers play a pivotal role in any education system. They directly interface with the students during curriculum implementation and yet society will judge the performance of the entire education
system from the performance of the graduates of the system. In society in general, teachers provide leadership, useful in explaining government policies and documents written in foreign and technical language. Teachers are also at times leaders of social movements like environmental activities, formal and non-formal education (Kagoda 2011). Teachers train the human capital essential for the development of a country and this is especially important in developing countries. In light of the above roles of teachers in society, it is important to evaluate the kind of education teacher trainees receive in teacher training colleges through their own voices.

Teacher education refers to the policies and procedures designed to equip prospective teachers with the knowledge, attitudes, behaviours, and skills they require to perform their tasks effectively in the classroom, school and the wider community. According to Talbert-Johnson (2006) teacher education is so far the most important and known way of preparing change agents because success in educational reforms depends on the teachers’ awareness of new changes, their attitudes to it and incorporation of the reforms in the daily conversation, professional values and commitment and knowledge of content. According to Allen (2009) teacher education programme refers to a prescribed set of studies, experiences, skills, and attitudes passed on to a teacher trainee, regardless of whether this is done pre-service or in-service, in preparing them for their future roles. Similarly Siddiqui (2009) argues that a teacher education curriculum framework needs to be in consonance with the curriculum framework for school education, and a teacher needs to be prepared in relation to the needs and demands arising in the School context. Teacher education has to change from time to time responding to the broader, social, economic and political changes taking place in society. The needs include; engagement with questions of the learner, the learning process and the content and pedagogy of educating a teacher. Siddiqui (2009) continues to argue that teacher education may be seen as a reflective undertaking that is a meta-activity in nature which should show how things are done at the school level, classroom level, basic theory and principles behind the practices. This calls for skills and understanding of a different kind in addition to the skills required for actual school teaching.

Andragogy (principles of adult learning) is the most appropriate pedagogy for teacher preparation. According to Elliot (1993) teachers learn how teach from experience and reflection. Teachers also learn through practice, acquiring knowledge and reflecting on their experience (Stuart et.al, 2009; Korthagen et.al 2006; Tailor et.al 1997). Learning to teach is a matter of learning the technical skills which enable individuals to function effectively in an education system. It requires knowledge and understanding of the subject. Learning about teaching is also enhanced through teacher trainees doing research on their own practice (Kagoda, 2011). Ozgun-Koca et.al (2006) and Tailor (1997) emphasize the importance of the constructivist theory of learning in the training of teachers. They argue that it is learner centered environment in which past experience of the pre-service teacher is respected. The learners construct their own knowledge by anchoring new information to pre-existing knowledge. Stuart et.al (2009) further states that some of this knowledge comes from formal training courses and wider social and cultural context in which they live. This construction of knowledge is interactive, inductive and collaborative. The teacher educator acts as a facilitator, provides pre-service teachers with a variety of experiences from which learning is built. The process maximizes social interactions between the learners so that they can negotiate meaning to what is exposed to them. In constructivist teacher education programs, there is less emphasis on skills and more on personal knowledge and on thinking skills. Constructivist teaching methods include role plays, debates, reflective journal writing, etc. which a most effective in influencing behavior change (Mugimu 2009)
2. Theoretic Framework

The research paper is based on Teacher Education Criteria and Guidelines for Programme Provider (2011) and National Council for Teacher Education, New Delhi; National Curriculum Framework for Teacher Education (2009) and syllabus of Central University of Orissa, Koraput as a guide to analyze students’ responses and critique the program at the Center for Education. The following are the suggestions deemed relevant to this study:

I. Make reflective practice the central aim of teacher education in the areas of content and pedagogy which are constantly changing

II. Teacher education should be open, flexible and not perspective and should put emphasis on the changing contexts and empower teacher trainees to relate her/him to them.

III. The programme should equip teacher trainees with a set of competencies to facilitate quality learning and cater for national priorities such as literacy, numeracy and inclusion.

IV. Ensure that the teacher trainees’ own literacy and numeracy and competences in promoting and assessing literacy and numeracy, as appropriate to their curricula/subject area.

V. Modern teacher education functions under the canvas created by the master concepts of learning society, learning to learn, inclusive education, education for sustainable development, gender, promotion of the values of peace based on equal respect of self and others as well as respect for work. This implies making teacher education liberal, humanistic and responsive to the demands of society.

VI. The worth and potential of indigenous culture as a source of rejuvenating teaching and learning. Multicultural education and culture specific pedagogy is the current trend.

VII. Acknowledge the existence of a diversity of learning spaces and curriculum sites such as the farm, workplace, home, community, media etc. apart from the classroom.

VIII. Appreciation of the diversity of learning styles and contexts in which teachers have to function; oversized classes, language, ethnic diversities, disadvantaged children etc.

IX. Teachers to be trained in organizing learner-centered activity based, participatory learning experiences like play, projects, discussions, dialogue, observation, visits, integrating academic learning with productive work.

X. The programme should help them understand the psychosocial attributes and needs of learners, their special abilities and characteristics, their preferred mode of cognition, motivation and learning resulting from home and community socialization.

XI. The programme should facilitate teacher trainees’ personal development and their growth in their professional role, enabling them to become responsible, trustworthy, effective, reflective practitioners.

3. The Teacher Education Curriculum At Central University Of Orissa, Koraput, Odisha

Center for Teacher education at Central University of Orissa is a youngest department. The mission and vision of the center is to prepare competent teachers at all levels; to work in the education system at Secondary School level. The vision of the School of Education is to be a center of Educational excellence and leadership in professional education and services relevant to the community sustainable development. The CTE is one of the biggest departments in university. The center offers the professional teacher education course (B.Ed.). CUO is structured in such a way that a teacher trainee must take foundation courses and two methodologies in courses. At the end of the first
semester of study, students are subjected to go for internship practice teaching which is practical and hands on experience in a real classroom experience in around schools of Koraput, allotted by the CTE for forty days. Theory, professional practice and academic activates the Centre is assessed and grades are awarded. It is also important to note that almost all teacher trainers have not undergone any orientation/training in teacher education programme and use their experience they gained.

### 4 Importance Of Innovative School Experience

Initiatory School Experience constitutes a relatively small portion of the whole endeavour of Teacher Education in the Central University of Orissa, Koraput, Odisha. Out of the mandatory minimum of 24 credit hours required for students to obtain a Bachelor of Education first semester, Initiatory School Experience accounts for only 2 credit hours. This notwithstanding, research has shown that many teachers consider their field-based experiences as the most important part of their education preparation programme (McIntyre, Byrd and Foxx, 1996). This could probably be attributed to the fact that unlike the regular semester courses, which require rigorous studies and constant preparation for end of semester examination, Innovative School Experience tends to be more activity-based and affords students the opportunity to apply the various competencies acquired from the lecture room to a real world situation.

A critical analysis of literature suggests that the importance of Initiatory School Experience in teacher training programmes cannot be over-emphasized. It has been established overtime that one of the biggest influences within the pre-service teacher education course is the field-based experiences trainee-teachers encounter in real teaching situations (Farrell, 2001). This might probably be because it has been observed that field-based experiences offer trainee-teachers the opportunity to observe and work with real students, teachers, and curriculum in natural settings (Huling, 1997). It has been found to also help to offer training to pre-service teachers in the context in which they would be working after their training (Sleeter, 2008). Again research has revealed that some of the prospects of field experience, as indicated by the objectives of such exercises, included a diverse range of skills that were considered important for trainee-teachers to acquire. Some of such skills include: classroom management skills, lesson planning, awareness of teaching style, and ability to interact with students (Richards and Crooks, 1988).

The supervision, which occurs during field experiences, also reflects theoretical and practical conditions and this has the tendency of building in trainee-teachers the requisite competencies for future professional practice. In addition, field experiences provide pre-service teachers with the
opportunity to develop their pedagogical skills, anchor their developing beliefs and put theory into practice in order to prepare them for future teaching jobs (Kauffman, 1992; Puckett and Anderson, 2002). Such competencies, for instance, have been found to help trainee-teachers to better understand the students’ out-of-school experiences in order to effectively address them in their classrooms (Coffey, 2010). During supervision, both the external and internal supervisors supervise the student and are important to the success the student experiences (Cooper, 1995). The training provided to trainee-teachers, which leads to the development of the appropriate teaching skills and professional proficiencies, paves way for trainee-teachers to secure employment after field experience. It has been established that designing and planning exemplary field experiences for education programme candidates is essential for retaining teachers on the job (Gold, 1996).

Initiatory School Experience also important because pre-service teachers enter teacher education programmes with strong beliefs and values about teaching and learning, as they have been students for the majority of their lifetime (Darling-Hammond, 2006). Some of these beliefs are likely to be misconceptions about teaching and learning, and sometimes, even about the teaching profession as a whole. People generally seem to have a negative perception about the teaching profession. Some see it as a stepping stone to other more lucrative professions. There are situations where trainee-teachers enter teacher education programmes, probably because they could not get their first choice course at the university. Such students then aim towards just obtaining a first degree and branching off to other programmes or professions of interest after being trained to teach. These beliefs are unlikely to change unless students are offered experiences that “challenge their validity” (Marx, 2004). This is to say that Innovative School Experience helps to change trainee-teachers misconceptions about teaching and the teaching profession as a whole. From a casual observation, there appears to be a total change in the attitude of trainee-teachers towards the teaching profession, after interacting with other professional teachers on the job during field experiences.

5 Statement Of The Problem

Training teacher trainees in large numbers by teacher educators who are inadequately trained and inexperienced in their job is a big problem in teacher preparation. The fact that the CTE does not have a single teacher education model that it follows in achieving its mission and vision is another issue that affects the training of teachers. The School of Education borrows ideas from the reflective model, the technical model, the social interaction model and the coaching model to guide teacher preparation. There is a problem of lack of a single model in teacher preparation at the CTE. Today, most of them believe that teacher education is for candidates who fail to get admitted to more “difficult” courses and is regarded as simple by most people in society as well as other academicians etc. Given such a scenario, the researchers sought to assess the teacher trainees’ expectations, experiences, and their assessment of the program at the School of Education.

6 The Purpose Of Study

The main purpose of the study was to identify and explain the teacher trainee’s expectations, acquire the school experiences and areas they feel need to be adjusted to make teacher training more effective and lifelong learners. In this context the university changes the curriculum for the year 2014-15. In this curriculum many activities are included in professional development and skills development. In the first semester the curriculum gives importance to Initiatory School Experience for different school experiences. The programme scheduled for a week, in the one week time all the students visit ten
different schools include normal, special schools, School excellences like KendriyaVidyalaya, Jawahar Navodaya, Kasturba BalikaVidyalaya, Ekalavya Residential School and local body running schools and include special schools like deaf, mentally retarded and blind.

The student teachers visit the schools and observe the school activities and systems, they take part in the classroom observation and they interact with the students and teaching staff. These activities give understanding about the different schools and systems.

6 Objectives Of The Paper
The study was guided by the following objectives
1. To assess the teacher trainees expectations when they joined the Center for Teacher Education.
2. To assess the teacher trainees 'experiences at the School of education as they undergo the program.
3. To solicit the views of the teacher trainees on how to improve the teacher education program.
4. To assess the different school system in school education.
5. To acquire the different professional skills by the trainee teachers.

7 Selected School For The Programme

1. UP School, Pujariput
   - State Board of Education - 1st to 7th Class
   - School is run by State Government - This is for local children

2. Kendriya Kidyalaya, Sunabeda
   - Central Board of Secondary Education - V to XII Std - For Gifted Rural Childern and residential pattern - Run by Kendriya Vidyalaya Samithi, New Delhi

3. Jawahar Novodaya, Koraput
   - Central Board of Secondary Education - V to XII Std - This mainly for Central Government Employees Childern - School is run by MHRD and Naviday Vidyala Samithi, New Delhi

4. Jagannath Vidya Peeth, Sunabeda
   - State Board of Education - 6th to 10 th Class - Run by Local Body-Zilla Parishad - This is for local children

5. Kasturba Gandhi, Podapadar
   - State Board of Education - Up to 7th Class - Run By State Government - For Girl Child Only - Residential Pattern

6. School for the Deaf, Sunabeda
   - State Board of Education - Up to 7th Class - This is for DeafChildern only - Residential and Day Schollers - Run by State Government

7. Eklavya school, Pungar
   - Central Board of Secondary Education and state board - This school exclusively for trible rural childern - Run by OMTE Society and government

8. Blind School, Koraput
   - This school is run by NGO for Bild childern - Followed State Syllabus - This is mainly Day scholar

9. MANAS School, Koraput
   - This is for mantally Challenged childern and residential pattern
   - This school run by state government - This school also had vocational training

Figure 7.1: ISE-Programme Schedule
8 Research Approach

Data was collected in two main ways: focus group discussion and student interviews. The focus group discussion took the form of a class discussion with all student teachers. These students had undergone Initiatory School Experience and were better placed to provide the relevant information for the study. The students were divided into five groups and each group was asked to discuss among its members the benefits they derived from field experience. Each group was then asked to present its views to the whole class for discussion. We then recorded the ensuing class discussions. The focus group discussion was employed to obtain the general consensus of trainee teachers about the issues raised. This was to ensure that the information obtained represented the views of the whole group and not a few sampled individuals. It also helped us to identify certain thematic areas to aid discussion.

Some of the students were selected by means of accidental sampling technique for interview. Students were interviewed in the office as they came to present their project work. The essence of the interview was to find out from students their own specific views about Initiatory School Experience and also to find out why they had such views. This gave us in-depth information for our analysis and also to understand the case of each individual student and the experiences he/she had during field experiences. The information obtained also helped us to elaborate more on the issues raised during the focused group discussion.

The data analysis focused on the major theme bothering on the research objectives that guided the study. The main theme was the benefits of Initiatory School Experience to trainee teachers. Under this theme, we derived based on the thematic analysis of the focused group discussion and emerging themes are discussed; citing individual cases from the interview data to explain the consensus arrived at during the focused group discussion. The analysis was organized around the research objectives because according to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007, p. 468) "this is a very useful way of organizing data, as it draws together all the relevant data for the exact issue of concern to the researcher."
9 Results and Discussion

This section presents the study results in terms of the perceived benefits trainee teachers obtain from field experience.

Benefits of Innovatory School Experience to Trainee Teachers

The analysis of the data obtained through the focused group discussion and the individual interviews clearly indicated that trainee teachers perceived Innovatory School Experience to be very important to them in terms of helping them develop professional proficiencies. Among such professional proficiencies cited by trainee-teachers included: the development of pedagogical skills and improvement in content knowledge; development of social skills; and acquisition of work experience.

With respect to the development of pedagogical skills and improvement in content knowledge, the trainee teachers generally agreed during the focused group discussion that the off-campus Innovatory School Experience helped them to fully understand some of the teaching practices they were taught during lectures and also helped them to apply some of the key concepts of teaching and learning they had learned in class. Among some of the benefits students identified with that Innovatory School Experience helped them to acquire skills in classroom management and control. One trainee teacher buttressed this point during the one on one interview by stating that "during the off-campus teaching experience, there were a number of occasions where I had to quickly cut into students’ discussions to prevent other students from making fun of their friends in class. Such scenarios were never present during micro-teaching on campus. Another student also indicated that "I acquired skills such as classroom management and control, time management, and management of students' behaviour". It also emerged during the focused group discussion that Initiatory School Experience helped build trainee-teachers' knowledge in different school systems. There was a general consensus among them that the exercise helped them to acquire more knowledge and also to apply certain key concepts during their schools visit. As one student indicated during the one on one interview, "there were certain concepts I didn't fully understand during lectures, but during the off-campus teaching practice, the more I taught full and discussed those concepts with students, the better the understanding I got". Among other skills developed as indicated by students included the opportunity to employ a variety of teaching techniques and also the effective use of questions during teaching. Student said the exercises "provided me a platform to understand the various methods of teaching", and another student also intimated that "it helped me to learn how to handle students' questions".

From the foregoing findings, it is very much obvious that students perceived Initiatory School Experience to be very important because it gave them the opportunity to practice the theories of teaching they had acquired during their course work on campus. This as they indicated helped them to improve upon such essential skills required for effective teaching in the classroom. This finding is supported by the assertion that field experiences provide pre-service teachers with the opportunity to develop their pedagogical skills, anchor their developing beliefs and put theory into practice in order to prepare them for future teaching jobs (Kauffman, 1992; Puckett and Anderson, 2002). Again, it agrees with the viewpoint by Richards & Crooks (1988) that Initiatory School Experience enhances the development of skills such as classroom management skills, lesson planning, awareness of teaching style, and ability to interact with students.

Another very important benefit student perceived to have derived from Initiatory School Experiences the development of social skills. Among the list of social skills students outlined during the focus group discussion included: learning to accept the views of students from different
backgrounds; developing good relations with colleague teachers in the field; improvement in communicative skills; development of self-confidence; and the ability to work in a group. These findings were collaborated and further explained by the data obtained during the one on one interview. The following are some of the views that emerged with respect to the one on one interview. The students express during the interview that "I used to be very shy and I didn't always feel comfortable speaking in front of people. But during the Initiatory School Experience, I had to interact and the more interacted with students, the more I became comfortable. Now, I'm not very shy". Another student also indicated that the exercise helped him to be more tolerant of other people's views. In one of the students 'own words, "I had to try and adjust so I could tolerate both students and teachers who had different beliefs and convictions from mine. It really helped to generate interesting discussions during ISE". As indicated by Coffey (2010), such competencies have been found to help trainee-teachers to better understand the students' out of school experiences in order to effectively address them in their profession. Again, as explained by Richards & Crooks, (1988), among a range of skills developed by Initiatory School Experiences an enhanced ability of the trainee-teacher to interact with students.

The final group of benefits trainee-teachers believe to have derived during Innovative School Experience was classified under the theme "acquisition of work experience", during the focused group discussion. Some of the experiences trainee-teacher agreed to have acquired, including; the experience of working under direct supervision; more practical insight into the teaching profession, in terms of acceptable code of conduct; an understanding of the administrative structures of schools; changes in perceptions about the teaching profession; development of interest in the teaching profession as well as the creation of employment opportunities. One of the interviewees indicated that Innovative School Experience gave him more insight into the teaching profession, which helped him develop more interest in the profession. He indicated that “it was a lovely experience”. It enabled me to realize my passion for teaching. I think I was born to teach” another interviewee also said she felt a sense of self-fulfilment for also being afforded the opportunity to teach someone “for me, it was a great accomplishment that I was able to teach other people”. Other trainee-teachers interviewed also affirmed that the exercise helped them to experience first-hand the activities that go on in a school, such as the day to day running of the school, code of conduct for teachers on the field and the opportunity to work with supervisors and mentors who helped them on their field experience. The interview also revealed that the exercise helped build the confidence of students and also prepared them for future life experiences. These sets of findings agree with research findings that ISE prepares trainee-teachers for the teaching job (Gold, 1996, Coffey, 2010); helps to reorient the beliefs of students about the teaching profession (Darling-Hammond, 2006, Marx, 2004) and giving trainee-teachers work experience by providing them the opportunity to work in settings they would be working in after their training (Sleeter, 2008).

10 Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on the foregoing analysis, it can be concluded that trainee teachers, after their off-campus or field based experience, perceived Initiatory School Experience to be very important to their training as teachers. Key among the benefits trainee teachers perceive to have obtained are: the development of pedagogical skills and improvement in content knowledge; development of social skills; and acquisition of work experience. It also became evident that the exercise helped dispel the
misgivings some trainee-teachers had about teaching and aroused their interest in the teaching profession.

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