
Title	Evaluating the needs of teacher education in South-East Asia
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Source	<i>1st International Conference on Teacher Education jointly organized by the International Council on Education for Teaching (ICET) & the Faculty of Education University of Malaya (FEUM) Conference, 3 – 7 August 1970</i>

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Evaluating the needs of teacher education in South-East Asia

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Editorial Note:

Since the above paper was unavailable, only a report of the speech delivered by Dr. Wong, who will be referred to as "RW", will be given in what follows. Should there be gross errors in reporting, we tender our apologies.

RW began by drawing a distinction between evaluating the needs of teacher education and evaluating the needs for teacher education. To her, education would direct attention on the demand for education and the problem of quantitative expansion, but the needs of teacher education are more particularly related to the supply of teacher education and its qualitative output. RW then pointed out that the paper would focus on the needs of teacher education.

Borrowing from the systems analytical model, she delineated three stages, namely input, process and output, as comprising the teacher education system. According to her, whether the total system succeeds or fails as a viable whole will depend on the strength of the qualitative components at each stage of the system. She observed that in all South-East Asian countries it does happen that the input is less than desirable and the process has unfortunately not been properly worked out. She however maintained that what we cannot do with the input stage can be done at the process stage in order to bring out that which will eventually help to upgrade the whole system and prevent deterioration.

RW suggested that at the input stage, which normally consists of objectives, persons and facilities in that order, vagueness about what is required is more characteristic of pre-service education than of in-service education, although what condition obtains for one does to some extent affect the other. At the input stage of pre-service education, objectives are seldom expressed in operational terms, nor are they specifically regarded as important to the system. Where they are enunciated they are very global and there is often a touch of the sublime. To illustrate this, RW quoted the following which was stated at the UNESCO Conference on the Status of Teachers in Paris, 1966:

"The purpose of a teacher preparation programme should be to develop in each student his general education and personal culture, his ability to teach and educate others, an awareness of the principles which underlie good human relationship within and across the national boundaries and the sense of responsibility to contribute both by teaching and by catering to social, cultural and economic progress."

She emphasised the need to redefine our terms and say specifically to ourselves what should we do when we educate teachers. For instance, it may sound very nice to say let them understand and have an awareness of things; but understanding and awareness are conditioned by certain norms, as is true of the nine countries which were the main concern of RW's paper, namely Burma, Cambodia, Laos, Malaysia, Indonesia, Philippines, Thailand, Singapore and South Vietnam.

RW indicated that such countries as the Philippines and Thailand have gone a little further ahead in stating their objectives, but they reflected the UNESCO global vagueness, with here and there a little glimpse of practical lucidity. On the other hand, with countries like Singapore and Malaysia, the statement of objectives is seldom made explicit and they are conspicuous by their absence in their manifest aims. In her view, the form of teacher education has not undergone very much change since it was introduced in colonial times, although the form has occasionally been modified in degree, the over-riding factor being one of meeting quantitative demands. She pointed out that at the present

time of need in Singapore, the trainee teachers have to teach a full day and then go back in the afternoons for part-time courses. In other words, the ploy was to increase the burden of the teachers without looking at the specific objectives of teacher training.

RW went on to say that the objectives of in-service training are frequently stated in somewhat more practical terms. Citing from the Report of the Regional Symposium on In-service Training of Primary School Teachers in Asia, RW compared, for example, the Indonesian aim "to enable qualified teachers and talented teachers to become head teachers and for supervisors to become inspectors" with the Laotian aim "to select suitable candidates to fill the post of principals." She felt that attempts at upgrading people through in-service training did not seem to her to be very logical, for it would appear as though it is taken for granted that the inspectors know a little more than principals, principals know a little more than secondary school teachers and so on down the line, so that a person who does not need to know very much is the primary school teacher. In order to boost the image of primary school teachers, Singapore has recently started a massive retraining programme to upgrade these teachers. In order to illustrate her point about the greater importance of the primary school, RW suggested that her reading of the latest research seems to indicate that when we establish in children a good reading ability during their first few years, then they may not even need any teachers as long as they are kept supplied with good books. Thus, according to her, students at the Faculty of Education who are honours graduates have not been tested and tried if they have not experienced teaching in the primary schools.

RW then elaborated on what she meant by the three components of in-service education, namely remedial education, re-education and continuing education. She pointed out that qualitatively the solutions to problems in South-East Asia did not differ much from those in other countries. This is a direct consequence of borrowing models of teacher education from colonial cults without much examination as to their relevance. The situation has, according to RW, been further aggravated by the fact that UNESCO itself has tended to give world solutions and in lumping diverse regions in South-East Asia, it always ended up with the same vague, generalised statements.

Another component of the input stage involves persons. The vagaries of the current Indochina war have according to RW, aggravated the present shortage of teachers in countries like South Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos and Thailand. The Report of the UNESCO International Conference of Public Education in Geneva, 1963, illustrates the increasing demands after the second World War and the inability of these countries to meet these quantitative demands.

In countries like Singapore, Malaysia and the Philippines where there seemed a likelihood of stabilisation of teacher supply, other factors have intruded to upset the equilibrium. Thus, RW observed that in Singapore, successful industrialisation and national defense have in the last two years depleted the teaching rank. In Malaysia, a change in the medium of instruction has created a shortage of specialised teachers of such subjects like Science and Mathematics. In the Philippines, the poor inducement offered by the teaching service has created an acute shortage of men teachers, as shown in Appendix I. RW expressed her concern over the imbalance in the teaching service, especially at the secondary level, where, according to her, adolescent boys need certain types of guidance that women cannot give. Since Indonesia has been able to supply teachers to Malaysia, RW concluded that her problem was akin to that of the Philippines, where there is no lack of teachers but rather of good teachers.

Considering the first group of countries, RW felt that since the academic qualifications and minimum age of entry vary considerably, as shown in Appendix II, different types of courses must be made available. For other countries where stabilisation of supply is likely to be or has been attained, standardisation of acceptable levels of admission to professional training as well as of acceptable levels of achievement needs to obtain if, according to RW, professionalism is to be attained.

The least important component of the input stage, in RW's opinion, concerns the available facilities, which range from situations where only bare classrooms are available to the presence of language laboratories, special facilities for videotaping and other equipment in keeping with modern advances in educational technology as occurs in Singapore and Malaysia. The facilities are considered least important because they do not make a significant dent to the quality of education, so long as teacher educators appreciate the essentials of teaching as an art and can exemplify good teaching. Unfortunately though, there has been a tendency to emphasise facilities and teaching has become a harsh affair to which no outsider may be admitted.

Dealing with the process stage of teacher education, RW observed that instead of specifying what teachers may be expected to do within the limited time available during teacher training, society tends to lay down the expectations and teacher educators accommodate to them. She hastened to say that she expects teacher education institutions to fulfil certain expectations of society as long as these are not limitless demands.

RW then delineated three roles of teachers as applied to the process stage, namely that teachers are expected to:

1. teach given subjects to given number of pupils;
2. be rational agents of change in order to facilitate and accelerate economic and social developments;
3. supply models of acceptable moral conduct

In respect of the first role, various academic and professional courses are offered in pre-service teacher education. RW observed that while academic course requirements are multiplied in inverse proportion to the years of academic preparation prior to admission to teacher education, professional courses are multiplied in direct proportion to the demands of society. Thus, primary school teachers carry a heavy academic load during pre-service training, whereas secondary graduate teachers are not expected to study academic subjects per se except to study the special methods associated with these subjects. There have also been a multiplication of professional courses such as child psychology, anthropology, sociology, guidance and counselling, educational technology, testing and measurement, etc. RW was however disappointed that in educational philosophy, we often talk of Plato and Aristotles but not what Tagore, Confucius or the Gurus have to say.

And because of the second function, such courses as economics of education, development education, ethnics of education, etc. have as pointed out by RW been added to the already overcrowded teacher education curricula. As a consequence, either the courses make but a shallow impression on the student or he suffers from an imbalance of treatment between what he requires as general versus professional education, between what is academic versus professional, between what is theory versus practice, and so on. Referring to some tables in a book by Pires on a Survey of Primary Teacher Education in Asia, RW illustrated the variables in the time allocation for theory versus practice. She pointed out that in one institution, only 3% of the time was developed to practice teaching, the rest given to talk and chalk. There were also correspondence courses where the trainees go through no teaching at all and this was compared by RW to teaching swimming by correspondence.

RW then posed a number of questions which need to be answered at the process stage. Firstly, how may a trained teacher be identified? By his skills, specifically defined, by times spent in training, by exposure to specific programmes, by a combination of these criteria, or by some other criteria? Second, are levels of training to be judged on the academic attainment of specific groups of trainees or are they to be associated with a hierarchy of teaching skills? Do teachers undergo a series of training starting from para-professional training and ultimately returning for various specialisations as

in the case of doctors, or are they being turned into all kinds of teachers by some strange feats of metamorphosis? Finally, can a trained teacher claim to have acquired a knowledge of his task which makes him supervisor to the untrained when put in the classroom? Is it because of our inability to say that a trained teacher is superior to one who is untrained that enables parents, administrators and politicians to tell us what to do, that we have put ourselves in their grip by sheer lack of definition? RW pointed out that at this point South-East Asia has no answer to give, but she hoped that the more advanced countries might be able to offer some solutions.

In terms of in-service education, RW dismissed remedial education and re-training as viable long-term concerns. To her, continuing education offers a ray of hope, especially when we are prepared to conceive of education courses as occurring at different levels. Citing Israel Sheffler's remark on the paradigmatic uses of the word "teach", RW felt that he was reminding us of the need to be as precise as possible as to the aim in teacher education, that if teaching is our purpose, then it is also our purpose to teach students why something is such and such, or to teach students why to do such and such, or teach students why how to do such and such. Thus, if it is our purpose to teach students why how to teach, then the teaching skills should be listed. RW stressed that at the first level of teacher education, it may be best to concentrate on norm acquisitions, or perfecting the techniques in the classroom (the science of teaching) and teaching the norms (the art of teaching). According to her, there is no need at the first level of teacher education to give the teacher all kinds of courses, like measurement. Instead it would be much better that the teacher should understand what the demands of duties are, how he should work in classrooms and what it is that he hopes the nation to achieve through him.

In providing opportunities for continuous growth individual differences will come to the surface. Hitherto pupil differences tend to be overemphasised. In her research on pupils' learning in the U.S.A., RW found that she could not point her finger on any one school teacher as ideal. Thus, the child from a strict home preferred the conservative teacher, the child from the home that had no rules somehow went for the disciplinarian and the child that was bright preferred to do everything himself. Hence, after level one courses and after having experienced teaching in classrooms different teachers are likely to return for specialised courses, as part of the programme for the continuing education of teachers.

RW finally pointed three observations of importance in evaluating the needs of teacher education in South-East Asia. First, we cannot have the same meaning and content in all the various countries and even in the same country. Second, the quality of educational output is a product not merely of the formal educational system but also of the informal system which includes the home, community and all the other out-of-school influences like all the professional cultural organisations, television, radio, libraries and museums. Third, the causes of poor quality are not peculiar to the developing countries, but the discontent with what has been achieved in quality serves as a motive for programmes.

RW concluded by pointing to the possible cyclic nature of input, process and output stages, for at some point the output can become the input, and urged that if this cycle is to continue spiralling, then it is time for us to rethink the needs of teacher education in our own countries.

APPENDIX I

Percentage Distribution of Full-time Teachers by Sex*

Country	Survey Year	Primary		Secondary	
		Male	Female	Male	Female
		%	%	%	%
Burma	1961	66.6	33.2	57.3	42.7
Cambodia		...	...	...	...
Indonesia	1959	...	...	79.7	20.3
Laos	1957	...	...	63.1	36.9
Malaysia: Malaya	1960	66.8	33.2	...	...
Singapore	1962	47.4	52.6	65.7	34.3
Philippines	1960	25.7	74.3	36.7	53.3
Thailand	1962	66.2	33.8	57.7	42.3
Viet-Nam, Rep. of	1959	65.3	34.7	84.7	15.3

*Source: *Education in Asia*, Ministry of Education, Japan 1964, p. 81.

Percentage Distribution of Full-time Teachers by Qualification*

Country	Survey Year	Primary		Secondary	
		Qualified	Non-qualified	Qualified	Non-qualified
Burma	1961	57.2 %	42.8 %	85.6 %	14.4 %
Ceylon	1962	67.4 ⁽¹⁾	32.6 ⁽¹⁾
China, Rep. of	1962	...	...	98.3	1.7
India	1960	64.1 ⁽²⁾	35.9 ⁽³⁾	65.4 ⁽²⁾⁽⁵⁾	34.6 ⁽³⁾⁽⁵⁾
Japan	1962	98.0	2.0	98.9	1.1
Korea, Rep. of	1960	98.5	1.5	91.4	8.6
Malaysia: Singapore	1962	43.0	57.0	69.5	30.5
Pakistan	1960	69.5 ⁽²⁾	30.5 ⁽³⁾
Philippines ⁽⁴⁾	1960	98.6	1.4	99.0	1.0
Thailand	1961	54.0	46.0	64.0 ⁽⁵⁾	36.0 ⁽⁵⁾

(1) Including secondary school teachers

(2) Trained

(3) Untrained

(4) Public school teachers only

(5) General secondary teachers only

*Source: *Education in Asia*, Ministry of Education, Japan 1964, p. 81.

Establishing Body, Conditions of Admission and Duration of Course for Primary Teacher Training*

Country	Establishing body	Conditioning of admission		Duration
		Minimum age	Previous studies required	Of full-time course (in years)
Burma	Central	16	General education of 9 to 10 years	1-2
Indonesia	Central	11	6 year primary education	4
Laos	Central	14	6 year primary education	4
Malaysia: Malaya	Federal	18	Lower certificate of education examination	3
Singapore	Central	17	7 year primary education in a Malay School, Cambridge Oversea School Certificate or Government Senior Middle Certificate of Specified standard	3 (part-time) 2 3 (part-time)
Philippines	Central	16	Completion of primary and secondary education (10 years)	4
Thailand	Central	17	Completion of 10 th grade	2 (general)
			Completion of 10 th grade	3 (vocational)
Viet-Nam, Rep. of	Central	17	9 year general education	1 (for grades 1-3) 3 (for grades 3 4 and 5)

*Source: *Education in Asia*, Ministry of Education, Japan 1964, p. 132.