



Teacher Education Needs at the Tertiary Level of Education in India: Perceptions of Doctoral Students in the States of Assam and Nagaland

Niboli Awomi

Abstract

The study presents the perceptions of doctoral students in the states of Assam and Nagaland, regarding the need for teacher education programmes in Indian tertiary educational context. And to ascertain the purpose of this study, a needs analysis following Hutchinson and Waters' model (1987), has been adopted to understand the doctoral students' needs, wants, and lacks; grounding this concept as the basis, respondents' perceptions of the need for teacher education programmes finds congruence. The study has adopted a qualitative approach and a total of 25 doctoral students from universities in Assam and Nagaland responded to the study. Findings from respondents' needs analysis convey that across universities, doctoral studies emphasised the research aspect while giving less or no attention to the pedagogical aspect—the two quintessentially interwoven aspects in the teaching profession. Therefore, the absence of pedagogical mentorship in the doctoral studies curriculum underpins respondents' perceptions of the need for teacher education programmes at the tertiary level of education in India.

Keywords: Teacher education programme, tertiary education, needs analysis, doctoral students

Introduction

Boehrer and Sarkisian (1985) stated,

With many academic departments, acceptance into a graduate program conveys an automatic license to teach. This notion presumes that, if a person can learn the subject, they can also teach it. For the new TA [Teacher], perhaps the most immediate threat to self-esteem comes from the discrepancy between the assumption that he knows how to teach and the discovery that he does not (1985, p.15).

As stated above, the reality of accepting individuals into the teaching profession based on their academic performance is a prevalent practice in tertiary level of education in

India. Here, the criteria for appointing new faculty in colleges and universities are — academic degree, and qualification in the National Eligibility Test (NET) conducted by the University Grants Commission (UGC) of India. Setting such criteria as standards for appointment indicate that academic degrees and certificates are the decisive factors for joining a teaching profession. In other words, every individual with required academic qualifications is qualified to teach. These types of requisites presume if one can learn the subject, then one can certainly teach the subject as well. And unlike teachers at the school level, most teachers at the tertiary level of education enter the teaching profession with minimal

or no amount of pre-service pedagogical training. Without adequate preparation and in the absence of pedagogical training, new appointees embark on new roles as teachers. Here, Milton (1972) states, "Elementary principles of learning, especially in higher education, have been neglected, abandoned to an abiding faith in traditional methods, or periodically subjugated to innovative hunches" (p. ix). This observation by Milton in the year 1972 is still relevant post-2020 i.e., without training and experience, new appointees teach the way their teachers had taught them. In other words, they simply follow the teaching techniques that they had experienced as learners. It is reasonable to state that one may have an excellent academic profile and outstanding research work, but these credentials do not ensure that one will be an effective teacher. Hence, a transition from being a scholar/academician to being a teacher needs careful attention.

Setting the prevalent academically oriented practice of appointing new faculty in Indian tertiary education as the context, the study seeks to understand doctoral students' perceptions on the need for teacher training programmes at the tertiary level of education in India. Here, it is important to mention that the study identified doctoral students as the respondents as they are the prospective employee i.e., the future faculty in colleges and universities. A needs analysis (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987) was conducted to understand their perceived needs, wants, and lacks. The study also seeks to understand their views about the curriculum followed in doctoral studies. As the future faculty, they have both expectant roles and determined roles, therefore, understanding these issues will examine—to what extent are the present tertiary education commendable in preparing them for the roles they will embark on as faculty in colleges and universities. Establishing this finding will determine if there exists a

need for teacher education programmes in the Indian tertiary educational context.

Needs Analysis and Hutchinson and Waters' Framework

Needs analysis as a concept has been borrowed from the field of language teaching and learning. Brown (2006) regards needs analysis as the systematic collection and analysis of all subjective and objective information to define and validate curriculum purposes that satisfy the language requirements of students and influence the learning and teaching situation. For Nunan (1988), needs analysis is the technique and procedure for collecting information to be used in syllabus design. According to John (1991), need analysis is the foundational basis for designing a course and it determines the reliability and the validity of the subsequent activities in course design. In language teaching and learning, needs analysis is regarded crucial for once identified, it will serve as the basis for material selection; test design; approaches to teaching; selecting teaching tasks; and strategies for evaluation.

Hutchinson and Waters' needs analysis model¹ (1987) focuses on the target needs (necessities, lacks, and wants) and the learning needs. This model explains target needs as 'what the learner needs to do in the target situation', and learning needs as 'what the learner needs to do to learn' (p.54). According to Hutchinson and Waters, target needs analysis will provide necessary information about the knowledge and skills required by learners to perform efficiently in the target situation; thereby, providing information to course designers about the language and skills learners need to develop. Knowledge about how learners would learn is analysed through gathering information such as, why are learners learning the course, who are the learners, and what is their learning background.

For a detail discussion on Hutchinson and Waters' model of needs analysis, see Hutchinson, T., & Waters, A. (1987). *English for Specific Purpose*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Framework for target needs analysis:

- Why is the language needed?
- How will the language be used?
- What will the content areas be?
- Who will the learners use the language with?

Framework for learning needs analysis:

- Who are the learners?
- Why are learners taking the course?
- How do the learners learn?
- What are the resources available?

The Rationale of the Study

The above section has defined the concept of needs analysis in English for Specific Purpose (ESP) context, and as mentioned, it is carried out as the basis for understanding a curriculum that will suit the learning needs of the learners. Needs analysis is seen as a necessity for both educators and learners to ensure that the course is efficient and effective for the learners. It is the awareness of needs that quintessentially characterizes the ESP situation. Therefore, the rationale of borrowing this concept into the present study is to understand the perceptions of the respondents by examining their needs, wants, and lacks as future faculty. The study also seeks to critically assess the aspect to what extent is the doctoral curriculum efficiently preparing future faculty for the roles and responsibilities in their professional context.

Understanding this aspect will form the relevancy of this study i.e., is there a need for teacher education programmes at the tertiary level of education in India?

Design of the Study

The study adopted qualitative nature of approach and thus, it does not seek to formulate or test any hypothesis but seeks to establish the purpose of the study without any preconceptions. Tools used for gathering data for this study include interviews and questionnaires with open-ended questions. Questions were framed based on the theoretical framework of Hutchinson and Waters' needs analysis model (1987). All questions were systematically put together to gather respondents' needs, lacks, and wants with the purpose of understanding their perceptions of the need for teacher education programmes at the tertiary level of education. A total of 25 doctoral students from Gauhati University in Assam and Nagaland University in Nagaland agreed to be respondents for this study.

Respondents' profile

There were 25 respondents in total, out of which 3 were males and 22 females. Information about distribution of respondents by years of teaching experience and classification of respondents by discipline and university will be tabulated in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1: Distribution of respondents by years of teaching experience

Years of Teaching Experience	No. of Respondents
1-2	2
2-3	5
3-4	5
4-5	3

Table 1 shows the distribution of respondents by years of teaching experience. Of the total 25 respondents, 15 of them had

some years of teaching experience prior to joining doctoral studies.

Table 2: Classification of respondents by discipline and institution

Discipline	Gauhati University	Nagaland University
Economics		1
English Language Teaching	5	
English Literature	1	3
Geography	1	2
History	3	2
Linguistics		4
Political Science	1	1
Psychology		1

Table 2 shows the classification of respondents by discipline under each university. It is pertinent to mention that owing to the lack of feasibility, the researcher could contact stakeholders from the discipline of humanities alone.

Data Analysis

The researcher took a qualitative approach to this study as it was crucial to analyse

respondents' personal views rather than merely quantifying their responses in numbers and percentages. Questions asked were primarily open-ended with enough scope for the respondents to present their views. The framework of Creswell's Data Analysis Spiral (2007) was followed for data analysis, an illustration of the framework will be presented below in Fig. 1.

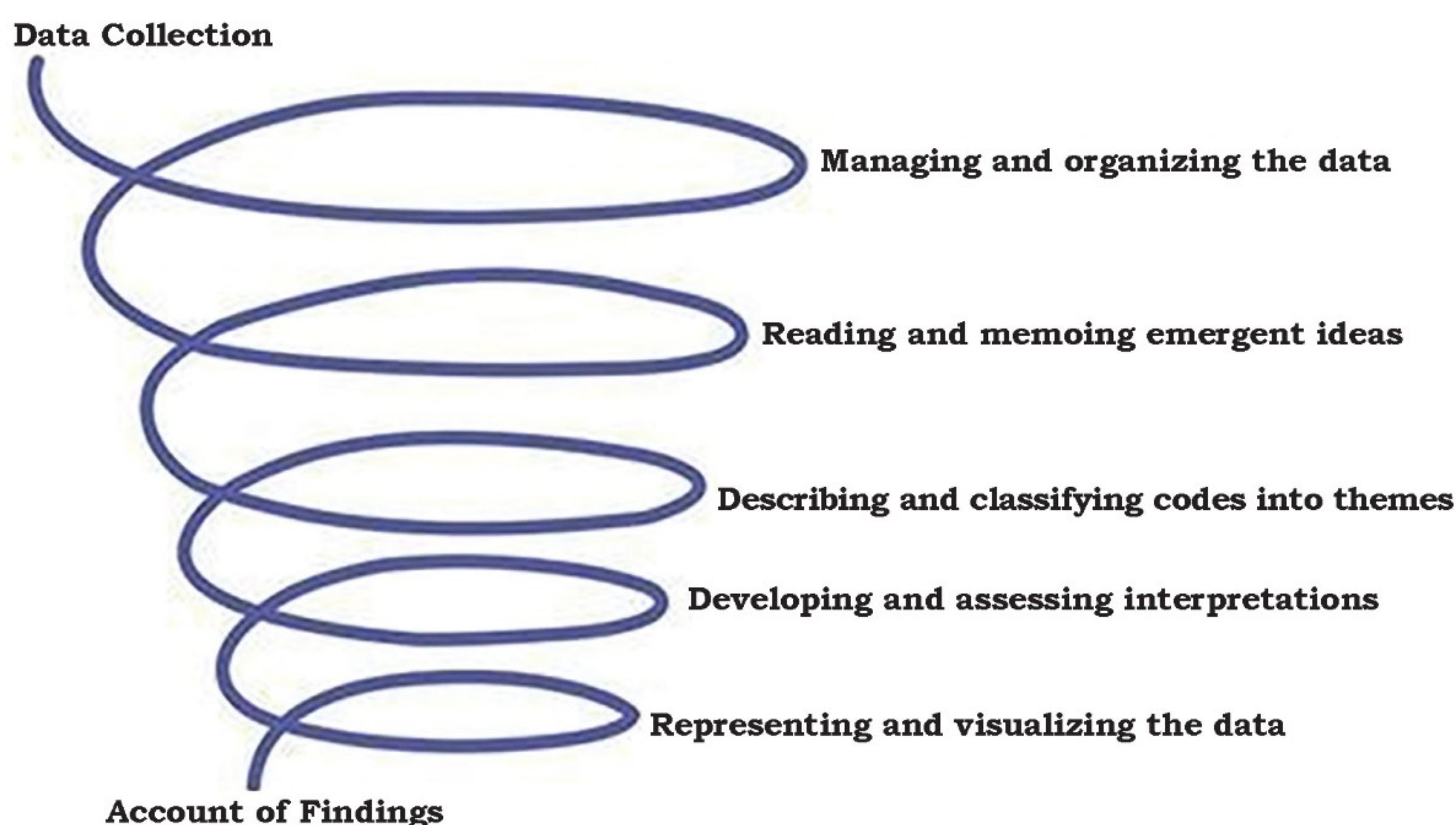


Figure 1: Data analysis spiral (Creswell, 2007)

Source: Creswell and Poth, 2018 (p. 225)

As Fig. 1 shows, data analysis for this study began by transcribing data gathered from the respondents and organizing them into specific folders for example, the researcher classified data into two broad categories i.e., data from respondents with prior teaching experience and data from respondents without prior teaching experience. Each folder was then, analysed to arrange data according to the emergent ideas in terms of similarities and relevancy. It was followed by coding the data following the themes in Hutchinson and Waters' needs analysis framework such as necessities, wants, and lacks. The next step was developing and assessing interpretations, which imply making carefully considered judgements about what is meaningful in the themes and categories gathered by analysis (Patton, 2010). The final step was articulating the analysis in text, tabular, or figure form. For data validity and reliability, one to one interview with standardised questions as intervention suggested by Conway et.al., (1995), was followed. Also, relevant data are presented as verbatim to demonstrate respondents' responses as gathered.

Respondents' Needs Analysis

Respondents' needs analysis were conducted with regard to the three pertinent aspects of Hutchinson and Waters' model of need analysis. Those three aspects were the target situation, the target needs, and the learning needs. Each of these aspects will be discussed in detail in the sections below.

a. Target Situation

Respondents' target situation was determined by posing some questions such as:

- Why are you pursuing doctoral studies? Has it been your preference?
- What is your career plan after completing doctoral studies?

These questions were set to understand the respondents' perceptions of pursuing doctoral studies and their plans for future careers. An interesting finding that emerged from data gathered on this aspect showed

that all respondents shared the same desire to join a teaching profession which was the reason for pursuing doctoral studies. The underlying connection between the two aspects was reflected through their emphasis on the importance of having a doctoral degree for teaching in higher education settings. One of the respondents with prior teaching experience stated, *'Nowadays, if you want to have a teaching career in colleges and universities, having a doctoral degree is essential and it has many advantages too, that's why I decided to join the doctoral studies.'* Another respondent commented, *'I always knew that I wanted to teach, so it was logical for me to get a doctoral degree.'*

These findings suggest that motivation to join a teaching career has fueled respondents' desires to pursue doctoral studies. And keeping in mind the interconnectedness between the respondents' choice of pursuing doctoral studies and their future career plan, the identified target situation i.e., the situation for which they are pursuing their doctoral degree is working as faculty in colleges and universities.

b. Target Needs—necessities, wants, and lacks

Following Hutchinson and Waters' model, the three aspects of target needs — which are necessities, wants, and lacks will be discussed in this section. As mentioned, necessities according to Hutchinson and Waters are the abilities or skills that learners must possess to function efficiently in the target situation. In light of this understanding, some of the necessities that would facilitate respondents' efficacy in the target situation are—

- expertise in subject matter knowledge
- skill in pedagogical aspects

Also, to determine the wants or the perceived needs of the respondents, one of the questions asked was—

- On a scale of 1 to 5, 1 being the lowest and 5 being the highest, how much would you rate yourself as classroom-ready, if you were appointed as new faculty? Could you provide reasons for your answer?

In response to this question, data gathered showed two categories; the first is the view shared by the respondents who had no prior experience in teaching, and the second is the view shared by the respondents who have had teaching experience prior to joining doctoral studies. In the first category, the majority of the respondents gave a rating between 2.5 to 3 out of 5. And reasons for their choice of answers point towards the same understanding i.e., having no experience in classroom teaching and the lack of training in practical aspects of teaching. In the second category, the majority of the respondents gave a rating between 3 to 4 out of 5. Also, another significant finding that emerged in this context was that all respondents in this category mentioned feeling nervous and anxious for the first few classes. And one of the commonly cited reasons was the number of students in the classrooms. All of them commented that there were more than 50 students in a classroom: a common reality across regions in India. Another commonly cited reason for their nervousness was the problem of classroom management in terms of time, student participation, and topic completion. One of the respondents also mentioned the problem of catering to the needs of students from different age groups (she worked in an institution where distance education programmes were offered). In concurrence with the reasons cited, respondents were asked to comment on what according to them would help in preparing them for the roles and responsibilities as future faculty. Respondents from both categories emphasised the need for training programmes that would give them opportunities for hands-on practical experience in teaching such as classroom management, lesson planning, and facilitating students' participation in classroom discussions. The echo of these voices was lucidly captured by one of the respondents by illustrating an example:

If you knew I liked fishing and you gave me a fishing cast net, but if you don't teach me how to cast a

net, it will definitely take me many trials and errors to figure out how to cast it appropriately. Likewise, even if we have the qualification, if there is no mentoring on how to manage classrooms, how to design lesson plans etc., these things will not come just like that, we need to be taught these aspects.

Applying the illustration succinctly summarised above, just as fish cannot be caught by merely owning a fishing cast net, so also, in the teaching profession merely having an academic degree is not sufficient. Drawing from these findings, the wants or the perceived needs of the respondents with regard to the target situation are:

- mentoring on the practical aspects of teaching
- hands-on practical experience sessions on real classroom teaching

Lacks as mentioned in Hutchinson and Waters' needs analysis model is the gap between the proficiency required in learners to function effectively in the target situation and their existing proficiency. Understanding the gap between the present teaching and learning process (preparation process) and the perceptions of respondents on their level of preparedness as future faculty, would to a great extent accentuate the objective of the present study. And to determine the lacks, it was found pertinent to know about the duration of the programme coursework and the curriculum followed in doctoral studies across universities. Data gathered showed that the programme duration for doctoral coursework, in general, was between six to twelve months. Also, there were similarities in the kind of curriculum followed i.e., paper on research methodology, and subject-specific specialisation. Another question that was asked to elicit the aspect of lacks from respondents' perspective was: According to you, do your doctoral studies adequately prepare you as future faculty? Kindly provide reasons in support of your answer. Responses gathered resonated the same perception, the essence of which was precisely stated by one of

the respondents as, 'Yes and no! Academically yes but practically no. Academically we go through a rigorous curriculum but there is hardly any opportunity for us to learn the practical aspects of teaching'.

This precise statement entails a concern that doctoral studies focused on the research aspect of subject matter knowledge, nurturing students to be skilled researchers or experts in subject matter knowledge, but less or no attention was rendered to facilitate students' pedagogical skills. However, subject matter knowledge and skills in pedagogy are two indispensable aspects of a teaching profession; therefore, prioritising one over the other shows a lopsided scenario in the preparation process of respondents as future faculty. To take cognizance of this line of thought, respondents were also asked to comment if expertise on the subject matter knowledge indicates the teacher's teaching efficiency. All respondents shared the same vein of thought in expressing that subject expertise alone does not indicate a teacher's teaching efficiency. One of the comments stated:

Let me first say this, knowing about the subject is indeed important but teachers must also know other classroom dynamics apart from knowing how to teach [the subject]. That's why I think having training in teaching should be a part of the doctoral programme, because most of us research scholars opt for a teaching profession.

As cited above, the common understanding among respondents was that a teaching profession required more than merely being an expert in subject matter knowledge. The gathered data also indicated that respondents were dissatisfied with the research-centric curriculum followed in the doctoral studies. Thus, based on these findings, the aspect of mentoring and training in pedagogical skills is found lacking in the doctoral study curriculum followed across universities in Assam and Nagaland.

c. Learning Needs

Hutchinson and Waters (1987) defined learning needs as 'what learners need to do in order to learn' in other words, how will learners learn? What are the knowledge and abilities required by the learners to perform competently in the target situation? And to determine the learning needs, it is necessary to take cognizance of aspects such as—

- Who are the learners?
- Why are the learners taking the course?
- How do learners learn i.e., what methodology will appeal to them?
- What are the resources available for learners to learn effectively?

Bringing the context of learning needs to the present study, it is pertinent to highlight once again that all respondents in this study are doctoral students who have the desire to pursue teaching as a career after the completion of their doctoral studies. Therefore, some of the optimal conditions to facilitate respondents' learning needs are:

- Following a curriculum that gives equal emphasis on nurturing knowledge and skills both in the subject matter knowledge and in the practical aspects of teaching i.e., the pedagogical skills.
- Incorporating guided mentorship sessions in the coursework.
- Presenting opportunities for hands-on practical classroom teaching sessions.
- Having timely and thorough feedback sessions.

Implication

A critical overview of the existing practices of appointing new faculty in Indian tertiary education settings showed that the criteria for such appointments focus on academic qualification which is considered as 'proof of certification'. In other words, if an individual possesses the required academic degree, it is assumed that they would do well in a teaching profession. Without any prior training or mentoring, the newly appointed faculty are expected to start performing their duties. However, as discussed in the above

sections, respondents' needs and wants showed that despite having the required academic qualifications, respondents were not 'classroom-ready' i.e., not confident to face real classroom situations. Therefore, the practice of appointing new faculty based on their academic performance does not stand in congruence with respondents' perceptions. Two notions can be inferred when such a practice is followed:

- Academic degree equates expertise in subject matter knowledge.
- Expertise in subject matter knowledge implies proficiency in teaching.

However, it is rational to doubt that mere possession of academic degrees does not necessarily mean that one is an expert in the subject matter knowledge. And again, being an expert in subject matter knowledge does not mean that one will be an efficient teacher. Shulman in his essay *Knowledge and Teaching* (1987) states:

The image of teaching involves the exchange of ideas. The idea is grasped, probed, and comprehended by a teacher, who then must turn it about in his or her mind, seeing many sides of it. Then the idea is shaped or tailored until it can in turn be grasped by students. This grasping, however, is not a passive act. Just as the teacher's comprehension requires a vigorous interaction with the ideas, students will be expected to encounter ideas actively as well. Indeed, our exemplary teachers present ideas to provoke the constructive processes of their students and not to incur student dependence on teachers or to stimulate the flatteries of imitation (pp. 13–14).

As rightly worded in the above quotation, teaching is not merely dictating what one knows about the subject, it is much more than that. It involves the aspects of knowing how to deliver what one knows in a way that is comprehensible to one's students. Therefore, there is no doubt that teaching requires both expertise in subject matter knowledge and skills in pedagogical aspects; these two

indispensable aspects must be interwoven for teaching to be effective. In light of this reality, another significant dimension that emerged from the findings revealed that all respondents were pursuing doctoral studies for the concomitant benefits it would have in their teaching career. However, data gathered suggest that they were dissatisfied with the kind of curriculum followed in their doctoral studies. It followed a lopsided research-centric pattern while neglecting the pedagogical aspects of teaching. In other words, preparing students to be good research scholars but not equipping them with skills to be classroom-ready teachers. Therefore, respondents' perceived needs stand on the premise that having teacher education programmes would facilitate an opportunity for them to be better prepared for the roles and responsibilities as future faculty. Teaching as a profession is praxis, and teachers are the crucial medium through whom knowledge is constructed in a classroom, thus, there is an apparent need to bring about a qualitative convergence of content expertise and pedagogical skills to foster the qualitative transaction of knowledge in a classroom.

Conclusion

This study investigated the doctoral students' perceptions of the need for teacher education programmes at the tertiary level in an Indian educational context. A total of 25 doctoral students from the universities of Assam and Nagaland agreed to be respondents for this study. Tools for collecting data include interviews and questionnaires with open-ended questions. A framework following Hutchinson and Waters' needs analysis model (1987) was conducted to understand the respondents' needs, wants, and lacks. And to ascertain their perspectives without any preconceptions, the study followed the qualitative approach of data analysis. Findings on respondents' needs analysis identified a gap between the proficiency required in them to perform competently as

future faculty and their existing proficiency. The need to address this gap underpins the respondents' perceived needs for teacher education programmes at the tertiary level of education in India to ensure—

- new faculty are fully equipped to embark on their roles and responsibilities
- students are taught by well-trained teachers who are classroom-ready to facilitate students' optimal learning

McDonald (1980) states that the majority of teachers find the transition period from student to teacher life as the most difficult aspect of a teaching career. And most of their difficult experiences are related to classroom management, delivery of instruction, evaluating pupils, and developing a consistent teaching method. Along with these identifiable measures, he also reports that the least identifiable but crucial problems experienced by teachers in their transition periods such as fear, anxiety, loneliness, and lack of mentorship. He concludes by stating that the experiences of the transition phase will impact teachers' professional competence and progress throughout their careers. As clearly stated, the transition period of a newly appointed faculty needs careful attention, and here, teacher education programmes can be a scaffold in facilitating the future faculty to

embark on their duties and responsibilities in two folds as they:

- are designed to equip teachers or prospective teachers with the knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, and skills required to perform their tasks effectively in the classroom
- offer a platform for new faculty to meet and build connections with their peers, thereby giving them opportunities to help and learn from each other.

In light of this discussion, it is pertinent to mention that the National Education Policy 2020 (NEP) acknowledges the importance of having teacher education programmes for all levels of teaching. It also recognises the need to train all doctoral students as future faculty in the tertiary education sector. And it proposes a mandate for all doctoral entrants to take credit courses in teaching/pedagogy/education related to their subject during their doctoral study programme. It has also proposed the introduction of Teaching Assistantships (TAs) during doctoral studies, requiring all doctoral students to have minimum hours of teaching experience. This is a major policy shift for the tertiary sector of education in India, and if well implemented, all new faculty will enter the teaching profession not only with subject expertise but also with the skills to teach efficiently.

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