

Evaluation of Teachers' Education Programs in Iran (Case Study)

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Doi:10.5901/jesr.2012.v2n2.127

Abstract: *Teachers are called nation-builders. In every country, in every period, and in every society the role of teachers is of great importance. It is left to the teachers to inculcate right values and developing young nation. The image of an ideal teacher has undoubtedly changed through the ages. In the past, a teacher was considered as source of all knowledge, but today this view does not exist anymore. In fact, the teachers need to be conceived as a "change agent" and not as a mere transmitter of knowledge and culture. In this context, in order to bring necessary changes, we should pay attention to the newer needs of teachers, in the different areas of profession. In fact, the professional development of teachers is regarded as an individual and collective process that should be accomplished in their workplace. Furthermore, it is looked upon as a contribution to the development of the teacher's professional skills, by means of a variety of both formal and informal experiences. The concept of professional development has changed over the last decade. Indeed, professional development has recently come to be viewed as a long term process, covering different types of opportunities and experiences that are systematically planned to stimulate the development and evolution of the teacher. Bearing all above in mind, in recent years, in developing countries like Iran, one of the most significant concerns in the field of teachers' education was efficiency of teachers' education programs. Therefore, this study attempted to gather information relevant to the state of pre-service and in-service programs for teachers in Iran. It specifically tried to find out aims of in service programs ,their organization ,nature of curriculum ,the methods of teaching, techniques of evaluation, the educational agencies involved in this program and its strengths and weaknesses. The study analyzed relevant literature and used a questionnaire for data collection. The findings revealed that there were specified and defined objectives: the organization was satisfactory, teaching methods were lecture and conference, and the method of evaluation was written method.*

Key words: *Teacher Education, professional skills, professional development, curriculum*

1. Introduction

Iran is a new nation with a long history and cultural tradition. It faces many problems in the social, cultural of its people. One of the greatest of these problems, both in importance and in scope, is the improvement of its educational system in order to meet the needs of young generation involved in the process of inclusive reform: social, economic, and political.

No matter how one views the concept of national development and its relationship to human resources, the need to develop an appropriate educational system performs a significant function since his role is to perpetuate society's heritage and simultaneously to energize human toward social progress. In recognizing crucial role of teachers in social and cultural change, Lynch and Plunkett indicated that from teachers must come much of the vision, expertise and cultural sensitivity to interpret and respond to pressure for change and initiate qualitative development in education.

If the premise that the teacher is a central element in level of education cannot rise far above the quality of the teacher in the classroom, then the selection and preparation of these teachers are of significant social concern. Concerted efforts must be made, therefore, to produce the best teacher a nation can afford.

Furthermore, teacher education provides a vital link between a nation's institutions of higher learning and the public they are designed to serve. Not all youth, even in the most affluent societies, can personally and directly be enrolled in college or university. The benefits of higher education to the majority of the population are thus generally transmitted by the teacher who is a product of this higher education. The institutions that

educate teachers, the teacher educators themselves, and the governmental departments concerned with teacher education are thus clearly a part of the nation's overall strategy in the development process.

To meet the educational crisis facing both the developing countries and industrialized nations, Dr. Philip H. Coombs of the International Institute of Educational Planning, suggests not only the development of innovations, but a habit of innovating in education. In this process he draws attention to the central role of teacher preparation:

"Educational system will not be modernized until the whole system of teacher- training is drastically intellectually richer and more challenging, and extend far beyond pre-service training into a system for continuous professional reward and career development for all teachers."

Educators and all those concerned with education of a nation should be encouraged to develop the capacity to build institutions that will train teachers who will themselves be innovators of educational and even community development.

Perhaps the strongest statement comes from Freeman Butts. Writing in *Education and the Development of Nations*, he declares that the education of teachers must be viewed as belonging at the very heart of any human resource development plan that hopes to contribute to the modernization and building of a free nation.

Questions have been raised that relate in one way or another to teacher preparatory programs in Iranian colleges and universities. Recent projects and innovations indicate the government's awareness of the problems existing in the preparation of teachers. Point seven of seven of the Charter of the Education Revolution in Iran emphasize the importance of teacher education in the attainment of the nation's goals :

As teacher- training plays a fundamental role in the country's education planning and social and scientific progress, all institutions concerned with teacher- training programs should make every effort to strengthen and adjust them to the needs of the nations.

2. Need for the study

Teacher Education has been debated at the several regional and annual conferences on the evaluation of the Revolution in education in Iran. However, there is a dearth of literature which deals comprehensively with education for school teachers.

From research literature, there is a need to explore and develop more effective ways of preparing educational personnel to meet the challenges of a changing society, and for focusing the thinking of teacher educators on conceptualizing the nature and scope of professional education at all levels. Teacher education programs for the future should cater to the new teacher roles, utilize technology to create new approaches to teaching and take in to consideration the needs of learner, especially in terms of the masses now entering in school in Iran as a result of free secondary and higher education.

There has been an absence of emphasis in teacher preparation in Iran on social problems which exist; such as lack of respect for the profession of teaching, little sense of services to the country and humanity, and doubtful attitudes about the ideals of democracy. Teachers must be alert to the need to develop a sense of responsibility for educating the child according to his individual abilities and needs and for guiding him wisely to the solution of his own problem. Only when these goals have been accomplished can Iran be organized among the educated nations of the world. A review of literature reveals that there is a great concern for the investment of teacher preparatory programs in Iran, and much effort is being expended to upgrade existing programs. The review of the literature and the concern of this investigation for the improvement of teacher preparation programs in Iran, have prompted the problem of evaluating teacher education programs in Iran.

Considerable research was conducted using, among other sources, the following in order to see if any study was undertaken regarding teacher education in Iran : Dissertation abstracts, Doctoral Dissertations Accepted by universities, Research studies in Education , none of these sources showed any study evaluating teacher education in Iran .

3. Objective of the Study

The study proposed to :

- 1- Identify the current status and characteristics of the teacher education programs (pre-service and in-service programs) in Iran
- 2- Find out aims of in service programs ,their organization ,nature of curriculum ,the methods of teaching, techniques of evaluation, the educational agencies involved in this program and its strengths and weaknesses .
- 3- Develop recommendations directed toward the improvement of teacher education programs in Iran.

4. Methodology of the Research

In this project survey method was used for collecting detailed descriptions of existing conditions with the intent of employing the data to justify those practice considered to be desirable for preparation of teacher in general and for Iranian institutions of teacher education in particular.

5. Data collection Methods and Research Tools

The Teacher Education literature was reviewed to identify those qualities considered essential for successful teaching in the schools. Other sources of information were writing of individuals concerned with the improvement of education in Iran. Professional books, bulletins and periodicals which discussed the study of teacher education were also reviewed. From these various sources, the investigator gathered and analyzed data to develop recommendation for policies and practices relating to teacher education in Iran. Because this study deals with subject matter that needs to utilize primary materials in Iran, thus one questionnaire was prepared in order to gather information about teacher education courses (pre and in-service courses) from target group. Also materials consisting of government documents and publications were collected by visiting government offices and educational institutions and conducting interviews of government officials and educators.

6. Data Analysis Methods

The quantitative and qualitative forms of expression were used in presenting the data in this study, while tables, figures and charts were utilized to assist in the interpreting the data. The findings of the study provided the bases for recommendation for improvement of the Iranian teacher preparation.

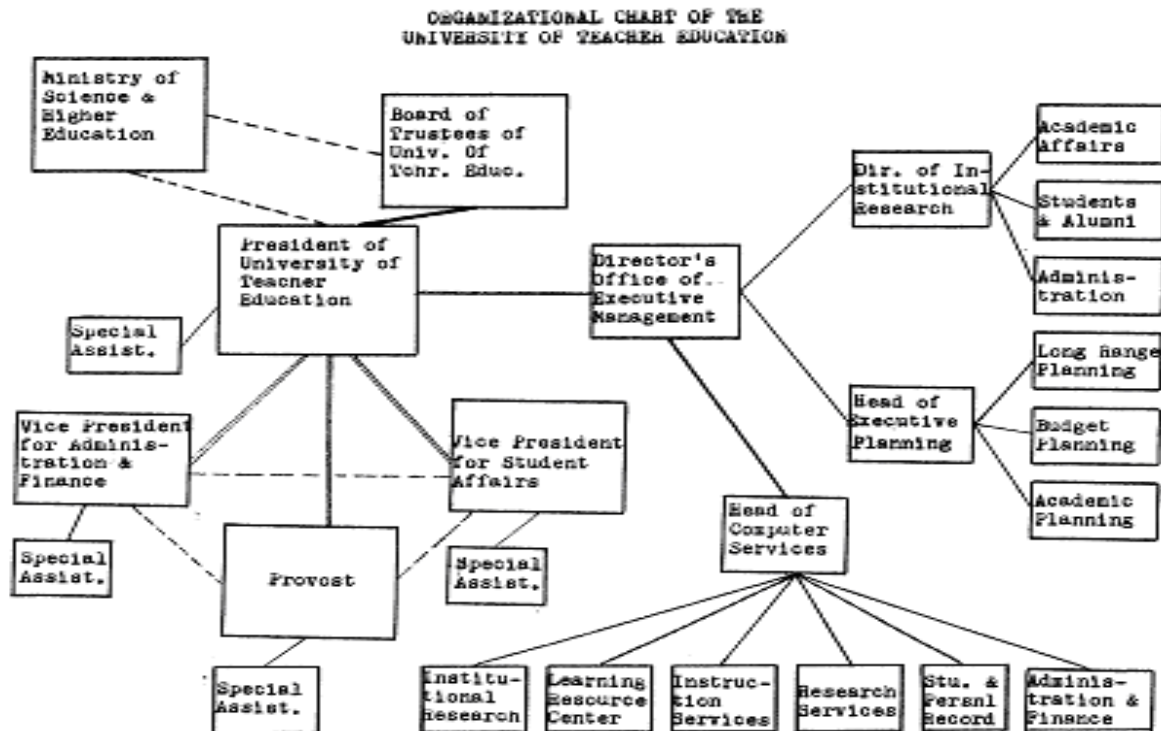
7. Out comes

Some of the major outcomes of this study are as follows:

I. Teacher training in Iran: The outcome of the study revealed that fields such as Education, Educational Administration, Educational Planning, and Counseling specifically aim to prepare students in higher education to work in the education system. Moreover, Science students may take 20-24 credits in teacher training (i.e. from the Departments of Education) and become certified teachers in the field of Mathematics and Science. Following diagram shows organizational structure of Teacher Education in the universities. A university teacher education faculty is members of the Iranian system of higher education which, under the direction of Ministry of Science and Higher Education coordinate all colligate institution constituting the university. By constitutional enactment the board of trustees of the university, consisting of seven members as follows

- a. The Minister of Science and Higher Education or his fully empowered representative.
- b. The Minister of state and Head of Plan and Budget Organization or his fully empowered representative.
- c. The secretary of the central council of the universities and colleges.
- d. Four perceptive and insightful personalities who can effectively enhance the developmental expansion of the university.

The administrative structure are shown in the following chart :



Objectives of teacher education at universities are:

- ♦ To prepare qualified teachers for normal schools, guidance cycle teacher training centers, and teacher colleges
- ♦ To prepare school administrators
- ♦ To plan, organize and conduct programs for preparing secondary school teachers
- ♦ To prepare educational specialists
- ♦ To prepare school counselors
- ♦ To furnish educational materials and advisory services for the students
- ♦ To conduct experimental and research studies in education

II. Teacher Education Institutions

a) *In-Service*: according to the interviews and data which were collected from target group by the help of questionnaire, Teachers in public schools are required to be engaged in in-service education. In-service education is used by centre of teacher training in the Ministry of Education and central government as a tool to manage change in the education system. The teachers who pass in-service education programs are eligible to receive a certificate for their training. In-service certification is considered an important factor in teachers' evaluations and add to their credentials. Teachers have to pass several assessments after they

start their in-service programs at universities. Schools have contracts with universities and send their teachers to these universities to pursue in-service credentials.

III. Number of years to complete

By referring to the outcomes of this study, it is clear that, the number of the years for completing pre or in-service education are different:

a) Pre-Service: the universities such as Payame Noor University, which offer higher education through distance education, the period of study for students for the Bachelor's degree is up to 20 semesters (10 years), depending upon their progress and pace of study. A total of 132-141 credits are required for a Bachelor's degree. At other universities like Tarbiat Moallem University, the Faculty of Psychology and Education is one of the oldest faculties, and has many departments including: Psychology, Guidance and Counseling, Foundations of Education and Educational Technology. In the Department of Foundations of Education, there are only a few undergraduate programs. The Department of Guidance and Counseling offers two Bachelor's programs: (a) Guidance and Counseling, and (b) Education of Exceptional Children, which emphasis on children with mental disabilities. The Department of Educational Psychology offers an associate diploma as well as a Bachelor's degree program in librarianship in addition to a Bachelor's program in Pre-primary and Primary Education. There is also a Faculty of Physical Education and Sport Science, which is composed of two departments: Boy's Physical Education and Girl's Physical Education. The Departments offer undergraduate programs in Physical Education

b) In-Service: In-service education and postgraduate teacher education at opne universities e.g. Payame Noor University, involves study at the postgraduate level (i.e., Master's level). The Master's degree programs at this level are related to Education include Education (Curriculum Planning, History and Philosophy of Education) and Physical Education and Sports Sciences. At other university like Tarbiat Moallem University, the Department of Foundations of Education offers some graduate/postgraduate programs. These include Educational Administration, Curriculum Development, History and Philosophy of Education, and Educational Research at the Master's level, and Philosophy of education, Curriculum Development, and Educational Administration at PhD level. At the postgraduate education level the Departments of Boy's Physical Education and Girl's Physical Education offer Master's and PhD programs in Motor Learning, Motor Development, Sports Administration and Sports Physiology .

IV. Teacher Education Curricula (i.e. content of TE programs)

In order to answer the question concerning "Who writes the text books?", interviews was conducted and one questionnaire was administered to the target group. The result showed :

a) Pre-Service: The system of instruction is based on several media. The most important of which is textbooks developed for independent study. Almost all courses hold a limited number of optional tutorials during each semester. The organization and structure of the program at these centers can best be described as a composite of these components: General courses, Areas of specialization ,Electives . Although they are limited in number for each major, they are designed to be closely related to the area of specialization of each student. This is intended to provide adequate depth in and understanding of, the subject matter which he plans to teach.

All students regardless of the specific branch of study in which they are enrolled, study the following general subjects:

General psychology, Educational psychology, principles and methods of education, history of education, comparative education, religious education, foreign language, test and measurement in education, Farsi (reading, writing and speech).

b) Pre-requisites: Pre-service teacher education system entrance requirements:

Requirements for Entrance into Teacher Education Programs: Applicants for the Bachelor's degree are required to be secondary school graduates with an acceptable grade point average (GPA) in their written examination. The GPA is specified by the University annually. The regular degree programs are offered to those who pass the National University Entrance Examination held annually by the National Educational Assessment Organization .

Year of Performance	Number of Employees	Educational Index		Total Hours of In-service Training Course for Staff		Total Hours of In-service Training Course for Principals	
		staff	Managers	General	Occupational	General	Occupational
2000	1003874	39	44	14277213	23481719	1003874	768611
2001	1021630	40	48	14945439	24195144	1021630	1565521
2002	1024598	45	51	16136641	24443374	1024598	1655527
2003	1043162	48	51	24406215	25970930	1043162	2405698
2004	1054131	63	59	27349894	29177663	1054131	2833739
Average of third	1029479	47	51	19423080.4	25453766	1029479	1845819.2

V. Alternative Process for qualifying for entrance: on the basis of the reviews and interviews there are Alternative entry at some universities such as Payame Noor University which means applicants no longer need to attend the National University Entrance Examination. Admitted students will study

VI. conditionally for one semester. If they succeed in the final examination of the first semester, they will be able to continue their studies, otherwise they will be withdrawn

VII. Standards (Licensing of Teachers – Initial and Continuing):

a) **Licensure Renewal/Sustaining:** A Teaching Certificate is required for employment at almost all of the public schools in Iran. However, most private schools do not follow the same procedure of Certification as public schools. Employment in private schools is mostly based on personal relationships/networks and principals' personal approaches.

b) Some of the training centers are too small to be effective centers for professional training.

VII. The result of evaluating performance of the in-service education from 2000-2008 are as follows:

Table n.1 Showing Performance of In-service Education at Ministry of Education in the Third and Fourth Development Plan in Iran

As chart no-1 shows, Educational Index (average Hours allocated to in-service training Course) for all the employees at the Ministry of Education on Third and Fourth Development Plan (form 2000 to 2008) was gradually increased. It enhanced from 39 in 2000 to 77 in2008. In other word, the Average Hours allocated to In-service Training Course either for Principals or for Staff has been increased during the 9 years of implementation of the training courses by Ministry of Education

Chart no-2 Showing Total Hours of Inservice Training course for Staff in Third and Foruth Development Plan

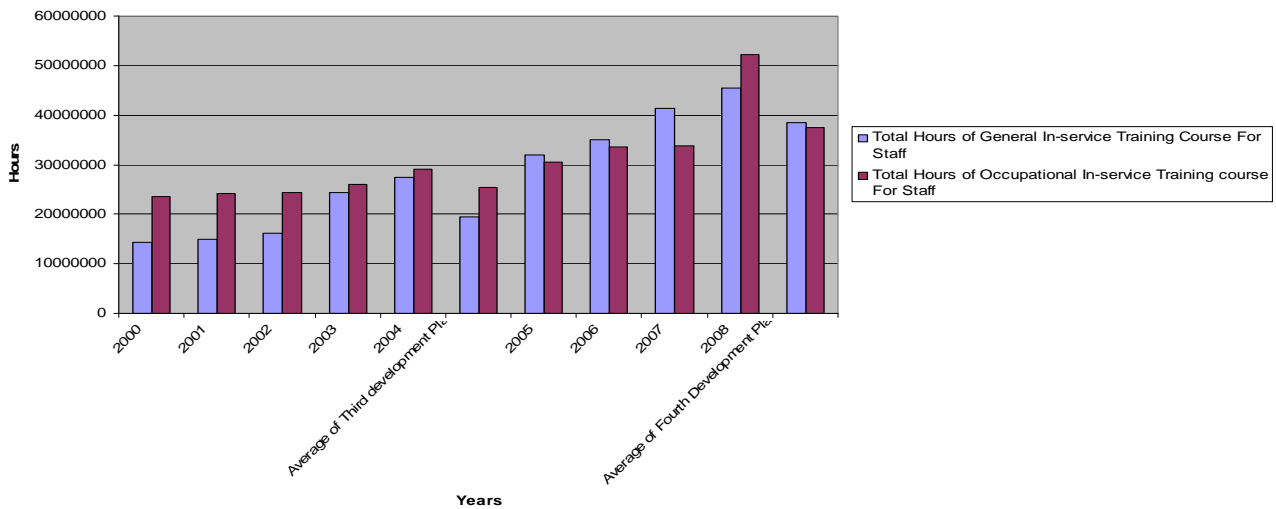
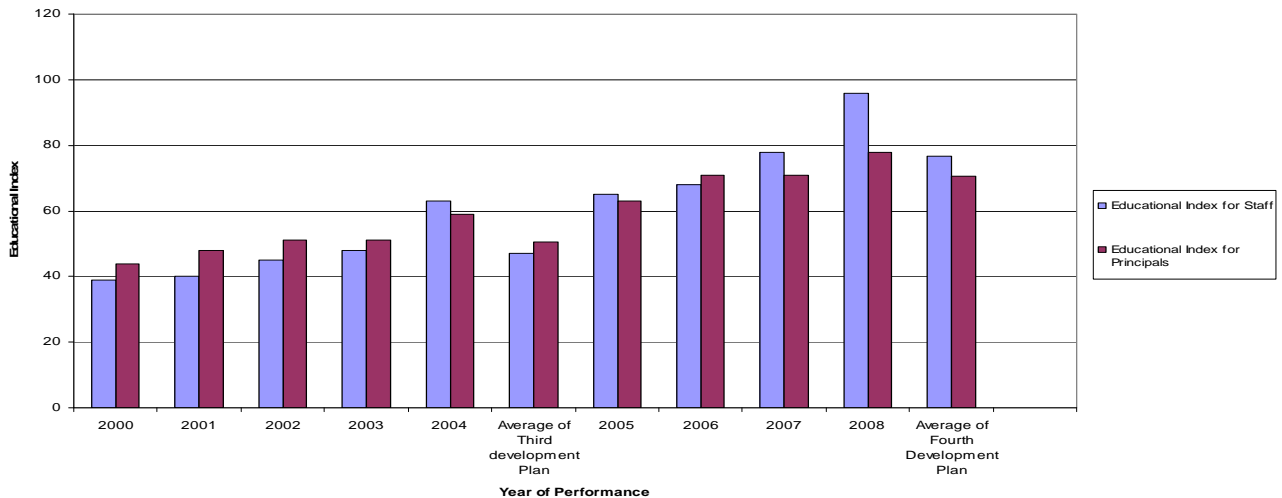


Chart no-2 showing total hours of in-service training course for staff at Ministry of education in Third and Fourth Development Plan. It is clear from the chart that total hour which was allocated to general in-service training courses for staff was less than that of occupational training courses during the Third and Fourth Development Plan.

Chart no-1: Showing Educational Index for Staff and other Employees in Ministry of Education During The Third and Fourth Development Plan



On the other hand the total hours allocated to either general or occupational in-service training courses have been increased steadily during both development plans. Therefore it can be concluded that training courses for all educational staffs have been steadily increased in order to improve to capacity and skills of all human resources, which is the main key factor for development.

7. Conclusion

In the last decade, Iranian system of teacher education tries to produce highly skilled individuals who receive regular training and are able to update their skills and upgrade their qualifications. Recent moves towards student centered learning and qualitative assessment have brought Iranian teaching closer to the ideal situation.

Moreover ensuring the quality of Teacher training courses is the responsibility of the Ministry of Education. Before a trainee teacher can take up a post at a school he or she must complete a period of pre-service training which is overseen by the local education authority. Regular programmes of in-service teacher training developed and set by the Ministry of Education also help ensure that teachers maintain the quality of their subject knowledge and keep up to date with new innovations in technology and teaching practice.

According to the General Teaching Council of England (GTCE), one of the key aspects of good professional practice in teaching is recognizing the individual needs of students in the classroom and catering to these needs within lessons. The recent move towards more student centered teaching methods in Iran reflects this ideal, as does the decreased emphasis on assessment. This has allowed teachers to concentrate on teaching pupils and addressing their individual learning needs outside the framework of examinations.

It is also necessary, for good practice, for teachers to work together, support one another and share their expertise. As it has been seen that this is also important in Iranian schools, with the establishment of local groups of teachers who share their knowledge and expertise in a variety of specialist areas. This network of support has enabled teachers to improve their subject knowledge outside of formal training sessions and improve the service that they provide for students.

This sense of cooperation and support ideally extends beyond teaching staff to include school governors, other professionals and other interested parties. Teachers are expected to work alongside these individuals to raise funding and make decisions that will affect the well being of their schools and their pupils.

Since Parent Teacher Associations in Iran are being encouraged by the government to play a greater role in school, establishing cooperation between home and school could be another key aspect of the teaching, as teachers must be sensitive to every child's individual needs and appreciate the impact of home life and personal issues on their education and well being. They must communicate effectively with parents and work alongside them to promote the best, most rounded education for each child. Iranian parents are responsible for bringing up their children and attending to their physical and moral needs, while teachers are responsible for educating their pupils according to the standards set by the national curriculum. The role of pastoral care and parent-teacher cooperation in the schools may therefore present Iranian teachers with involvement of them in their pupils' lives and working alongside parents to promote each child's moral, spiritual and educational well-being will be a new experience for most if not all, Iranian teachers. Therefore any training course in this area may also be compounded by their status as a teacher, with whom parents are willing to communicate and likely to cooperate.

The guidelines of teacher training course should put more stress on the role that teachers must play within the community. They are expected to support and promote their school and to be aware of the influential role that they fulfill within the community. They must set an example for their pupils, both inside and outside the classroom, and maintain their professionalism at all times.

The final aspect of good professional practice which is training courses, is the need for teachers to maintain and update their subject knowledge and their understanding of modern teaching methods. This is also an important area for Iranian teachers, with the Ministry of Education composing and delivering new courses each year. These courses are directly targeted at problem areas (for example ICT training) and directly correlate with the overall policy of the Ministry, for example introducing modern student-centered teaching methods.

In conclusion, it could be said the Iranian system of teacher education and in-service teacher training prepares teachers well for work in schools. Modern teaching methods have been introduced gradually since the reform programme began in the late 1990s. The curriculum has also been made more concise and less 'quantity-orientated', enabling teachers to concentrate on their students' learning needs. Furthermore the system of in-service training has addressed the weaker areas of knowledge and practice.

8. Suggestions and recommendation

- a. Academic degree of recruited teachers and educators working in elementary schools could be promoted to B.S by training courses
- b. Academic degree of recruited teachers and educators working in Guidance and high schools could be promoted to M.S by continuous training courses
- c. It is necessary to establish an official agency to study teachers' needs; building of more higher education institution; recruitment of more teachers and payment of better salaries.
- d. in selecting and admitting students for teacher training universities should be placed more on the intangible traits .
- e. the teacher training colleges for training of the teachers in Iran should offer wider range of courses in general and professional education.

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