



PRACTICE OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN SECONDARY TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAMME: WHAT TO THE STUDENT-TEACHERS AND TEACHER EDUCATORS PERCEIVE?

Prachi Pattanaik, Sankar Prasad Mohanty & Bhawani Shankar Gadatia

Ph.D. Scholar (Education), P.G. Department of Education, Rama Devi Women's University, Bhubaneswar, Odisha, India. E-mail: prachipattanaik2@gmail.com

ORCID ID: 0009-0009-6307-9100

Associate Professor and Head, P.G. Department of Education, Rama Devi Women's University, Bhubaneswar, Odisha. E-mail: spmohantyedn@gmail.com.

ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4847-7305>

Lecturer in Education Sonapur College, Sonapur, Odisha, India.

Paper Received On: 25 August 2023

Peer Reviewed On: 21 September 2023

Published On : 01 October 2023

Abstract

This research paper documents the perceptions of student-teachers and teacher educators about the practice of community engagement in secondary teacher education institutions. The data were collected through two self-developed questionnaires from 160 student teachers and 35 teacher educators from five teacher education institutions of Odisha affiliated to Utkal University. The findings reveal that community activities are organised as per the course structure such as: awareness Programmes, mass safai, plantations, road repair, blood donation camps in the community. The resources are not recognized and utilized for school improvement. As observed during data collection that community engagement is practised in all the secondary teacher education institutions, but need to be in full-fledged manner.

Keywords: pre-service teacher education, community engagement.

Introduction: Teacher training programmes in India have traditionally focused on theoretical knowledge and pedagogical skills. The importance of practical experience, such as community

engagement, in teacher education has gained recognition in recent years. Community engagement offers student-teachers an opportunity to connect theoretical knowledge with real-world contexts, develop a deeper understanding of the communities they serve, and cultivate a sense of social responsibility and empathy (Hamilton & Margit, 2019).

Incorporation of community work engagement during teacher training aims to bridge the gap between theory and practice, emphasizing the significance of real-world experiences in the educational process (Sahoo & Behera, 2018). It offers student-teachers a platform to apply theoretical knowledge in authentic settings, fostering a deeper understanding of the diverse socio-cultural backgrounds and challenges faced by communities (Mahato & Behera, 2018). Through this engagement, student teachers have the opportunity to develop a heightened sense of social responsibility, cultural awareness, and empathy, which are vital attributes for effective teaching in diverse and inclusive educational settings (Benson & Mannes 2014).

Conceptual Framework

Community engagement in pre-service teacher education is grounded in the theoretical framework of social constructivism (Vygotsky, 1978; Lave and Wenger, 1991), specifically that learning and knowledge creation are socially constructed through experiences with others and the world (Vygotsky, 1978). Field and community-based experiences provide opportunities for pre-service teachers to construct a good understanding of teaching and learning within a social context. When engaging in approximations of practice, pre-service teachers have opportunities to move beyond the familiar and often comfortable role of student to that of teacher (Hamilton and Van Duinen, 2019).

Hence, realizing the importance of field-based learning, and in pursuance of the NCTE Regulations 2014, norms and standards, Government of Odisha in the School and Mass Education Department introduced the common syllabus for two-year B.Ed. Programme in the State. The said syllabus comprised a broad practical aspect in pre-service teacher education programme, called 'Field Engagement Activities (FEA)' having four components such as: (a) Tasks and Assignments (b) Courses on Enhancing Professional Capacities (EPC), (c) School Internship (SI), and (d) Community Activities (CA). The Community Activities carry 50 marks including a variety of activities like mass safai, plantations, public utility services (cleaning water sources and public places, road repair, etc.), blood donation camps, health check-ups,

surveying community resources and their utilization for school improvement, mobilization of out of school children in the community, etc.

Rationale of the study

Many research evident suggested that promoting community within pre-service programmes can foster appreciation of difference, respect for others, insights into interdependency and collaboration, and willingness to try out new roles, thus contributing to the creation of productive learning environments (Beck & Kosnik, 2001). Community engagement provides unique opportunities for student-teachers to link theory with practice and to situate learning in meaningful contexts (Burant & Kirby, 2002; Cooper, 2007; Sleeter, 2001). This approach not only enriches the educational process but also enables student teachers to gain a comprehensive understanding of community dynamics, challenges, and resources, thereby enabling them to design more contextually relevant and impactful teaching strategies. Moreover, research suggests that using community-based field experiences can potentially enhance teacher education programmes because they give pre-service teachers insight into students' lives outside of the school (Cooper, 2007). Sleeter (2001) suggests that pre-service teachers also need training in the context in which they will be teaching. Students' civic awareness and cross-cultural understanding are enhanced when they engage with the community (Hilden brand & Schultz, 2015).

Although community involvement is essential for the development of teacher education programmes, but their objectives have not yet been met. Despite being incorporated into the teacher education curriculum in accordance with NCTE Regulation 2014, community involvement still has to be implemented effectively in actual practice. Since community engagement was introduced to help student teachers interact with the community in a sustainable way, student teachers are the main focus of its implementation. Thus, there is a need to explore the practice of community engagement activities on the basis of the perceptions of student-teachers and teacher educators.

The research questions were posed to reveal the ground realities as:

1. What are the perceptions of student teachers about practices of community engagement?
2. What are the perceptions of teacher educators about practices of community engagement?

Objectives of the Study

1. To study the perception of student teachers about practices of community engagement.
2. To study the perception of teacher educators about practices of community engagement.

Methodology

Survey design was employed to explore the perceptions of student-teachers and teacher educators about the practice of community engagement activities. A sample of 160 student-teachers and 35 teacher educators was selected through random sampling technique. The sample was selected from five numbers of secondary teachers' training institutions of Odisha affiliated to Utkal University. Two self-developed tools were used for data collection, i.e., 'Questionnaire on Perception of Student-Teachers' and 'Questionnaire on Perception of Teacher-Educators'. The first tool consists of 15 questions (11 closed ended and 4 opened ended) and the second tool consists of 12 questions (9 closed ended and 3 opened ended). The validation of both questionnaires was done by taking the opinions of experts. The data were analyzed using the percentage analysis technique.

Results

The data collected through the questionnaires were analysed and presented in the following tables.

Perception of student-teachers on practice of Community Engagement

The perceptions of student-teachers on practice of Community Engagement activities gathered are analyzed as under.

Table-1: Perception of student-teachers on practice of Community Engagement (N=160)

Sl.No.	Activities	Responses (Figures in parentheses indicate percentage)		
		Agree	UD	DA
1	Establishing good rapport with community members	85(53.13)	27(16.87)	48(30.00)
2	Awareness building Programme me in the community	123(76.87)	12(7.5)	25(15.63)
3	Organisation of different community activities	91(56.88)	19(11.87)	50(31.25)
4	Survey of community resources	23(14.38)	13(8.12)	124(77.5)
5	Utilisation of community resources	17(10.62)	29(18.12)	114(71.26)
6	Identification of out of school children in the community	25(15.62)	11(6.88)	124(77.5)
7	Mobilisation of out of school children to school	18(11.25)	14(8.75)	128(80.00)
8	Co-operation from the community members	88(55.0)	17(10.62)	55(34.38)

9	Supervision by teacher educators	103(64.37)	6(3.75)	51(31.88)
10	Follow up activities	31(19.38)	21(13.12)	108(67.5)
11	Satisfied with the community activities	87(54.37)	11(6.88)	62(38.75)

The table-1 depicts, more than half of the student-teachers (53.13%) agreed that there is a good rapport between the institution and community, whereas 30% of them denied it. Most of them (76.87%) agreed that awareness building programmes are conducted in nearby communities. They (56.88%) also viewed different community activities like mass safai, blood donation camps, road repairs, plantation etc., as organized by them. But some of them (35.15%) denied the fact. Hence, it is concluded that, in most of the institutions, awareness building programme and community activities are being carried out. The majority of student teachers (77.5%) replied negatively regarding the survey of community resources and their utilization in their institution. Only (10.62%) accepted that they use community resources for the betterment of their institution. So, it may be judged, student teachers rarely go for identification and utilization of community resources for the improvement of the institution. Most of the student teachers (80%) reported about non mobilization of out of school children to school, which is quite pathetic. Half of them (55.0%) accepted that, they get cooperation from the community members while doing different activities in their locality, while 34.38% rejected it. The majority of student teachers (64.37%) opined that supervision is done when they go for community activities. But 31.88% of them viewed community activities are not at all supervised properly. Hence, it can be said that in some institutions, supervisors don't take it seriously. No follow-up activities are being carried out to evaluate the effectiveness, as stated by the majority of student teachers (67.5%). About half of them (54.37%) are satisfied with the community activities that are going on, while, 38.75% are not satisfied and demand modification and improvement.

Besides the above discussion, the student teachers also expressed different challenges they faced during the practice of community engagement. Most of them (71.30%) complained that a shortage of funds is a major problem that hinders planning for community activities. About half of the student teachers (54.51%) stated that they lack motivation and interest in doing community activities, while (45.15%) revealed an adjustment problem. Some of them (37.58%) viewed that no cooperation was seen among the student teachers, while (35.45%) expressed that a proper strategy was not undertaken to carry out community activities. On the other

hand,(54.85%) student teachers explained regarding unawareness of community members about health and hygiene. More than half of them (52.12%) said that community members have no interest in these activities.

The student teachers gave different suggestions to improve the organization of community activities. More than half of them (58.52%) focused on proper planning to be made for effective community activities, while others (39.31%) suggested doing it in a creative way. Some (52.34%) recommended involving all stakeholders of the school in such activities. (44.43%) student teachers emphasized on teamwork, while co-operation among the student teachers is emphasized by (40.22%) student teachers. The majority of student teachers (82.23%) advocated prioritizing community engagement programme in the institution, as it is a quite neglected aspect.

Regarding the usefulness of community engagement, the student teachers (73.32%) revealed that team spirit is being developed by working in group, while communication skills were focused on by (43.67%) of them. More than half of the student teachers (53.36%) developed unity, cooperation, and collaboration, while intrapersonal and interpersonal skill were refined, as viewed by 33.03% of student teachers. Some of them (42.73%) realized that multiculturalism is promoted by community engagement. A crucial aspect of community engagement, as favoured by many of them (61.52%), is that it provides hands-on field experiences to the student teachers.

Perception of Teacher Educators on practice of Community Engagement

The perceptions of teacher educators on practice of community engagement activities gathered are analyzed as under.

Table-2: Perception of Teacher Educators on practice of Community Engagement (N=35)

Sl.No.	Activities	Responses	
1	Organisation of awareness building programme in the community	Yes	No
		28(80.00%)	7(20.00%)
2	Different activities organised in the community		
	a. mass safai	26(74.28%)	
	b. blood donation camp	21(60.00%)	
	c. plantation	19(54.28%)	
	d. health check-up	09(25.71%)	
3	Linkage with community members	Yes	No
		30(85.71%)	05(14.28%)

4	Identification and utilization of community resources	08(22.86%)	27(77.14%)
5	Mobilization of drop outs to school	04(11.43%)	31(88.57%)
6	Supervision at the time of organising community activities	35(100%)	Nil
7	Areas of supervision		
	a) dedication towards the work	24(68.57%)	
	b) active involvement	31(88.57%)	
	c) leadership quality	18(51.43%)	
	d) co-operation	22(62.86%)	
8	Satisfied with the community activities	Yes	No
		19(54.28%)	16(45.71%)
9	Usefulness of community engagement	31(88.57%)	4(11.43%)
10	Other activities to be added in community work		
	a) Each one teach one	11(31.43%)	
	b) Interaction with nearest community	26(74.28%)	
	c) Focus on “No Dropout”	19(54.28%)	
11	Challenges faced during organisation of community activities		
	a) Lack of proper motivation	17(48.57%)	
	b) No co-operation among students	14(40.00%)	
	c) Lack of awareness	11(31.43%)	
	d) Lack of co-operation of community members	28(80.00%)	
	e) Not systematically organized	11(31.43%)	
	f) Lack of fund	30(85.71%)	
12	Suggestions to make community activity programme more successful		
	a) Involvement of NGOs	9(25.71%)	
	b) More involvement of teacher educators	15(42.86%)	
	c) Grassroot level problems are to be identified	13(37.14%)	
	d) Focus on team work	18(51.43%)	
	e) Regular linkage with community	23(65.71%)	
	f) Increase monetary support for doing community activity	32(91.43%)	
	g) More time should be given	18(51.43%)	

The above table shows that most of the teacher educators (80.00%) admitted that an awareness building programme is being organized in the community by the student teachers. More than half of them (74.28%) stated that mass safai is done by the student teachers in the community. Some (60.00%) viewed that the student teachers organize blood donation camps in their locality. Other activities like plantation health checkups, road repairs, etc. are also being organized. The majority of the teacher educators (85.71%) admitted that they have a good linkage with the community members. But unfortunately, 77.14% of them stated that student teachers don't go for identifying and utilizing community resources. They also don't mobilize

the out of school children to school (88.57%). All the teacher educators (100%) go for supervising community activities. Most of them (88.57%) were concerned about the active involvement of student teachers, whereas cooperation was noticed by 62.86% of supervisors. Half of the teacher educators (54.28%) were satisfied with the community activities being organized in the teacher education institutions, while 45.71% of them showed their dissatisfaction with them. The majority of student teachers (88.57%) agreed that community engagement is very useful for student teachers. They suggested some other activities should be added to community work. Most of them (74.28%) remarked that the student teachers should develop good interactions with the nearest community. Half of them (54.28%) proposed that focus should be given to “No Drop out” and the student teachers should work on it. Some (31.43%) also advocated that each trainee should teach one of the children of a nearby community. Apart from this, the student teachers faced so many challenges at the time of organising community activities. More than half of them (48.57%) opined that lack of proper motivation among student teachers is a major challenge, whereas 40.00% stated no cooperation is seen among them. Most of them (80.00%) blamed the fact that community members don’t cooperate with them in organizing the activities. A major challenge that is identified by most of them (85.71%) is a lack of funds, which creates obstacles to performing different activities in the community. Some student teachers (31.43%) also viewed these activities as not organized systematically in their institution. Different suggestions were given by the teacher educators to make the community activity Programmeme successful. Most of them (91.43%) suggested providing more monetary support for doing community activities, while more than 60.00% of them proposed to keep regular linkages with the community members and invite them to different programmes of the institutions. Half of the teacher educators (51.43%) proposed to devote more time to community work. Other suggestions, like more involvement of teacher educators, identification of grass-roots issues, involvement of NGOs, more involvement of teacher educators, etc., were also given.

Findings and Discussion

The present research explored the perceptions of student teachers and teacher educators towards the practice of community engagement in secondary teacher education institutions. The

findings of the study revealed that about half of the student teachers (53.13%) agreed there is a good rapport between the institutions and community. Hence, it may be inferred that some institutions develop a cordial relationship with community members, whereas others have no relationship with the community. Both the student teachers and teacher educators confirmed that different awareness building programmes are carried out in the community, which is in conformity with the findings of Cook and Buck (2014). Community resources can be identified and best utilized for sustaining the improvement of schools (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Mc Alister 2013) But more than 70% of participants replied negatively regarding the survey of community resources and their utilization in the institution, which contradicts the study of Hamilton and Margot (2019), as they found community resources are being identified and utilized for the improvement of the institution. Maximum (80%) student teachers and teacher educators denied that; they don't mobilize out of school children to the nearby schools, which is quite apathetic. Hence, it is suggested that the student teachers need to be more sensitive towards community issues and get involved more intensely in the community so as to mobilize the out of school children to school.

As found, community engagement is very useful and provides the best experience for student teachers to deal effectively with people of different socio-cultural backgrounds. This finding has similarities to the findings of Mishra, 2015. Most of the student teachers (73.32%) developed cross cultural awareness, unity, cooperation, refined interpersonal and intrapersonal skills, and recognized their personal and professional roles as future classroom teachers. The above findings corroborate the findings of Chambers & Lavery (2012), Sunderman (2015), Hilden brand & Schultz (2015).

Both the student teachers and teacher educators expressed different challenges that are faced during community engagement. More than 80% of them complained about a shortage of funds to organize the different activities in the community. Except for that, they also stated about problems like lack of cooperation from community members, lack of motivation and interest, lack of a cooperative environment, institutional barriers, etc., as found in the study of Khan & Van Wynsberghe (2020).

At last, different suggestions were given from both stakeholder groups for the improvement of the community engagement Programme. More than half of them suggested having proper planning, and more time must be given for it. The majority of them (80%)

recommended having enough budgetary provision to carry out these activities in a well-organized manner. As community engagement provides the best exposure for the student teachers to have social engagement and helps the pre-service teachers contribute towards their professional teaching standards (Burant, 2002). Hence, most of the student teachers (82.23%) advocated prioritizing community engagement programme.

Conclusion

Integration of community engagement in pre-service teacher education is highly beneficial to developing greater competencies for teaching in multicultural communities (Khan & Van Wynsberghe (2020). Though community engagement is carried out in all secondary teacher education institutions as a part of the B.Ed. programme it is not in a well-organized manner. Both stakeholder groups (student teachers and teacher educators) are least interested in its full-fledged implementation. Hence, the majority of work is done only on pen and paper. It is suggested that both the student teachers and teacher educators should be involved in the community engagement programme more intensely so as to gain a better experience out of it.

References

- Beck, C., & Kosnik, C. (2001). *From cohort to community in a pre-service teacher education Programme, Teaching and Teacher Education*, 17, 925–948.
- Benson, P., Scales, P., & Mannes, M. (2004). *Developmentally attentive communities*. In C. B. Fisher & R. M. Lerner (Eds.), *Encyclopaedia of applied developmental science*, (pp. 357-359). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Burant, T. J., & Kirby, D. (2002). *Beyond classroom-based early field experiences: Understanding and “educative practicum” in an urban school and community*. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 18(5), 561-575. doi:10.1016/S0742-051X(02)00016-1
- Chambers, D. & Lavery, S. (2012). *Service-learning: a valuable component of pre-service teacher education*. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 37(4), 128-137. <http://dx.doi.org/10.14221/ajte.2012v37n4.2>
- Cooper, J. E. (2007). *Strengthening the case for community-based learning in teacher education*. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 58(3), 245-255. doi:10.1177/0022487107299979
- Khan, S. A. & Wynsberghe, R. V. (2020). *A synthesis of the research on community service learning in pre-service science teacher education*. *Frontiers in Education*. 5, 1-13. doi:10.3389/educ.2020.00045
- Hamilton, E. R. & Margot, K. C. (2019). *Preservice teachers’ community-based field experiences*. *Front. Edu.* (4)115. Doi:10.3389/educ.2019.00115
- Henderson, A.T. & Mapp, K. L. (2002). *A new wave of evidence: the impact of school, family, and community connection on students’ achievement*. Annual Synthesis, National Centre for Family and Community Connection with Schools.
- Hildenbrand, S. M., & Schultz, S. M. (2015). *Implementing service learning in pre-service teacher coursework*. *Journal of Experiential Education*, 38(3), 262–279. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1053825915571748>
- Lave, J., and Wenger, E. (1991). *Situated learning: legitimate peripheral participation*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press. doi: 10.1017/CBO9780511815355
- Mahato, A., & Behera, D. S. K. (2018). *Attitude of B.Ed. student-teachers towards practicum*. *American Research Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, .4.

- Mc Alister, S. (2013). *Why community engagement matters in school turnaround*. Annenberg Institute of School reform 35-42
- NCTE, (2014). *Norms and Standards for B.Ed. New regulation*, The Gazette of India: Extraordinary (Part 3- sec.- 4) Retrieved from <http://www.ncteindia>.
- Sahoo, J. & Behera, L. (2018). *Perspectives of Student Teachers and Teacher Educators on Pre-Service Secondary Level Teacher Education Programmeme of Odisha*. *Pedagogy of Learning*,4(3), 32-45. <http://pedagogyoflearning.com>
- Sleeter, C. E. (2001). *Preparing teachers for culturally diverse schools: Research and the overwhelming presence of whiteness*. *Journal of TeacherEducation*, 52(2), 94-106. doi:10.1177/0022487101052002002
- Sunderman, B. (2015). *The study of pre-service teachers participating in candidate learning communities: a mixed methods study*. *Educational Administration: Theses, Dissertations, and Student Research*. 217. <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/cehsedaddiss/217>
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: the development of higher psychological processes*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Prachi Pattanaik, Sankar Prasad Mohanty & Bhawani Shankar Gadatia. (2023). PRACTICE OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN SECONDARY TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAMME: WHAT TO THE STUDENT-TEACHERS AND TEACHER EDUCATORS PERCEIVE?. *Scholarly Research Journal for Humanity Science & English Language*, 11(59), 124–134. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.10039889>