

**INFORMATION NEEDS AND
INFORMATION SEEKING BEHAVIOUR
OF TEACHER EDUCATORS IN SRI LANKA**

Perpustakaan SKTM

KANTHALINGAM SATHIYANATHAN

Perpustakaan Universiti Malaya

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ABSTRACT

The study was designed to find out the information needs and information seeking behaviour of Sri Lankan teacher educators. A total of 70 teacher educators were randomly selected in 6 teacher education institutes from the eastern province of Sri Lanka. Questionnaires were administered through the heads of the institutions. A total 58 (82.8%) usable questionnaires were considered for the data analysis. Based on the analysis, most of the teacher educators' information needs were focused around their professional development, handling the teacher trainees problems, and their continuing education. Libraries, informal and interpersonal channels were the preferred channels for seeking information by the teacher educators. Formal mass media was not preferred as an information channel. The main sources of information were journals and books, while newspapers and Internet came next. A small number of teacher educators mentioned seminars and conferences as their information sources. The main obstacles in meeting the information needs were sources being unavailable. The study found other barriers including "inadequate time to access", "knowing the location of information" and "lack of English knowledge". Other findings indicate a large percentage (64%) of teacher educators were not using the computer for any purpose. A lesser percentage of teacher educators were using computers for typing work and entertainment, rather than for seeking and processing information. The results of this study also show that support from the institutional libraries was poor for fulfilling their information needs. The results show teacher educators strongly agree the statement on "improving the information seeking behaviour is very important for professional development".

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Background

Information is considered as an important resource that contributes towards the development of a nation. It provides the core for the development of knowledge, the basis for innovations, the resources for an informed citizenry, and as a result becomes a key commodity for the progress of a society. We are today moving from an industrial age to an information age. Most industrialized nations can document that approximately half or more of their work force is engaged in information-related activities. The processing, storage and management of information and their application is increasing even more dramatically at present with the help of computers (Griffith 1999). It has been long recognized that information has become the liberator of mankind. The person who is informed will no longer be easily enslaved by the decisions of others. Information is wealth, and rapid and wide access to information is power (Large, 1981).

In this age where information is important, the traditional methods of teaching are no longer useable. The concept of 'Jug into the Mugs' where teachers are jugs of information who pour it into the empty mugs (minds) of learners, has already been put in to the dustbin, not only the universities but also in the colleges, schools and teacher education centres. Many years ago, Patricia Knapp (1956) wrote "Educators recognize that accelerated social change requires education, particularly general education, be concerned not with solution for today's problem, but with methods of solving tomorrow's problems". New ideas not only overlap old ideas, but also

completely change them (Wan Zahid, 1996). The technology revolution and its effects on schools, is part of this evolutionary process.

The teachers themselves need to be trained for these changes by the teacher educators. The teacher educators are not a central body to collect and deliver all the information for their teacher trainees. Rather, they are only facilitators and guides to their students, and motivate their information seeking behaviour. Teacher trainees themselves must learn how to collect the necessary and relevant information with regard their information needs. This is an era of the 'Explosion of Knowledge'. The information that we used yesterday may not be relevant today. The amount of information available also doubles approximately every eight years (Mancall, Lodish & Springer, 1992).

The growing use of various technologies is prominent in today's society. Schools offer the use of technology so that students will be prepared for further education, careers, and be able to function in society. Teacher educators need to expose pre-service teachers to the use of a variety of technologies to effectively prepare them for educating today's children. According to Le Baron and Bra^gg (1994), if technology applications are valid for emerging school practice, then they should be included in teacher preparation. Effective integration of technology into teacher education is often limited to basic courses in technology applications and is not usually woven into the overall teacher preparation program (Lampert & Ball, 1990).

Lederman (n.d) stated that the various efforts to reform science teacher education have significant implications for both in-service and pre-service science teacher

education. Unless prospective and practicing teachers can develop the knowledge, skills, and beliefs called for in the reform documents, little will change. Science teacher educators are clearly critical to both in-service and pre-service efforts. Although science teacher educators have been involved in the development of reforms in science education, they have been virtually ignored in discussions about the implementation of reform efforts. That is, the essential qualifications for the science teacher educator have not been addressed.

Importance of Teacher Education Programme

It is recognised that good teachers contribute to the development of good school. Reid, Hophins and Holly (1987) stated that "the quality of teaching staff is perhaps the single most important factors (in determining the quality of schools). Schools with weak staff will never be *as* effective as schools with strong staff".

The need for effective teachers emphasises the importance of teacher education. There is an extensive body of research to indicate that to teach effectively, one has to be trained. Teachers who have participated in teacher training programmes are more effective than those who have not been trained at all (Evertson, Hawley & Zlotnik, 1985; Grossman 1990). Studies have shown that trained teachers are better able to introduce and conclude lessons (Denton & Lacina, 1984), communicate effectively with pupils and relate to pupils' needs and interests, and teach in a style that facilitates higher order learning (Ashton & Crocker, 1987). Cooke & Pang (1991) reported that trained teachers have fewer problems and adjust better during their first year of teaching than partially trained or untrained teachers. Evertson et al (1985), in their review of research on pre-service teacher education

programmes, concluded that teachers acquire from these programmes the ease of teaching, which relates to methods of improving pupils' achievements.

Educational Structure in Sri Lanka

In Sri Lanka there are approximately 190,000 teachers in the school system. Of these, approximately 10,000 do not have a professional qualification in teaching. As the quality of the teacher contributes substantially to improve the teaching learning process in the classroom, the initial training of all teachers and providing opportunities for continuing education to all teachers should receive high priority in teacher education programmes. At present, teacher training is being carried out in Teachers' Colleges, Colleges of Education, National Institute of Education (Distance Education Teacher Centres) and Faculties of Education in universities. Under the General Education Project-2 (GEP-2), the teacher education curriculum was revised to improve the quality and effectiveness of teaching in all schools and to incorporate components on values, human rights national harmony, gender issues, environmental technology which are necessary for holistic human development (Reforms in General Education in Sri Lanka, 1997).

The education sector in Sri Lanka consists of eight administrative provinces on the island. The North-East Province is the biggest province in Sri Lanka (*Appendix A*), for it comprises of two provinces-the North and East Province. The North-East Province (NEP) encompasses 1,970 schools spread over 8 Administrative Districts and 72 Administrative Divisions. These schools cater for primary, secondary and college education needs of the students of the NEP. Apart from these schools, there are 4 Teacher Training Colleges, 3 Colleges of Educations (*Appendix B*), 3

Affiliated University Colleges and 3 Universities in the province. In addition, there are Technical Colleges and Colleges for Music and Dance. The education sector in the NEP at the moment is far from satisfactory. Access to education in the NEP during last two decades has been very disturbed due to the prevailing hostile situation. A lack of security, poverty, and unsettled nature of life, particularly in the military operation areas, has discouraged parents from sending their children to school. Life and security come first, and everything else is secondary for the people. Equity in educational opportunities is lacking due to shortage of resources and facilities (Six Year Strategic Plan for NEP-1998). This study was conducted in the two districts in the above mentioned North-East Province.

Teacher Education in Sri Lanka

Teacher education in Sri Lanka consists of two major programmes. They are initial teacher education programme and the continuing teacher education programme. The programmes are designed to create a better learning climate in the school by raising the quality of teaching, and to make teacher education more cost effective. These programmes are under the "*Teacher Education and Teacher Deployment Project*" (*TETDP*) under the General Education Project-2 in the Ministry of Education Sri Lanka. The objective of the initial (pre-service) teacher education programme is to prepare all teachers prior to their entry into the teaching service. Successful completion would be pre-requisite for all seeking appointment as a teacher. Teacher education is provided in Universities (Post Graduate Diploma in Education and Bachelor in Education), National Institute of Education (Post Graduate Diploma in Education, Bachelor in Education), and Distance Teacher Education Centres and National Colleges of Education (Diploma in Teaching). Initial teacher education of

two years is conducted at National Colleges of Education, followed by a one-year internship prior to the award of the Diploma in Teaching (TETDP, 1996). The objective of the continuing (in-service) teacher education programme is to improve the quality of trained teachers in the teaching service.

Initial Teacher Education Programme in Sri Lanka

The Initial Teacher Education Programmes are the students' first stage of learning to become a teacher. Such professional learning is given prior to admission into the teaching profession. Traditionally in most countries, three types of programmes have been available (TETDP, 1996).

- Primary teaching, in which the emphasis is on the many-sided development of the young child, and where the one teacher is responsible for teaching all subjects in the primary school curriculum.
- Secondary general teaching, where the student teacher concentrates on two or three subject disciplines.
- Specialised subject teaching, in subjects such as Science, Mathematics, Art, Music.

In Sri Lanka, the Universities and National Institutes of Education generally offer programmes for teachers who are already practicing their profession. This is not the traditional model for pre-service education. Yet it is normally the secondary teachers' first exposure to formal professional study areas. The intention of the Teacher Education and Teacher Deployment Project is to modify this approach. The emphasis will be on training prior to becoming a teacher. While graduates who are practicing, as teachers in schools will need to continue to seek full-time study

release to obtain a Post Graduate Diploma in Education or Masters of Education, the emphasis is to reduce their "in-service" programme and to initiate full "pre-service" programmes.

Continuing Teacher Education Programme in Sri Lanka

Continuing Teacher Education applies to teachers currently serving in schools, and to teachers and teacher educators who are granted study opportunities to further their qualifications. The Continuing Teacher Education Programme is conducted through direct contact mode by attendance at courses, or through distance learning mode that includes contact sessions. This programme provides different levels or depths of study, ranging from basic courses for those with limited qualifications to specialized courses leading to higher degrees. Four different types of continuing education have been identified in Sri Lanka. They are upgrading courses, broad-ending courses, re-training courses, and refresher courses.

Distance Teacher Education Programme in Sri Lanka

The distance teacher education programme in Sri Lanka, which was introduced in the year 1984, has been functioning satisfactorily. It can be called an innovative approach in teacher education. It is timely to discuss how the programme can be developed in the light of recent trends in the sphere of industrial technology. Effective education demands an understanding of the culture and society of the people or clientele it seeks to serve. Education communicates values. It also reinforces standard beliefs and practices while at the same time challenging accepted values. Education both acts as an agent bringing about change and reflects changes, which have already taken place. Any innovative programme, if it is to succeed,

should not run counter to existing social as well as cultural values and aspirations of the clientele.

As the factors that influence any education programme, as well as the setting in which the learning is carried on, change with times, continuous revisions of approaches are necessary. Gardner (1983) has designated this process as "self-renewal": "Every individual, organisation or society must mature, but much depends on how this maturing takes place. A society whose maturing consists simply of acquiring more firmly established ways of doing things is headed for the graveyard even if it learns to do those things with greater and greater skill. In the ever-renewing society what matures is a system or framework within which continuous innovation, renewal and rebirth can occur" These process of self-renewal based on innovations are needed to assist planners in grappling effectively and insightfully with educational issues.

The Objectives of the Teacher Education Programme in Sri Lanka

The objectives of the Teacher Education Programme in Sri Lanka are geared towards:

- Meeting the need for competent and committed teachers for the school system.
- Assisting the professional and personal development of teachers.
- Facilitating the professional development of teachers to enhance the quality of life, value system of individuals and nation building, community development and in functional as change agents in education and in society (Reforms in General Education in Sri Lanka, 1997).

Teacher Education and Vision of a Better World

Education is an enterprise. Explicitly or implicitly, it serves both individual and societal goals. Even when intentions are not stated explicitly and formally, all educational endeavors convey purpose and underlying ideas about education. Policy decisions, for instance teaching multi-age classes in schools, reflect a position that learning is not necessarily age dependent and that students might benefit from sharing a common learning environment. The school curriculum, whether explicit or hidden, is but one expression of intentions. The teachers' educational practices are an embodiment of their own educational beliefs and images, and constitute another expression of educational intentions having the power to influence schooling. Cochran-Smith (2000) suggests that education is a political enterprise, with teachers and teacher educators having the power to shape the future of education. She argues that "teaching and teacher education are unavoidably political enterprises and are, in that sense, value-laden and are influenced by the histories, economics, and cultures of the societies, in which they exist, particularly by competing views of the purpose of schools and schooling. Like it or not, most of us in teacher education and in the policy communities will need to engage in these public and political debates if we are to have a real voice in framing the questions that matter for the future of teaching education".

Yet visions tend to be elusive, and practitioners can easily lose their sense of mission or give up trying to realize their dreams in the face of nearly impossible tasks. Rudduck (1998) claims that teachers are "exhausted by the demands of multiple initiatives whose coherence and whose relationship to their own values they haven't the times and sometimes of energy to work out". Rudduck's study discusses some external initiatives that shape teaching and teacher education and their inherent

contradictions. It also suggested that these external forces must be understood in light of teachers' needs for certainty and control, their dependence on the teaching context, and their own images of teaching.

The Needs of Teacher Educators

Teacher educators who are currently involved in teacher-training programmes in colleges of education and teachers' colleges in the country are unlike other adolescent or young adults. They carry out multiple developmental tasks and the ongoing process of adaptations and adjustments to their environment. They have to grapple with complex social problems. The needs of the teacher educators are hence many and varied. These needs are similar to those described by Shertzler and Stone (1980) who discussed the needs of the American teachers. Some needs and grievances stem principally from the maturation process and necessitate continuous personal, social and environmental adjustment. Other needs are attributable to complex social, psychological and economic forces and pressures. The teacher educators who have such a complexity of needs would naturally need help and guidance. They have to be offered help and guidance in order to understand themselves, their environmental conditions, and to fully develop their potentialities.

Statement of Problem

Since the beginning of teacher education in Sri Lanka, there is a trend showing an increase in the number of teacher education programmes, especially over the last two decades. In most teacher education programmes in Sri Lanka, there is a noticeable lack of library and information resources support. The problems of the lack of information resources support are major barriers to the development of information seeking skills among the teacher educators and teacher trainees. In the

writings on teacher education, the role of the college libraries and information services is seldom discussed in detail. This is surprising because teacher education is essentially a self-learning patterned adult education, for which library support is indispensable. Even in formal education, the library is important but in teacher education it is more so. In publications on various other aspects of teacher education, the role of the college library has not been emphasised in Sri Lanka. There are not many discussions on library and information services to cater for teacher educators and teacher trainees. A detailed knowledge of the present status of college library and information services in Sri Lanka's teacher education programme did not exist prior to the present study. Since the teacher education programme in Sri Lanka has been increasing in recent years, the government and the ministries who are providing the teaching education programme to the teacher educators must have forward-looking and complete guidelines if they are to fulfill the present and future education needs in Sri Lanka. This study represents a first step to address this need.

Objectives of **the Study**

This study strives to assess the information needs and information seeking behaviour of teacher educators in Sri Lanka. The purposes of this study are:

- a. To determine the information needs of teacher educators in Sri Lanka.
- b. To examine their information seeking behaviour.
- c. To identify the media used to access their information.
- d. To identify the barriers in meeting their information needs.
- e. To identify the relationship between their information needs and demographic factors, such as age, sex, race, income, and educational qualifications.

Research Questions

This study endeavours to answer the following questions:

- a. What are the main information needs of teacher educators in Sri Lanka?
- b. What forms of electronic media /channels do the teacher educators use for their information needs?
- c. What are the main sources used by the teacher educators to meet their information needs?
- d. What are the major barriers in meeting their information needs?
- e. What are the relationships between their information needs and selected demographic factors?

Scope and Limitations of Study

This study was conducted with the awareness that certain limitations were inherent in the design and the instrument used.

1. This study only focused on the information needs and information seeking behaviour of teacher educators in two administrative districts (Batticaloa and Amparai) in the Eastern province of Sri Lanka, specifically on those attached in Teachers College, Distance Teacher Education Centres, and Colleges of Education. The reason for identifying these two administrative districts was that out of three administrative districts in the province, these were the only districts that had the Teacher Training College and College of Education. While Batticaloa district teacher education centers lack of modern facilities, Amparai district teacher education centers consists of modern facilities. Both colleges have a multi ethnic teacher educators' population from

country. As such these colleges reflect the levels of development and representation of all the teacher education centers in Sri Lanka

2. The findings of this study will be specifically applicable to the two administrative districts in the Eastern Province in Sri Lanka, because the study was conducted based on the two administrative districts. However the general pattern will be applicable elsewhere, because the teacher trainees and teacher educators come from all over Sri Lanka.
3. The findings depend much on the respondents' responses to the questionnaire. It was not practical to interview and observe the teacher-educators for verification of the information.

Definition of Terms

The following definitions are used in this study.

Teacher education: The concept of teacher education is a professional training programme for the teachers, who are newly recruited without any prior professional training, and represent the students' first contact with learning to become a professional teacher. Such as professional learning should be given prior admission onto the teacher profession (TETDP, 1996).

Colleges of education: These include all the colleges of education those involved in pre-service initial teacher education in Sri Lanka. A policy has been taken by the reforms in general education project in Sri Lanka, to train all new recruit teacher trainees before they enter the classroom. At present these activities are carried out by the Colleges of Education in Sri Lanka.

Teachers' colleges: Traditional teacher training programmes are conducted by teacher training colleges in Sri Lanka that are presently referred to as teachers' college. The institutional teacher training programmes are carried out for teacher trainees who are already in the teaching service

Teacher educators: The concept of teacher educators encompasses both academic staff in the teacher training colleges, colleges of educations and distance teacher education centres in Sri Lanka who are specialist in professional areas, and those involving the teaching, guiding, motivating and evaluating for the teacher trainees' and helping them towards professional and personal development.

Distance Education: This is an education system where the teaching behaviours are separated from the learning behaviours. The learners work alone or in groups guided by study material arranged by the instructor, who together with the tutor facilitates teaching with the aid of one or more media such as correspondence, telephone, television, or radio. Distance education may be combined with various forms of face-to-face meetings (Flinck, 1981).

Information: The term "information", as used in this study refers to any piece of text or data, document, report, monograph, collection, knowledge, association, perception, launch, or simple idea, which is held in any medium.

Information seeking behaviour: Information seeking behaviour is a broad term, which involves a set of actions that an individual takes to express information needs, seek information, evaluate and select information, and finally use this information to

satisfy his/her information needs. Various factors may determine the information seeking behaviour of an individual or a group of individuals.

Information needs: The association of the word information with needs in this study implies a basic need similar to other basic human needs divided in to three categories: physiological, affective and cognitive needs. As part of the search for satisfaction of these needs, an individual may seek information_ A need is what an individual ought to have for his work, education, recreation, etc. This need can be equated to necessity. Needs in this context are both instrumental and purposeful.

Information Services; Duckett (2000) states that the term 'information services' refers to services provided by or for a special library, which draws the attention to information, possessed in anticipation of demand. This is carried out by preparing and circulating news sheets, literature surveys, reading lists, abstracts, particular articles in current periodicals which are anticipated, and will be of interest to potential users of the services. An operational meaning of the term information services in this study implies any service based on information such as lending of library materials, providing reference facilities, processing and maintaining information supplying programmes, research assistance services etc., which are provided on demand or anticipated demand.

Significance of the Study

In order to have as comprehensive and understanding possible of the factors influencing the information needs and information seeking behaviour of teacher educators, there is a need to study these factors. As far as could be determined, no

studies have been done on a large scale in Sri Lanka on the teacher educators' information needs and information seeking behaviour.

This study is imperative to investigate the present status of the information seeking behaviour. It is hoped that the findings of this study will provide some insights to the college librarians and information professionals from the Ministry of Education about information environment of teacher education institutions.

It is also hoped that this study will provide some insights to the policy makers in the teacher education field into the possibilities of establishing a more systematic, organised and comprehensive college library system for all teacher educators and teacher trainees in all over the country.

This report on the existing state of teacher education and library information services should help raise awareness and possibly generate greater support from the Ministry of Education in Sri Lanka for the teacher education programmes in all over the country.

In addition the study will produce baseline data for information pertaining to teacher education in Sri Lanka, which will be very helpful for future studies in this area.

Organisation of the Study

This report is organised into five chapters, which are presented in the following manner. Chapter One provides an introduction and background information about the Sri Lankan education structure and teacher education system. It follows with the statement of the problem, objectives of the study, scope/limitations of study, the

research questions, definition of terms and significance of the study. Chapter Two reviews and analyses relevant literature on information needs, information seeking behaviour of educators, as well as previous research on information needs. Chapter Three presents the research methodology that was used in the collection and the analysis of data. Chapter Four presents the results and the statistical analysis of the findings. Chapter Five concludes the research and provides interpretations of the findings, recommendations and suggestions for future studies into this area. A bibliography is provided, and the questionnaire is included as appendices.

Summary

This chapter serves as an introduction to the study. It provides an overview of the education structure of Sri Lanka, initial teacher education programmes in Sri Lanka, distance teacher education programme. The importance of the teacher education and teachers' information needs are also discussed. The chapter also presents the research problems, importance of the study, objective of the study, research questions, the limitations of the study and organisation of the study. The following chapter presents a review of pertinent research drawn from the literature of scientific communities, teacher trainees, university graduate students, nurses, distance education students and other various community members.