

# Teacher Preparation: Issues and Trends in International and Arab Frameworks

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#### **Abstract**

The aim of this paper is to provide teacher educators and policymakers with a research-based framework for examining teacher education in the Arab countries in the light of international developments, trends and innovations. Key themes and issues of teacher education are addressed, such as: applications for and admissions to teacher education; the role of governmental and professional institutions in the organization and control of various aspects of the teacher education process, such as types of institutions entrusted with teacher education, terms of admission and graduation and types of certification; curricula of teacher education programs, both in terms of organization and content; practical training during formation; quality assurance of educational programs; and the academic accreditation system. These issues are addressed within two frameworks. The first is the global framework that includes the most prominent international developments, trends and innovations. This international framework was examined through a review of relevant literature, as well as through reports issued by governmental and professional bodies. The second is the Arab framework that involved a review and assessment of the experiences of Arab countries in light of international developments and trends. This Arab framework was examined mainly through regional and national reports, in addition to available literature.

## I. Introduction

Almost all educators agree that preparing skilful and qualified teachers is the key to the success of the educational process and to the success of efforts aimed at reforming, developing and promoting the education sector. In this regard, well designed buildings, modern equipment, advanced curricula and efficient administrative systems, though important, cannot contribute to success of the educational process unless the teacher is well qualified and possesses the required knowledge, skills, experiences, and professional and human values. As everyone seems to agree that a good teacher is the building block of good schooling, the most important questions to be asked then are the following: What are the factors that contribute to the preparation a good teacher? How can we educate qualified teachers so that they have the required competencies? In order to answer these questions, it would be useful to set forth a model showing the different





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stages of the teacher education process and the roles of all parties involved in every stage. This would make it easier later on to identify the influential factors relevant to each stage and each party.

# 1. Stages of Teacher Education

Contemporary teacher education literature agrees that the teacher education process involves three stages:

- a. Initial preparation within teacher education institutions (pre-service).
- b. Induction into the teaching profession during the first critical years in teaching.
- Maintenance of the teaching profession and opportunities for professional development (in-service).

### 2. Partners Involved

Main partners involved in the teacher education process are:

- a. Teacher preparation institutions including university and non-university levels.
- b. Cooperating schools regarding the practical field experience occurring during the preservice preparation stage.
- Schools where a teacher begins his/her professional life and the local communities within which schools operate.
- d. Governmental and professional institutions which initiate and determine laws, general policies, procedures, and standards.

Teacher education, preparation, and training require a high degree of cooperation, coordination and partnership between governmental and professional institutions on the one hand and preparation institutions and schools on the other. This partnership is important because each of these parties plays a key role in the different stages ranging from preparing teachers to entering professional life and practising the profession.

# 3. Research Methodology and Limitations

Although all three stages of teacher education are important and are linked to factors influencing the quality of teaching and teachers' qualifications, this research will focus only on the preservice preparation stage and the related role of the three above mentioned parties. Other research in the future will hopefully study the two remaining stages. This study will accordingly address a range of issues and developments within two frameworks:

- a. The international framework which is comprised mainly of developments, trends and innovations relative to international experiences. In this regard, relevant literature was reviewed along with reports issued by governmental and professional institutions.
- b. The Arab framework in which Arab experiences were assessed and reviewed in light of international developments and trends. This part of the study was mainly based on reports issued by regional and national institutions in addition to available literature.

Therefore, this study focuses mainly on the following issues:

- a. Applicants and entrants to the teacher preparation programs.
- b. Control and governance in teacher preparation programs: centralization or decentralization of the education system.
- c. Institutional framework for teacher preparation.
- d. Teacher education curricula: organization and content
- e. Practical field experience during the preparation period.









f. Quality assurance and enhancement in the preparation programs and the academic accreditation system.

# II. Applicants and Entrants to the Teacher Preparation Programs

# 1. International Qualifications and Abilities

Knowledge about the volume and quality of applicants and entrants to teacher preparation programs may give a preliminary view about the quality of the pool from which future teachers will be drawn.

While it is true that there is no direct link between the quality of applicants and entrants to the programs and the quality of teaching, it is, nevertheless, reasonable to say that the quality of the pool of applicants can reflect the ability of preparation programs to attract large numbers of qualified students (Sutherland, 1997).

In the United States, for example, students who apply for teacher preparation programs tend to have lower average scores on entrance examinations than other university students in general. However, by graduation, students who have completed teacher preparation programs have higher average scores than the general pool of students entering university. The underlying reason is that more applicants with lower ability exit preparation programs due to admission or graduation problems than do higher ability students. Furthermore, even though teacher education students have slightly lower average scores than university graduates in general, students preparing for secondary teaching have test scores comparable to other university graduates (Cochran - Smith & Zeickner, 2005).

In England, some reports show that students admitted to teacher preparation programs have lower average scores than expected. Furthermore, the overall volume of applicants to some main programs (such as teaching mathematics, sciences, technology and modern foreign languages at the secondary cycle) is lower than is required for these specialization fields (Sutherland, 1997). In Hong Kong, applicants accepted to teacher preparation programs get lower grades on university entrance examinations than do their counterparts accepted in other programs (Ingersoll, 2007). Another study conducted in Europe which included 27 European countries showed that 57% of those countries face difficulties in attracting qualified applicants to teacher preparation programs. Countries in North and Central Europe were the most affected, followed by countries in East and West Europe (Jacobsen, et al., 2006).

In contrast, the situation is different in East Asian countries such as Japan, Korea and Singapore, as well as in Ireland, where teacher preparation programs attract highly qualified students with relatively high achievement scores. (Ingersoll, 2007; Jacobsen, et al., 2006).

Overall, the capacity of teacher preparation programs to attract highly qualified students differs from one country to another due to factors related to the social status of the teaching profession and the working conditions of teachers. For instance, in Eastern Asia and Ireland, teachers have high social status compared to other professions and work within supportive and positive professional conditions concerning wages, job stability and professional development opportunities (Ingersoll, 2007; Jacobsen, et al., 2006).

#### 2. Arab Qualifications and Abilities

In Arab countries, the situation is closer to that of the European countries than to those in Eastern Asia. Salama and Wahba (2008) noted that young people in seven Arab African countries have, since the 1970s, been avoiding the teaching profession. Further, loose and light







admission standards were being adopted in teacher preparation institutions under pressure to provide schools with the required number of teachers. The same study noted an increase in unemployment rates in the more competitive vocational sectors. Thus, students who were unable to compete in programs related to these competitive domains started to head to teacher preparation programs where admission was comparatively easy and a minimum temporary income was guaranteed at graduation and hoped to pursue their preferred profession in the future when the opportunity arose.

Jarrar (2002) noted that governments in Arab countries have lowered the admission standards to teacher preparation programs because of the great lack of qualified applicants. For example, in Egypt, applicants are admitted to university programs according to their scores in the high school graduation certificate. Thus, students with the lowest scores are oriented toward education and Islamic studies faculties, whilst those with the highest scores are oriented toward the medicine, engineering, law and business faculties. According to a recent Arab Human Development Report, the underlying reasons of this phenomenon seem to be linked to the low social status of the teaching profession and to low wages and poor working conditions for teachers (UNDP / RBAS, 2003). However, Jarrar (2002) highlighted the attempts of some Arab countries such as Egypt, Syria and Morocco to enhance the level of applicants in preparation programs by offering scholarships and by guarantying employment in governmental schools after graduation. These policies may help to attract high quality students to the teaching profession.

## 3. How to Attract Good Students to Teacher Preparation Programs?

As long as the teaching profession does not get the social, economic, and national status it deserves, high quality students will not be attracted to teacher preparation programs. Further, the rising rate of unemployment accompanied with a lowering of admission standards to the preparation program attract young men and women with moderate abilities looking for easily accessed job opportunities to these programs while keeping away those students with higher abilities seeking lucrative and competitive job opportunities.

Furthermore, lowering admission standards to meet the growing demand for new teachers will ultimately exacerbate the problem. Considering that the objective is to provide good education to school students, this policy will lead to lowering their educational level and thus undermining developmental policies, as the human resource is the cornerstone of the success of such policies. In this regard, it is important to improve the social status of the teaching profession, enhance working conditions, provide professional development opportunities and increase wages. Only then would it be possible to raise admission standards and the requirements needed to enter the teaching profession to teacher preparation programs. These suggestions are, however, insufficient if they are not accompanied by policies and developmental plans leading to an increase in job opportunities and a decrease in unemployment rates.

# III. Governance of Teacher Preparation Programs

The governance of teacher preparation programs addresses the relationship between state authorities, teacher preparation institutions, and sometimes a third party, namely governmental or independent national bodies. Governance in this paper will focus on the centralization/decentralization issue of the education system.







## 1. International Centralization/Decentralization in Teacher Preparation

Governmental institutions around the world deal in different ways with the regulation and monitoring of aspects related to their teacher preparation process.

For instance, the United States adopt a decentralized system, where local authorities and institutions in each state deal with issues related to teacher preparation and certification. However, this trend created large discrepancies between states, so during the last few years, local authorities have called upon teacher preparation colleges and institutes to obtain an accreditation from a national<sup>2</sup> or local body in order for the relevant authorities to grant certification and licensing to graduates of such programs (Wang, et. al, 2003). In this regard, it is important to clarify some concepts (Roth & Swail, 2000):

- *Certification*: is a process of determining that an individual meets the minimum standards of competence required in a specific profession.
- *Licensing*: is a legal process to permit an individual to practice a specific trade or profession after obtaining the required certification.
- Accreditation: is a process of determining that a program in a specific field meets the
  professional standards and qualifications in order for the program to be approved by
  relevant professional bodies.

Consequently, licensing in the USA depends on certification which has become increasingly dependent on obtaining the appropriate professional accreditation. Moreover, the intervention of the federal government in educational issues has been steadily increasing in the past decades. This federal role culminated in the 2002 "No Child Left Behind" Act, which was considered to be the most comprehensive and influential federal education reform in the history of the United States (Goss, 2005; Ingersoll, 2007). The act stipulated that all teachers in public schools must be «highly qualified» by the end of the academic year of 2005 / 2006. All states, accordingly must present evidence showing their commitment to the Act. According to this Act, «highly qualified» means that teachers must hold a university bachelor degree, have obtained a state-issued certificate, and show evidence of competency in the subject matter they intend to teach (Goss, 2005; Ingersoll, 2007).

Similarly, Australia has a decentralized system for regulating educational issues. It is up to each state and each district to define the required standards in order to grant certification or licensing. The two latter processes are carried out by statutory teacher registration bodies in each state, which grant certification to teachers based on university test results (Wang, et. al, 2003). Furthermore, in the last few years, three states enacted new legislation stipulating that teacher preparation programs obtain approval or accreditation from a local governmental institution (Ingvarson, et. al, 2006).

However, many other countries implement a central system for regulating educational issues, including teacher preparation programs. For instance, the ministries of education (or their equivalent) in Japan, Hong Kong, Korea, Singapore and China organize all aspects of teacher preparation and certification. As a result, under such a centralized system, teacher preparation conditions and requirements in one region are brought into line with those of other regions in that same country. Further, in England, national and governmental institution share, through a centralized system, the responsibilities of granting accreditation to programs, and requirements for admission, graduation, and certification (Ingersoll, 2007; Wang, et al., 2003).





<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education NCATE is the largest and most important organization in the United States.



As for other European countries, the general trend until the 1990s was to give more autonomy to teacher preparation institutions regarding teacher education. Many earlier legal procedures were then replaced by broad general guidelines allowing preparation institutions to rapidly meet the labour market requirements. However, when the Bologna Process was adopted and signed in 1999 (45 countries from both inside and outside the European Union are now signatories to this process), state authorities intervened more and more in teacher preparation issues by enacting additional legislation and procedures aimed at enhancing the quality of preparation programs and at adopting a unified program structure in Europe (Ingvarson, et al., 2006).

## 2. Arab Centralization/Decentralization in Teacher Preparation

The centralized system prevails in Arab countries in higher education institutions including teacher preparation ones. The Arab Human Development Report, issued by the United Nation Development Program (UNDP), showed that Arab universities as a whole suffer from their dependency on the political regime of the state. This state of affairs adversely affects their autonomy and hampers their capacities to plan, research, and teach (UNDP / RBAS, 2003). Similarly, another UNDP report assessing the quality of education programs in Arab universities indicated the presence of governmental pressures that sometimes involve determining the design, content and assessment methods in teacher preparation programs. The report also noted the presence of centralized governmental or university demands regarding admission, curricula and assessment methods. Such demands could hamper the ability of education faculties to attract high quality students and provide them with appropriate opportunities to develop the required skills (UNDP/RBAS, 2006).

### 3. Where Are Arabs Compared to International Trends?

During the last decades, the international educational scene has witnessed an increase in the strategic intervention of federal or local governmental institutions in planning and administration, while at the same time preserving the autonomy of university preparation institutions regarding the design and organization of curricula and the management of human and financial resources. Furthermore, independent or governmental national institutions played an increasing role in quality assurance and accreditation of preparation programs. Indeed, governmental, professional and higher education institutions all play important and complementary roles in the preparation, training and professional development of teachers.

The Arab universities' lack of autonomy and the numerous governmental pressures and demands go against international trends. In fact, governmental, professional and higher education institutions should play their required role without interfering in each others' affairs.

While the decentralized system is the most common in the United States and Australia, the centralized system is the most widely used system in the world. This does not mean that one is better than the other. In this regard, it seems best to closely examine factors and practices that make the role of governmental authorities or national and local professional bodies a positive factor in serving the preparation program goal of preparing teachers with high competencies and good qualifications. Official Arab institutions are required to adopt ambitious educational policies at national and regional levels to institutionalize and coordinate efforts, determine standards, set strategic goals and design practical plans to achieve these goals within a specific timeline. At the same time, it is important to maintain the academic and administrative autonomy of universities and provide them with the required human and financial resources to enable them to best accomplish their mission.







# IV. Institutional Framework for Teacher Preparation

## 1. International Institutional Framework for Teacher Preparation

In most countries in the world, teacher preparation takes place at the college level where institutions that prepare teachers are mostly faculties or departments of education within universities (Al-Amine, 2009). However, in some cases, there are differences between teacher preparation for the elementary and secondary levels.

For instance, the United States, Japan, Korea, Australia, Canada, and Britain require a minimum of a bachelor degree to teach in the different cycles, whereas other countries such as Singapore and Hong Kong allow students with two years of post-secondary education to teach in the elementary cycle. In China, a high school degree is the minimum required to teach at the elementary level, two extra academic years for the intermediate level, and a bachelor degree for the secondary level. In Thailand, elementary and secondary teachers must complete a five-year university program (Al-Amine, 2009; Ingersoll, 2007). However, China, Singapore and Hong Kong have been working to raise the elementary teacher preparation level to that required for the secondary level (Ingersoll, 2007; Lai, 2007).

In Europe, almost all countries prepare their teachers in university programs extending from four to five academic years, except for Belgium and Denmark, where some preparation programs are still classified as pre-university programs (Eurydice, 2002).

## 2. Arab Institutional Framework for Teacher Preparation

In the Arab world, earlier reports show that different institutions provide teacher preparation programs for elementary and secondary levels. Indeed, teacher preparation in Arab countries occurs in two types of institutions. The first type includes pre-university institutes where the study period ranges from one to three years and the second type includes university programs where the study period is four years. Generally speaking, pre-university institutes prepare elementary teachers only, while university programs prepare both elementary and secondary teachers. For instance, in Tunisia, Algeria, and Mauritania it is still possible to find pre-university institutes for elementary teacher preparation. However, in Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Bahrain, Iraq, Kuwait, Arab Emirates and Lebanon, recent legislation has mandated that teacher preparation for all levels must take place at the university level (Jarrar, 2002; Salama & Wahba, 2008; Electronic Learning, 2007). A more recent report (Al-Amine, 2009) noted that most Arab countries, including Algeria and Mauritania, are moving toward university teacher preparation, except for Bahrain and Tunisia which are transferring preparation from universities to institutions affiliated with their ministries of education.

At the secondary level in Arab countries, the most common pattern of teacher preparation is either a four-year university program for high school graduates or a one to two-year program for holders of a bachelor degree in natural sciences and humanities (Jarrar, 2002).

#### 3. Where Are Arabs Compared to International Trends?

When comparing international and Arab institutional frameworks for teacher preparation it can be seen that Arab countries are in-line with international trends. It seems that both are moving toward university teacher preparation. Arab countries that are lagging behind are called to pass the required legislation to enhance teacher preparation in accordance with international trends.







#### V. Teacher Education Curriculum

#### 1. International Teacher Education Curriculum

## a. Organization and Structure of Teacher Preparation Programs

The structure and organization of teacher education programs differ from one country to another; as such, programs can either be concurrent or consecutive. In concurrent programs, subject matter courses/are studied concurrently with professional courses such as foundations of education, teaching methods, educational psychology and practical field experience. This system is the most common in undergraduate teacher preparation programs. As for consecutive programs, subject matter preparation is first required in the relevant university departments, followed by professional preparation in education faculties (Eurydice, 2002).

Concurrent programs are the most common amongst teacher preparation programs worldwide. In Europe, for instance, most countries follow the concurrent model for elementary teacher preparation programs, except for France and Germany, where the consecutive model is implemented, while some other countries implement both models. Similarly, most European programs for secondary teacher preparation are concurrent, except in Greece, Hungary, Italy and Ireland (Ingvarson, et al., 2006). In Hong Kong, England, and the United States, both concurrent and consecutive systems for elementary and secondary teacher preparation programs are available (Ingersoll, 2007; Scannell, 1999).

Some educators believe that the main benefit of the concurrent model is that it provides students with a greater opportunity to receive integrated learning (i.e. subject matter and teaching courses are delivered concurrently). However, the concurrent model requires students to take early decisions about entering the teacher preparation program and the teaching profession. The consecutive model provides students an opportunity to receive a good academic preparation relevant to their specialization field with highly qualified teachers. However, such a model provides few opportunities for integrated learning. Given that each model has benefits not present in the other, it is best to provide both models so the student can choose the one that suits them best (OECD, 2005).

### **b. Teacher Education Curriculum Content**

The majority of teacher education curricula include three main components: general education, a specialization area and professional education. In general, undergraduate preparation programs for elementary teachers usually comprise of more courses in general education and professional education, whereas undergraduate preparation programs for secondary teachers usually comprise of more courses in the specialization area. Furthermore, graduate preparation programs for both elementary and secondary teachers mainly focus on professional education, as the accepted student has already acquired the specialized academic preparation in other relevant faculties. For instance, in the United States, most undergraduate preparation programs require from 120 to 135 credits over a four-year period. In this regard, general education and specialization area courses are typically delivered during the first two years, whereas professional education courses are delivered during the last two years. Further, some higher education institutions also provide undergraduate five-year integrated teacher preparation programs, although such programs are less common than the four-year ones. In the five-year programs, the fifth year is usually dedicated to courses in teaching fields, pedagogy and practical field experience (Scanell, 2002).

Wang et al (2003) reported a similar situation in Korea, Japan, Singapore, Honk Kong and Holland, where courses are distributed across general education, a specialization field, and professional education.







The National Academy of Education (NAE) in the United States has recently sponsored a national panel of experts in teacher education to examine the teacher education curriculum. Panel leaders of the committee made recommendations about what should be included in the core curriculum for teacher preparation programs (cf. Crocker and Dibbon, 2008). These recommendations point out that good teacher preparation requires curricula that enable prospective teachers to know and understand the following:

- 1) The nature of developmentally appropriate educational practices.
- 2) Learning theories and learning methods for students.
- 3) Students' language development.
- 4) Subject matter expertise and pedagogical content knowledge.
- 5) The nature of students' diversity.
- 6) Appropriate assessment practices.
- 7) The social context of education.
- 8) Classroom management

In the same context, Darling-Hammond (2006), who was one of the two NAE panel leaders mentioned above, studied seven exemplary teacher preparation programs in the United States and concluded that such programs share the following features:

- 1) All course-work and practical field experiences reflect a common, clear vision of good teaching.
- Well-defined standards of performance and practice are used to guide and evaluate course-work and practical field experience.
- 3) Curriculum is grounded in good knowledge of child and adolescent development, learning, social contexts and subject matter pedagogy, taught in the context of practice.
- 4) Extended and well developed practical field experiences that are well integrated with course-work.
- 5) Clear strategies to help students in preparation programs to confront their beliefs and assumptions about learning and students, and to learn about the experiences of people from different cultural backgrounds.
- 6) Strong relationships based on common knowledge and beliefs between faculty of education professors and school teachers involved in practical field experience.
- 7) Teaching methods and educational practices that encourage the application of academic learning to real problems in practice, namely: case studies, action research, performance assessments and portfolio evaluation.

### 2. Arab Teacher Education Curriculum

The Salama and Wahba study (2008), which included an assessment of teacher education institutions in seven Arab African countries, pointed out differences in the organization and structure of their preparation programs. Whereas Morocco adopted the consecutive model, Tunisia, Libya and Mauritania adopted the concurrent (integrated) model. Furthermore, Sudan and Egypt apply both, using the concurrent model for undergraduate programs and the consecutive model for post-graduate programs.

Further, the design and content of the teacher education curriculum in Arab countries differ according to the nature of the preparation institution and the level of entrants to that institution, with university-based programs being more demanding than pre-university ones (Salama & Wahba, 2008). The same study pointed out that academic preparation in pre-university teacher preparation programs in Tunisia, Algeria and Mauritania add little to the initial knowledge of







students because such programs seem to repeat the courses taken previously in elementary or secondary levels. In addition, the same study criticized the curriculum quality in the faculty of education in one of the seven universities for providing academic and educational courses at very low levels and with very simplistic approaches. Moreover, the UNDP report on assessing the quality of education programs in Arab universities highlighted many issues requiring attention and improvement. The report pointed out a lack of intellectual stimulation in teaching of courses and the presence of overlap and repetition between professional education and academic preparation courses. Moreover, the report noted a lack of integration between these courses and the presence of many weaknesses related to the updating of curricula and university books that were out-of-line with modern programs and research requirements. On the other hand, the report noted some positive aspects in programs such as enabling students to acquire intellectual, practical, professional and general skills. In addition, it noted a good balance between theory and practice in half of the programs reviewed (UNDP/RBAS, 2006).

The same report also noted that the intended learning outcomes (ILOs) of programs and courses were poorly defined. It concluded that even though most programs had made progress in, for the first time, specifying ILOs during the process of academic review sponsored by UNDP, such progress was not enough to begin using those ILOs and the programs' general objectives as a starting point to determine the structure and content of the preparation programs, and to develop standards and tools required in the assessment and evaluation processes (UNDP/RBAS, 2006). Here, it should be noted that by "intended learning outcomes" we mean the knowledge, concepts, and skills students acquire at the end of a course or program.

Both the Salama and Wehba study (2008) and the UNDP Arab Human Development report (2003) agree on the absence of an educational philosophy or a clear vision that defines the educational choices and guides the preparation process.

#### 3. Where Are Arabs in Comparison to International Trends?

Various reports point out several shortcomings in Arab teacher education curricula. The main weakness may be the absence of a clear philosophy of education rooted in society's culture, needs and ambitions both at national and regional levels. Another important weakness is related to the absence of clear intended learning outcomes for both programs in general and specific courses.

Regarding structure and organization, it is possible to make both concurrent and consecutive systems available within preparation programs to attract more qualified students. The concurrent integrated system might be more suitable for elementary teacher preparation, whereas the consecutive system may be more suitable for secondary teacher preparation. As for curricular content, there is an almost consensual agreement about the necessity to achieve a balance between good academic preparation, educational preparation and professional preparation. Furthermore, we need more coordination and integration among curricula components and courses on and among the different partners in teacher education, particularly universities and schools.

Finally, it is also vital to continue learning about major advances made in teacher education and teacher preparation, and to continually update courses based on research carried out on curricular content, teaching methods, assessment and evaluation methods, while taking into consideration the cultural characteristics of Arab societies. In this regard, the UNDP report assessing the quality of education programs in Arab universities (UNDP/RBAS, 2006) recommended that more effort be made to ensure that teacher education curricula is more in-line with current international standards and practices.







# VI. Practical Field Experience in Teacher Preparation

## 1. International Practical Field Experience in Teacher Preparation

All teacher preparation programs include practical field experience as one of their components, but may differ in their duration, monitoring and assessment. For instance, in the United States, practical field experience gradually progresses from observation to practice teaching throughout the program. A university faculty member supervises and evaluates the student's work in collaboration with a school teacher (or director). Moreover, the field experience duration differs from one state to another, ranging from a minimum of six weeks in some states to a minimum of twelve weeks in others. This variation in duration is also found in other countries where field experience can extend from three to six weeks in Japan and Korea, and eight to ten weeks in Hong Kong and Singapore. In Australia and England, the practical field experience can exceed a year with a minimum of respectively 16 weeks and 24 weeks (Wang, et al., 2003).

Furthermore, additional questions about practical field experience have also been addressed, such as its quality and ability to achieve the intended goals. Various studies found evidence pointing to the importance of timing and organization of the practical field experience. Practical field experience that begins early in the program and extends gradually under good supervision has positive influences on trainees' performance and self-confidence (Crocker and Dibbon, 2008). In addition, effective practical field experience is characterized by being coherent and well integrated with the academic and professional components.

Another important issue in practical field experience is related to the quality of cooperating school teachers who are often chosen due to administrative considerations or on a voluntary basis. Further, some cooperating teachers do not get adequate orientation about their role in the practical field experience, and may suffer from inadequate communication with the university preparation team. All this will undermine the ability of the practical experience program to achieve its intended goals (Crocker and Dibbon, 2008).

One of the most important initiatives in the last two decades on the importance of developing relationships and integration among components of teacher preparation programs was the Professional Development Schools (PDS) project, launched by the Holmes Partnership which includes the deans of the biggest American research universities (Ornstein and Levine, 2006). This project aims at linking universities preparation programs and local school sites in order to create a collaborative research and learning environment for pre-service teachers, university professors and school teachers. The intention is that Professional Development Schools, which are modelled partly on medical teaching hospitals, will be leading institutions for research, training and practice, and will establish communication and integration between academic preparation, educational preparation and practical field experience (Crocker and Dibbon, 2008). The PDS concept has become more widespread, especially in the United States, where more than one thousand PDS schools were in place by 2004 (Ornstein and Levine, 2006).

#### 2. Arab Practical Field Experience in Teacher Preparation

The available reports on practical field experience within teacher preparation programs in the Arab countries show differences in the training level, duration and integration with academic and educational preparation. According to Jarrar (2002), the practical field experience component, along with teaching methods, is a main weakness in Arab teacher preparation programs. In the same context, Salameh and Wehbe (2008) consider that the practical field experience in seven Arab universities included in the study (Tunisia, Algeria, Sudan, Libya, Egypt, Morocco, and







Mauritania) suffer from various common problems. These include:

- a. Inadequate duration both designed and performed for practical training.
- b. Time periods dedicated to practical training are dispersed and the biggest share is devoted to observation.
- c. There is little coordination between instructors of theoretical courses, supervising instructors and cooperating schools teachers.
- d. There is no clear, objective, and comprehensive program to assess trainees' performance and the influence of this performance on the learning of school students.

In Jarrar (2002), additional problems are mentioned about the programs in Arab universities. These are:

- a. There is no clear guide for practical field experience programs.
- b. Supervising university faculty members are not doing a good job due to a high teaching load and the large number of students to be supervised.
- c. Sometimes ministry employees or senior teachers are required to monitor interns with little preparation being offered for this task.
- d. The training period is often too short and coordination between the different training supervisors is often weak.
- e. Current training programs need revision and improvement to organize the training process and to ensure that they offer trainees with real and valid school experiences.

Moreover, the UNDP report assessing the quality of education programs in Arab universities (UNDP/RBAS, 2006) concluded that the practical field experience is good in ten universities, acceptable in seven and unacceptable in six. The report especially praised the quality of such training programs in Qatar University and Jordan University. It also pointed out the lack of integration between educational and academic preparation in some programs.

## 3. Where Are Arabs in Comparison to International Trends?

The three above-mentioned reports clearly point out the presence of several shortcomings in the practical training component of teacher preparation programs in Arab countries. In light of the presented international experiences, it is possible to conclude that a good practical field experience needs the following:

- a. An extended period of time throughout the program during which the trainees gradually participate in teaching practice.
- b. The training curriculum must clearly determine goals and ILO's and the means to attain them in accordance with the broad goals and ILO's of the teacher education program.
- c. It is important to have a clear, objective, and comprehensive student performance assessment system during the training.
- d. Cooperating teachers in schools should be chosen on the basis of their expertise and teaching and communication skills and should enjoy a high degree of coordination with supervising faculty members.
- e. It is important to enhance integration between academic preparation courses, professional education courses and practical field experience programs.
- f. It is worthwhile to undertake a viability study regarding the implementation of the "Professional Development Schools" project which has become widespread amongst teacher education programs in the biggest American research universities.







# VII. Quality Standards and Accreditation System

# 1. International Quality Standards and Accreditation System

Teacher preparation aims at training good and qualified teachers. But what are good teaching standards? Who guarantees that the preparation program is good and has the required characteristics? How can we control and assure quality in preparation programs? How can we be assured that teacher education graduates have the required qualifications for the teaching profession?

Almost all countries in the world have passed legislation and introduced procedures to regulate the preparation and entry of individuals into different professions including teaching. For instance, in the United States, governmental authorities in each state certify the individual qualifications and their compliance with minimum competency standards for the teaching profession (Roth & Swail, 2002). In light of this certification, the state authorities grant licensing to individuals who are then permitted to practice the teaching profession. Moreover, the certification process requires that the individual has a degree from an approved or accredited teacher preparation program. Although all states have a local system to grant program approval, an increasing number of them specify that teacher preparation programs must obtain additional accreditation from an independent national body such as the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE). The NCATE has the approval of the U.S. Department of Education to grant accreditation to teacher education and other education-related professions (Ingvarson, et al., 2006).

In brief, licensing is based on certification, which in turn depends on getting at least local approval coupled very often with national accreditation. Even though different states may have different licensing and certification requirements, most of them agree that graduates of teacher programs should fulfil the following criteria (Roth & Swail, 2000):

- a. Obtain at least a bachelor's degree.
- b. Graduate from an approved or accredited education program.
- c. Have a major or minor in education (for elementary teachers).
- d. Have a major in the subject matter intended to be taught (for secondary teachers).
- e. Have a strong background in liberal-arts courses.
- f. Pass a state test assessing knowledge and skills related to teaching.

Moreover, the standards required by preparation programs in order to be accredited have shifted in the last decades from focusing mainly on programs' characteristics such as curricula, resources and training (programs' inputs) to focusing also on graduates' abilities, skills and knowledge (programs' output) (Goss, 2005). Such shift is clearly reflected in the new standards proposed by NCATE as a basis for reviewing and accrediting programs (NCATE, 2000). It is worth mentioning that accreditation occurs periodically, approximately every five years, which means that preparation programs are in a continuous process of self-evaluation and improvement.

In Europe, most countries have a national body in charge of reviewing university programs, including teacher preparation programs. Some countries also have specialized bodies in teacher education accreditation. In England, the Teacher Development Agency (TDA) grants certification and licensing by giving graduates from accredited preparation programs a certificate of "Qualified Teacher Status" based on standards in three areas (Ingvarson, et al., 2006):

- a. Professional values and practice;
- b. Knowledge and understanding;
- c. Teaching.







Further, the assessment of graduates is based on data gathered from different sources, including trainers, school teachers, university professors and graduates. The graduates also sit a test on skills organized electronically by the Agency. Accreditation of programs, however, is handled by a different body, the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED), whose role is to make sure that the programs meet four groups of requirements, namely:

- a. Admission requirements to the programs;
- b. Training and assessment;
- c. Management of the initial teacher training partnership;
- d. Quality assurance.

Interestingly, one of the criteria for accrediting programs is the percentage of their graduates who obtain the "Qualified Teacher Status".

Moreover, following the signing of the Bologna Process in 1999, the Bergen conference in May 2005 for ministers of education in Europe established a new European independent body to determine standards and regulations for quality assurance in higher education institutions in Europe<sup>3</sup>. This general framework will include all higher education institutions involved in teacher preparation in Europe.

In Australia, there is as yet no national accreditation institution for teacher education (Ingvarson, et al., 2006). The different states use different legislation and regulations related to accreditation, certification and licensing. However, only three states have legislation requiring formal approval or accreditation of teacher education programs. Further, only two states have implemented formal processes of program review and approval. The state of Queensland, which is recognized as the leader in this domain, passed a teacher registration act in 2005 requiring all initial teacher education programs to be approved by the "Queensland College of Teachers" for graduates to be granted teacher registration in the state.

To conclude, the international scene has become increasingly interested in issues related to standards of good teaching and the establishment of national and local bodies charged with working on quality assurance and accreditation of programs as a basis for granting graduates certification or licensing. Furthermore, there is a general international trend for accreditation to focus on standards related to graduates' skills, abilities and knowledge (program output) in addition to standards related to programs' characteristics or input.

#### 2. Arab Quality Standards and Accreditation System

Jarrar (2002) pointed out that certification and licensing concepts for the teaching profession are not in evidence in the Arab world. Moreover, there are no Arab bodies specialized in quality assurance and accreditation for teacher education programs (Al-Amine, 2008). However, Al-Amine (2008)) described six local "accreditation" institutions for quality assurance in Arab countries.

These institutions are located in Jordan, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Sudan and Palestine. Al-Amine (2008) added that these institutions are not autonomous as they are all affiliated with ministries of education or higher education. Most of them focus on quality control and not on quality assurance, while their scope of work is often limited to the private sector. However, the National Association for Evaluation and Accreditation of Higher Education Institutions in Saudi Arabia is distinguished by covering both private and public sectors, and by focusing on both quality control and quality assurance. In addition, Al-Amine admired the





<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> «The European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education» (ENQA, http://www.enqa.met).



efforts made by the national committees for quality assurance and accreditation in both Egypt and Tunisia, which are paving the way to the establishment of national institutions in the two countries.

# 3. Where are Arabs in Comparison to International Trends?

The last decade has witnessed a dynamic movement toward establishing and promoting national and Arab institutions in charge of determining standards, frameworks and processes required for quality assurance and academic accreditation. In 1998, a regional UNESCO conference held in Beirut jump-started a wide range of efforts and activities that were later reinforced by the recommendations of the Conferences of Arab Ministers of Higher Education and Scientific Research between 2001 and 2005. As a result, many academic conferences were held, many comprehensive studies were conducted, and many initiatives were launched to establish Arab institutions and networks for quality assurance (Al-Amine, 2008). Such efforts must continue and should focus more on planning implementation processes and practical mechanisms aimed at establishing and developing national and regional institutions for quality assurance and accreditation in higher education institutions in general and in teacher preparation programs in particular.

## VIII. Conclusion and Recommendations

The UNESCO Institute for Statistics Report (2006) stated that Arab countries will face a severe shortage of teachers in elementary schools by 2015. It will thus be necessary to increase the teacher reserve by 26% and enrol about 479,000 new teachers (in addition to teachers who are already in the profession) in a period of ten years. For instance, Saudi Arabia will need to enrol 137,000 new teachers and compensate 187,000 teachers expected to retire by 2015. Only four Arab countries (Algeria, Lebanon, Syria and Tunisia) do not need to increase their teaching workforce, although they still have to compensate retiring teachers. The challenge of providing the required number of teachers is accompanied by another of similar importance, namely the preparation of high quality teachers who can provide good teaching to school students. This paper has tried to contribute to this challenge by providing decision-makers in the area of teacher preparation with a research-based framework within which teacher preparation in the Arab countries is assessed in the light of international research, trends and advances. The main conclusions and recommendations proposed by this paper regarding the above-mentioned issues refer to:

- a. Applicants and entrants to the teacher preparation programs.
- b. Control and governance in teacher preparation programs: centralization or decentralization of the education system.
- c. Institutional framework for teacher preparation.
- d. Teacher education curricula: organization and content.
- e. Practical field experience during the preparation period.
- f. Quality assurance and enhancement in the preparation programs and the academic accreditation system.

## 1. How to Attract Good Students to Teacher Preparation Programs?

Summary: As long as the teaching profession does not receive the social, economic and national status it deserves, high quality students will not be attracted to teacher preparation programs.







Further, the rising rate of unemployment accompanied with a lowering of admission standards to the preparation program attract young men and women with moderate abilities looking for easily accessed job opportunities to these programs and keep away students with higher abilities seeking lucrative and competitive job opportunities. Furthermore, lowering admission standards to meet the growing demand for new teachers will ultimately exacerbate the problem. Considering that the objective is to provide good education to school students, this policy will lower the educational level and thus will undermine developmental policies, as the human resource is the cornerstone of the success of such policies.

#### Recommendations:

- a. Offering financial incentives to entrants in the preparation programs (teaching grants, job guarantee).
- b. Enhancing the social status of the teaching profession in Arab countries, improving work conditions, providing professional development opportunities and increasing wages.
- c. Raising admission standards to teacher preparation programs and entrance standards to the teaching profession.
- d. Designing developmental policies and plans aimed at increasing jobs and decreasing unemployment rates (or else the above-mentioned suggestions will be insufficient).
- e. Increasing and improving efforts to attract students to preparation programs, especially students with high abilities.
- f. Attracting non-traditional students to the teacher education programs such as professionals or businessmen desiring to change their profession or people seeking to return to the labour market such as early-retired people and housewives.

### 2. Centralization or Decentralization of the Educational System

Summary: During the last decades, the international educational scene has witnessed an increase in the strategic intervention of federal or local governmental institutions in planning and administration, while at the same time preserving the autonomy of university preparation institutions regarding the design and organization of curricula and the management of human and financial resources. Furthermore, independent or governmental national institutions have played an increasing role in quality assurance and accreditation of preparation programs. Indeed, governmental, professional and higher education institutions all play important and complementary roles in the preparation, training and professional development of teachers. The lack of autonomy in Arab universities and the numerous governmental pressures and demands go against international trends. Governmental, professional and higher education institutions should play their appropriate roles without interfering in each others' affairs. Recommendations:

#### Recommendations:

- a. Activating existing national and Arab cultural, educational, economic and political frameworks to design ambitious educational policies at the regional and local levels. It would then be possible to organize and coordinate efforts, define standards, set longrange goals and put practical plans in order to achieve these goals within a specific timeline.
- b. Establishing national professional institutions for quality assurance and academic accreditation of teacher preparation programs and promoting the role of existing institutions.
- c. Preserving the autonomy of university preparation institutions regarding the curriculum design, organization and management of financial and human resources.







# 3. Institutional Framework for Teacher Preparation

Summary: When comparing international and Arab institutional frameworks for teacher preparation it can be seen that Arab countries are in-line with international trends. It seems that both are moving toward university teacher preparation.

### Recommendations:

- a. Arab countries that are lagging behind must adopt legislation to enhance quality teacher preparation and be more in tune with international trends.
- b. Arab countries, which have adopted the required legislation, must enforce and implement it in practice.

## 4. Teacher Education Curricula

Summary: Most countries in the world seem to working actively at improving their educational institutions in general and teacher preparation programs in particular. However, the core problem at the Arab level is the absence of a clear educational philosophy derived from society's culture, needs and ambitions at both national and regional levels. Addressing this would make it more feasible to determine the general structure, organization and content of teacher education programs.

#### Recommendations:

- a. It is important to establish an educational philosophy stemming from our culture, needs and ambitions at both national and regional levels.
- b. Preparation institutions must define clear intended learning outcomes related to the program in general and to specific courses. They must also use these outcomes, in addition to the program's general objectives, as a basis to determine the structure and content of the teacher education curriculum and to develop the standards and tools required in the assessment and evaluation processes.
- c. In terms of structure and organization, the concurrent system seems to have benefits and characteristics that the consecutive system lacks. That is why it is important to make both systems available in preparation programs, so they can attract a larger number of able students. The concurrent system (integrated) may be more suitable for elementary teacher preparation, whereas the consecutive system may be more suitable for secondary teacher preparation.
- d. In terms of content, there is a general consensus that curriculum content and teaching methods are more important than structure and organization. It is important, therefore, to find a balance between a good academic preparation and a good educational and professional one. Moreover, it is crucial to focus on subject matter teaching methods.
- e. It is vital to coordinate and integrate the different components of the curriculum with theoretical and practical courses.
- f. The different partners in the teacher preparation process, especially universities and schools, must coordinate and integrate their work.
- g. It is important to follow the latest developments in the teacher preparation field. It is also vital to continually update courses and programs, according to the results of recent research in curriculum content, teaching methods and assessment and evaluation methods, while taking into account the cultural characteristics of Arab communities.
- h. More efforts should be made to ensure that the teacher education curriculum is in tune with known international standards and practices.







## 5. Practical Field Experience in Teacher Preparation

Summary: Available reports about practical field experience in teacher preparation programs in Arab countries show various and common problems, namely:

- a. Inadequate duration both designed and performed for practical training and allocating the biggest share to observation.
- b. There is little coordination between instructors of theoretical courses, supervising instructors and cooperating schools teachers.
- c. There is no clear, objective, and comprehensive program to assess trainees' performance and the influence of this performance on the learning of school students.
- d. There is no clear guide for practical field experience programs.
- e. Sometimes ministry employees or senior teachers are required to monitor interns with little preparation being offered for this task.
- f. Current training programs need revision and improvement to organize the training process and to ensure that they offer trainees with real and valid school experiences.

#### Recommendations:

- a. An extended period of time is needed in the program to enable trainees to gradually participate in the teaching practice.
- b. The training curriculum must clearly determine goals and ILO's and the means to attain them in accordance with the broad goals and ILO's of the teacher education program.
- c. It is important to have a clear, objective, and comprehensive student performance assessment system during the training.
- d. Cooperating teachers in schools should be chosen on the basis of their expertise and teaching and communication skills and should enjoy a high degree of coordination with supervising faculty members.
- e. It is important to enhance integration between academic preparation courses, professional education courses and practical field experience programs.
- f. It is worthwhile to undertake a viability study regarding the implementation of the "Professional Development Schools" project which has become widespread amongst teacher education programs in the biggest American research universities.

## 6. Quality Standards and Accreditation System

Summary: The international scene has become increasingly interested in issues related to standards of good teaching and the establishment of national and local bodies responsible for quality assurance and accreditation of programs as a basis for granting graduates certification or licensing. Furthermore, there is a general international trend for accreditation to focus on standards related to graduates' skills, abilities and knowledge (program output) in addition to standards related to programs' characteristics or input. Furthermore, the last decade has witnessed a dynamic movement toward establishing and promoting national and Arab institutions in charge of determining standards, frameworks and processes required for quality assurance and academic accreditation.

#### Recommendations:

- a. These Arab efforts must continue and should focus more on planning implementation processes and practical mechanisms aimed at establishing and developing national and Arab institutions for quality assurance and accreditation in higher education institutions in general and in teacher preparation programs in particular.
- National institutions must be more autonomous and must extend their efforts to include quality control and assurance in both the private and public sectors.





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