

# Quality Assurance in Sri Lankan Teacher Training

## Evaluation Procedures for the Assessment of the Internship Period

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**Abstract:** In 2002 guidelines for the implementation of the internship programme for prospective teachers have been released in a joint venture by the Basic Education Sector Programme (BESP) of the GTZ (Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit/German Technical Cooperation) and the Professional Development Centre (Teacher Education) of the National Institute for Education of Sri Lanka (NIE). These guidelines aim at assisting the National Colleges of Education (NCOEs) and internship schools in implementing the internship programme and at improving its efficiency and effectiveness in the local venues of teacher training. The Monitoring & Evaluation activity described in the present article was to assess as to how far the intentions originally associated with the internship programme are being accomplished. Its main task is to bring strengths and weaknesses of the programme to light and to appraise the current status of its implementation.

### 1. Introduction

The internship period in teacher training, a profession oriented preparatory training for pre-service teachers is playing a significant role in Sri Lankan teacher training. Guidelines for the implementation of the internship-programme have been elaborated in a joint venture by the Basic Education Sector Programme (BESP) of the GTZ and the Professional Development Centre (Teacher Education) of the National Institute for Education of Sri Lanka (NIE). One of the guideline's key contributions is the clarification of the roles and responsibilities of relevant stakeholders in both the National Colleges of Education (NCOE) and the internship schools. Learning objectives, desirable learning outcomes and necessary steps to be undertaken in order to achieve them are comprehensively described. The most important of these objectives is to provide prospective

teachers with opportunities to practice their knowledge, skills, and attitudes which are required to become a self-reliant professional, to strengthen their teaching competencies, and to work with confidence in their future teaching career. The evaluation activity described in the present article was to assess as to how far the intentions originally associated with the internship-programme are being accomplished in a sample of NCOEs and internship schools. Its main task is to bring strengths and weaknesses of the programme to light and to appraise the current status of its implementation.

The data for this activity was gathered from relevant personnel in the NCOEs, internship schools, and post-interns belonging to the sample. The methods used for data gathering included structured interviews, focus group discussions, self administered questionnaires, and checklists. The instruments used to obtain the relevant information are supposed to serve as a model for future assessment and evaluation strategies and activities, providing colleges and internship schools with easy-to-use instruments for self-assessment.

The evaluation procedure was implemented collaboratively by the authors of the present article in February and March 2005 in several NCOEs in different regions of the country.<sup>1</sup> This “cross-cultural approach” proved to be most fruitful: different standpoints as regards appropriate evaluation frameworks, methods, and traditions were vividly discussed prior to the actual evaluation activities and combined to a quality oriented and participative approach. The experience we made with this approach is being described in the present article. First we give a brief overview of Sri Lankan teacher training in general.

### **1.1 Teacher Training in Sri Lanka**

In the mid-1980es the then Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE) introduced National Colleges of Education (NCOE) to train teachers for the primary and secondary (up to Grade 11) cycles. Until then G.C.E. (O.L.) and G.C.E. (A.L.)<sup>2</sup> qualified youths were recruited to schools as primary and secondary teachers and they were subsequently absorbed to Teachers’ Colleges to be provided with two-year institutional in-service training programmes. Under the new concept the NCOEs would provide two years of academic *and* professional education in residential institutes. During the third and last year students would work as student-teachers at schools. This internship period was to be supervised

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<sup>1</sup> The consultancy of the domestic and international evaluation experts was facilitated by GOPA Consultants ([www.gopa.de](http://www.gopa.de)).

<sup>2</sup> G.C.E. (O.L.): General Certificate of Education (Ordinary Level); G.C.E. (A.L.): General Certificate of Education (Advanced Level).

by NCOE lecturers in cooperation with the hosting schools. At the end of the internship period student-teachers would undergo a final examination. They would graduate from the NCOEs with a Diploma in Education and be employed by the MEHE as qualified teachers.

This new concept proved to be quite attractive for various reasons. One intention related to introducing this new approach to teacher education had been to create alternatives for school leavers who had passed their G.C.E. (A.L.) examination but had no real chance to enter the Universities. Even before independence, education had been a high priority for Sri Lankan parents. After the independence this development was further strengthened. Access to universities had become the ultimate objective of a school career, a development that has made the Sri Lankan school system highly competitive and examination oriented. Unfortunately, the capacity of the universities could not keep up with the swelling numbers of G.C.E. (A.L.) graduates and the rising demand for academic education at tertiary level. Over the years an ever increasing mismatch of demand and supply for tertiary education developed. This mismatch contributed in no small measure to the youth unrests that have plagued Sri Lanka in the early 1980es. Therefore, introducing NCOEs as alternatives to university education had been a political measure to take some pressure out of a highly politicised situation.

For G.C.E.(A.L.) graduates the introduction of NCOEs offered the opportunity for academic and professional training though outside the more prestigious university system. This lack of prestige was countered by the fact that graduating from an NCOE would almost automatically mean a job opportunity because the education system had a high demand for more and better qualified teachers to cope with the rising number of students. At the same time, the NCOEs would provide the education system with more and better qualified teachers at relatively moderate costs since teachers would no longer have to go through an academic university *and* a professional teacher training programme. Furthermore, the school system would have the use of professionally qualified though still not graduated – and still inexperienced – teachers after the first two years of the total teacher education time of three years. This would allow the education system to fill the vacancies in schools – at least nominally. This option was tempting in particular for the small schools and the schools in the more remote areas that were commonly not so attractive for already trained teachers and therefore suffered most from teacher shortages.

To start the NCOE professional education approach, the MEHE initially converted some of the existing teacher training colleges to NCOEs. With German and Japanese aid two new NCOEs were built, one in the tea plantation area – Sri Pada College of Education – and one in the south – Nilwala College of Education. Both areas signified political hotbeds: The

tea plantation area with a Tamil majority and a Sinhalese minority had long been neglected and needed to be better integrated into Sri Lankan society.

The National Institute of Education (NIE) had prepared the curricula for the NCOE system. These were developed with a strong academic focus. This promoted the NCOE lecturers to stress the academic side of teacher education rather than practical activities. In addition, from the start, the NCOE system suffered from a lack of experienced lecturers with a background in primary education. Most NCOE lecturers had previously been working at secondary schools where a strong focus on academic learning had established itself as a reaction to the highly competitive and examination oriented school system.

From the start the practical side of teacher education was rather weakly developed at the NCOEs. Though teaching practices were supposed to be standard features of the NCOE curriculum, many lecturers – at least initially – paid them little more than cursory attention. Admittedly, the situation varied from college to college, largely depending on college leadership.

The lack of practice orientation became even more visible once the internship period of training started for the first time. In many cases student teachers were posted at schools where they were expected to serve as class teachers with a full teaching load. They received generally little support from NCOE lecturers and even less from the schools themselves which appreciated the additional teacher but were commonly ill-prepared to assist the professional development of a student-teacher. Even though the NIE had provided some initial guidelines for the internship period, in reality each NCOE established and followed its own design. Therefore, a standardised approach with a common understanding and common goals had not been established from the start.

Several attempts were undertaken in the mid 1990es by a German sponsored Project to pilot an internship concept at Sri Pada College of Education (SPCOE). The ambition was to develop the pilot programme eventually into a standardised concept for the internship period that all colleges would have to follow. These attempts met with strong resistance from the SPCOE lecturers but also the NIE: At the SPCOE the yearn for integration into the NCOE system was too strong to support any concept development that would assign the SPCOE an outstanding role among the NCOEs; the NIE saw an infringement of its position as the central curriculum development institution in Sri Lanka and was at that time not too interested in sharing its responsibility with colleges of education lecturers who would be a major driving force of concept development.

In the late 1990es / the early 2000 again a German sponsored project brought up the issue once more and was this time successful. The project undertook to develop an internship concept jointly with the NIE which would this time be the driving and eventually the implementing force. The concept that emerged stressed for the first time the practical part of teacher education in its various aspects. Most importantly it undertook to define the roles of all involved parties and it provided structured, systematic training to introduce the concept to all NCOEs that train students to become primary teachers.

A rather prominent feature that was firmly imbedded into the concept was the "mentor", a fellow teacher who was to support the prospective teacher as they were called by now at the school level and accompany and assist him / her continuously throughout the internship year. Mentor, NCOE lecturer and principal were now expected to take joint responsibility looking after and supervising the prospective teacher and his / her mentor in order to make the internship period a meaningful part of teacher training.

## **1.2 Organisational Framework of the Internship Programme**

Internship period is scheduled for the third year of the National Diploma in Teaching Course. It comprises three main areas of training which cover the relevant skills demanded by the teaching profession. Namely these comprise

- i) *furthering experience in classroom practice*: Activities in this field range from observing the lessons of experienced teachers to planning and conducting regular lessons,
- ii) *professional duties other than classroom teaching*: These duties refer to classroom management, counselling students and parents, community activities, and conducting relief work, and
- iii) *conducting a research project*: Interns are supposed to plan and conduct an action research project on a problem which occurs during their classroom teaching and which they believe is worth being researched (e.g. learning difficulties of disadvantaged students and respective development strategies).

In general the internship programme's implementation follows the same standards and practice everywhere. "However, through the years of experience, good practices have developed as well as deviations have occurred" (NIE 2002). Based on such experience the guidelines for internship have been developed in order to provide stakeholders at colleges

with an organisational framework for the programme's implementation. Respective recommendations refer to the establishment of an Internship Committee at any NCOE. This committee is supposed to function as a steering group. Its members are the President, Vice-President and deans of the NCOE, as well as teacher educators, who are being delegated to internship schools in order to train the interns and the internship schools' personnel (school principals and senior teachers, who are mentoring the interns). The Internship Committee selects schools as internship schools according to different criteria referring to a) the medium of instruction, b) the distance to the college, and c) the available staff and resources at the school. Teacher educators and mentors are selected according to their interest and professional experience. A bottom-up scheme of reporting and record keeping as regards interns' learning achievements is supposed to secure the steady implementation and assessment of the programme. Prepared data sheets for internship are used in order to gather relevant and comparable data on the programme's implementation in the different venues. The latter aspect of record keeping was of high relevance to the evaluation approach since a strong and effective administration seems to be a prerequisite for successfully handling teacher training at different levels

## **2. The Evaluation Approach**

The evaluation approach is participative and quality oriented. Its mission is not to detect individual faults and to make stakeholders in the selected venues accountable. It is supposed to bring strengths and weaknesses of the internship programme's implementation to light and to discover measures for further improvement jointly and in co-operation with all stakeholders involved. These overall objectives determine the methodology that seems to be most promising in order to accomplish the evaluation's objectives.<sup>3</sup>

### **2.1 Planning and Organization**

The implementation of the evaluation activity is based on a concept paper, which has been developed and continuously refined prior to the actual evaluation activities. This concept paper comprises descriptions of the evaluation's overall aims and objectives, relevant data sources, data

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<sup>3</sup> The present evaluation is based on the experience that has already been made with M&E activities in Sri Lankan teacher training: in 2004 the first author of this article has conducted an evaluation of language materials, that have been developed for primary teacher education by the Basic Education Sector Programme of the GTZ, following a comparable evaluation approach.

gathering instruments, required resources, and detailed schedules in order to ensure its steady implementation. Foremost the evaluation approach comprised visits of selected NCOEs.<sup>4</sup> The selection criteria mainly referred to the used medium of instruction (Sinhala/Tamil/both)<sup>5</sup> and to the location of the college (remote vs. central). A balanced selection of colleges with different settings could be achieved. The most important part of the preparatory work consisted of the development of data gathering instruments. The instruments chosen for the present Evaluation are being described in the following section. The major aspects taken into consideration refer to the different fields under evaluation as outlined in the concept paper:

- i) assessment of the internship's contribution to gathering experience in day to day classroom practice,
- ii) assessment of the internship's contribution to gathering experience in professional duties other than teaching (e.g. communication with parents, implementing extra-curricular activities, etc.),
- iii) assessment of the internship's contribution to furthering research competencies (conducting a school based action research project),
- iv) assessment of the internship committee's functioning at the given NCOE (management, document and record-keeping, relationship to the internship schools).

## **2.2 Development of Instruments**

Information of different scope and relevance was gathered from different groups of stakeholders. Thus the instruments in use varied with the different players. As the overall approach is quality oriented and foremost aiming at involving local stakeholders in the process of fact finding and problem solving, mostly qualitative methods of social science research were applied. These comprise interviews with stakeholders, which allowed them to answer open-ended questions regarding the relevant issues and to give in-depth comments on strengths and weaknesses of the programme. Structured interviews were conducted with 2005's interns, mentors, schools' Principals and NCOE teacher educators. Alongside with

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<sup>4</sup> Five out of 12 colleges, teaching primary education were visited: Ruhuna NCOE (Sinhala & Tamil medium), Ruwanpura NCOE (Sinhala medium), Sri Pada NCOE (Sinhala & Tamil medium), Dhargangar NCOE (Tamil medium), Hapitigama NCOE (Sinhala medium).

<sup>5</sup> The education system in Sri Lanka is using the languages of the two biggest sections of the population: Sinhalese and Tamil. Depending on the region, one of the media or both of them are used in schools, colleges and universities.

these interviews focus group discussions with interns and post-interns were used. These were supposed to discover “group attitudes” as the product of interactively exchanged beliefs and attitudes among the discussions’ participants [BOHNSACK 2004; KRUEGER 2005].

Additionally probing of in-service teachers who have passed the internship in previous years were conducted, by applying self-administered questionnaires. Such probing is expected to provide information on the post-interns’ appraisal of the programme’s usefulness.

### *2.2.1 Guidelines for Structured Interviews*

Structured interviews were conducted at each NCOE with teacher educators (n = 2), at each internship school with 2005’s interns (n = 2), mentors (n = 2) and the Principal (n = 1). The guidelines for the staff’s interviews focussed on their awareness of the internship’s requirements (e.g. as regards related additional training they had received to meet the demands of the task, meetings they conduct, records they keep in order to build up a well functioning administration, guidance they provide for the interns, and assessment strategies they apply, etc.). Interns were interviewed referring to the extent to which the internship programme is helpful for them as regards the gathering of experience in classroom teaching, professional duties and research competencies (planning and implementing an action research project). Other relevant aspects refer to mechanisms of the selection of mentors and the placement as prospective teachers in internship schools. The latter aspects seem to be critical as regards the interns’ overall satisfaction with the implementation of the programme.

### *2.2.2 Guidelines for Focus Group Discussions*

Focus group discussions were implemented in groups of around 10-12 recently passed out post-interns, who are by now in-service teachers. It was envisaged that these post-interns could retrospectively appraise the usefulness of the programme for their professional development.<sup>6</sup> This results in a broadly based data source describing the acceptance of the programme among its participants and their suggestions for further improvement, which they have against the background of their experience. However, relevant aspects under evaluation were comparable to those under evaluation in the structured interviews conducted with 2005’s interns. These aspects included:

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<sup>6</sup> In some cases the number of 10-12 post-interns was not available, thus smaller groups had to be accepted. The participation of most recent post-interns (2004) was very limited, as they were not available in schools close to the NCOEs.



- internship's contribution to experience gathering and professional development
- mechanisms for the selection of mentors and placement of interns in schools.

### *2.2.3 Self-administered Questionnaires*

Among the prospective/in-service teachers, 2004's interns seemed to be the most relevant group since they have already undergone the programme and can appraise it rationally based on their experience with it. Thus self-administered questionnaires were mailed to a randomly chosen sample (of about  $n = 30$  in each College, equalling a total of about 150 questionnaire forms) in addition to the focus group discussions being conducted in this group. The purpose of this approach was to obtain post-interns' aggregated estimations in addition to the very individual opinions as expressed in the structured interviews and focus group discussions. The scope of this questionnaire covered the relevant aspects as already applied in structured interviews and focus group discussions. Additionally interns were asked to provide information concerning their personal background (age, gender, educational achievement prior to teacher training and the like) and about their motivation to take up a teaching career. Such information enables to address the question to what extent the interviewees' appraisal reflects rather their personal background than the programme's quality [SPIEL & GÖSSLER 2000].

### *2.2.4 Checklists for the Evaluation of Document-keeping Procedures*

The present evaluation approach considers administrative procedures to be a crucial quality indicator for the assessment of a teacher training facility's performance. Thus it was to take a closer look at routines the NCOEs and internship schools have developed in order to maintain records and reports on the implementation of the internship programme. The relevant records comprise mentors', Principals' and teacher educators' assessment reports as submitted to the NCOEs and the NCOEs' reports on the implementation of the internship programme. The question under evaluation mainly addressed the regular and adequate maintenance of the respective documents in the given internship schools and NCOEs.

## **2.3 Pilot-testing and Refining Instruments**

Out of the five chosen NCOEs, in which the designed evaluation procedure was conducted, the Ruhuna National College of Education served as venue to pilot-test the instruments. Nevertheless this college could also be provided with feedback and evaluation results immediately after finishing the visit, since the needed refinement proved to be of rather small

extent. However, the number of questions in most of the guidelines for structured interviews seemed to be overextended and could be condensed after the pilot test. The self-administered questionnaire, handed to the Ruhuna NCOE's President could be refined after receiving her highly valuable suggestions for improvement. The self-administered questionnaire handed to post-interns did not need further refinement according to the appraisal of a group of six post-interns at Ruhuna NCOE who filled in the form, discussed its contents and considered it to be comprehensive. The instrument seemed to have met the requirements as regards aspects such as the clarity of language, length and sequence of questions, relevance and the like.

## **2.4 Meetings and Provision of Feedback to Stakeholders**

Preliminary meetings with the NCOE Presidents and the internship committees were conducted in order to express the M&E team's appreciation of the local stakeholders' willingness to co-operate and to participate in the evaluation process. It was emphasized that the endeavour did not attempt to find individual faults and to make stakeholders accountable but to involve them in the quality assurance procedure from the very beginning.

Additionally to gathering data for evaluation purposes, it was a major task of the visits at the NCOEs and internship schools to provide them with immediate feedback based on the findings. At the end of each visit an immediate feedback session on preliminary findings was conducted with the NCOE Presidents and the internship committees. The local stakeholders appreciated the external point of view on their working routines as provided by the evaluation team.

## **3. Findings**

In the following the findings of the evaluation activity are displayed. First we give a summary of key findings, which we group under the strengths and weaknesses of the programme's implementation. Additionally one of the case studies is taken a closer look at, particularly emphasising views of the different groups of stakeholders on the internship programme's implementation. Since we have gathered a wide body of information on the five NCOEs we need to limit the presented ones to the very essential. Thus we have chosen to abstain from extensively discussing the results of the survey conducted in the group of post-interns. We do so for two reasons: first the analysis is not finalized yet and second we believe the information provided by interviews more relevant in the context of the present quality oriented evaluation activity.

### **3.1 Summary of Key Findings**

The investigations revealed several strengths and weaknesses, which became quite obvious –even though to different degrees- in all of the venues under evaluation. One could particularly point out that there is a high level of commitment for the successful implementation of the internship programme which becomes evident among the Presidents, Vice-Presidents and teacher educators of all the NCOEs. Interns feel that they are quite well supported by the mentors, Principals and the visiting teacher educators to develop their experiences in classroom practices.

Sufficient opportunities are provided by the internship schools to further the professional skills of interns. The interns are provided with reasonable support by the NCOEs to conduct the obligatory action research Project and the majority of interns feel confident to accomplish the task.

A high level of co-operation is extended to NCOE teacher educators by the schools' Principals and mentors which becomes obvious by considering the “flow of information” relating to internship programme issues, that takes place between NCOEs and internship schools.

Interns are satisfied with their integration to the teaching staff and the way they are treated as equal colleagues. At the same time, internship schools' Principals are happy about the interns and consider their presence as a blessing to their schools, which could be taken as a confirmation of the interns' estimation. Moreover, even senior teachers in schools, that are not directly linked to the programme's implementation are benefited by the interns as these introduce new knowledge and educational methodologies. That is why interns are highly popular among school staff members, children and parents as was reported by internship schools' representatives.

Even though these findings seem to support the conclusion that the overall aims of the programme are being accomplished, there are some weaknesses, which function as obstacles to its full success. These are mostly related to organisational problems, which could be solved comparatively easy. A main issue in this regard is the distribution of the booklet on “Guidelines for Internship” to the entire system of both NCOEs and internship schools. At present there is not a 100% coverage. Thus there are Principals in internship schools and mentors who have not yet acknowledged this basic resource. The respective deficiency results in the lacking of knowledge on the relevant professional trainings, that need to be attended, on meetings that need to be conducted, on the organisational framework of the programme, etc. Another major problem is related to the administration of the relevant documents and records. Maintenance and filing of documents related to the internship programme are not sys-

tematic in almost all the NCOEs, available computer facilities are not adequately used for storing data related to the internship programme. Finally the assignment of duties to interns in schools is not taking place as prescribed in many NCOEs. E.g., some interns are assigned as class teachers, with numbers of classes that do exceed the recommended number by far. Such problems are mainly caused by general shortcomings regarding the needed (human) resources.

### **3.2 A Case Study: Internship at the Ruhuna NCOE**

The Ruhuna NCOE situated at Akmeemana, Galle in the Southern Province offers primary education courses in both Sinhala and Tamil media. The M&E team visited Ruhuna NCOE from March 9-10. The visit comprised meetings, discussions and interviews at the NCOE as well as the conducting of evaluation procedures as outlined above in two internship schools, namely at the Ihalagoda Sumangala Model School (Sinhala medium) and at the Suleymaniya School (Tamil medium). This section displays the information gathered from the various groups of stakeholders as regards relevant aspects of the programme's implementation.

#### *3.2.1 Key Information Gathered*

*...from the NCOE President and Internship Committee members*

Strong emphasis is placed on the internship programme and stakeholders are eager to provide good working conditions for the prospective teachers. Meetings are conducted regularly, the internship committee is organised as a standing committee. Nevertheless there are some shortcomings at hand which could lead to a decrease in the interns' overall satisfaction with the programme. These are mostly related to (un-) available resources. There is adequate number of schools within the catchment area to post Sinhala medium interns. But the number of schools for Tamil medium interns is hardly adequate. In 2005, 59 Sinhala medium interns have been placed in 52 schools and 29 Tamil medium interns in 13 schools. The interest of schools in hosting interns is at least partly due to their lacking of teaching staff. Internship schools do not always follow the guidelines provided. For example, interns are assigned to teach more than 15 lessons per week and they are sent on relief work.

Inability to provide adequate awareness on the internship programme during the institutional training period and heavy workload related to the internship programme are considered as weaknesses. Interns are provided considerable support for the action research. Several awareness and training programmes have been conducted to support the interns in this regard. They are guided by the Internship Committee on the selection of topics for the research and their progress is supervised. Although teacher

educators conduct at least four visits to internship schools per month for supervision, their travelling allowance is paid only for two visits due to lack of funds. The internship programme in the Tamil medium is suffered due to the lack of Tamil medium teacher educators.

*...from Teacher Educators*

Teacher educators are emphasising the internship programme by attending the relevant training workshops as provided since 2002. Nevertheless they state that further training would be highly appreciated and valued as a contribution to further their professional experience, which would be benefiting the professional development of the interns in the long run.

The number of visits to internship schools they are conducting and the duration of each of these visits are according to the guidelines for internship's demands. The visits are taken as opportunity to discuss relevant issues of the teaching and learning process based on observations of the interns' classroom performance. Additionally mentors are advised on how to improve their strategies for classroom observation by the teacher educators. Moreover the assignment of interns at school (as regards numbers of lessons and relief work to be taught) is taken care of.

A particularly important field of teacher educators' work is the assessment of interns' achievements. A training workshop on this issue has been provided by the GTZ in 2003, which has been widely attended by teacher educators. According to the teacher educators' appraisal there is still improvement needed, in order to familiarise both teacher educators and mentors with assessment strategies. At the moment inconsistencies of mentors' and teacher educators' assessments can be discovered, guidelines for internship are not being properly internalised in all cases.

*...from School Principals*

Principals attend one day training programmes conducted at the NCOE and found them as useful. They seemed to be providing professional guidance to the interns, supervising the work of interns regularly and providing opportunities for interns to develop professional skills. Their relationships with the NCOE President and visiting teacher educators were found to be good. Allocation of classes and tasks to interns has not been carried out according to the guidelines in one school. In this school each intern is assigned a single class to act as the class teacher, due to the shortage of primary teachers. In both schools interns have been assigned with relief work in addition to the 15 periods per week limit. Both Principals did not seem to be confident about assessment of interns. They expressed their willingness to participate in further training on this aspect. The Principals were well aware of the difficulties interns have to undergo in finding accommodation in the school localities. They mentioned that

accommodation fees in the school localities are quite high and interns are unable to cover this cost with their meagre allowance.

...*from Mentors*

Mentors are quite aware of the internship's requirements regarding its function to strengthen interns' teaching practice and competencies. They attend the respective training workshops and awareness programmes, which were provided at the NCOE. Nevertheless they remark that further training is needed in order to enable them to strengthen their role in the internship's implementation. Mentors support interns' attempts to gather teaching experiences by observing their lessons and guiding them in planning and self-assessing. Mentors have enough confidence in carrying out the tasks assigned to them. None of the mentors considered their additional workload as problem. Assessment strategies as outlined in the guidelines for internship (assessment sheets, etc.) do not seem to be comprehensively familiar to mentors. Further, they demonstrate a very self-confident attitude and rely on their own assessment strategies. They suggest that classroom observation should be strengthened regarding its assessment purpose.

Mentors from the Tamil medium school have not read the "Guidelines for Internship" as they have not received copies of this booklet. Sinhala medium mentor commented that the book is extremely useful to guide the interns properly. All three mentors have attended the "Introduction Meetings on Internship" conducted at the NCOE and have found them to be very useful. Meetings at school level do not take place regularly. However, there is evidence that informal review meetings are conducted occasionally.

...*from Interns and Post-Interns*

The interns' appraisal of the internship's contribution to gathering classroom practice confirms the estimations of the NCOE President, teacher educators and mentors.<sup>7</sup> Focus group discussions and structured interviews with recent post-interns reveal that they are overall quite satisfied with the internship's implementation and state that they are given sufficient opportunity to practice and enhance their teaching competencies. Interns and post-interns appreciate the different techniques applied in order to strengthen their teaching competencies. The maintenance of a reflective journal, which is of particular importance to them is valued as most helpful to enhance teaching practice. Although the interns feel well

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<sup>7</sup> Actually the group of interns as referred to here consists of interns (who are currently undergoing the programme) and *post-interns* (who have already passed the programme and are now newly appointed in-service teachers). Since the latter group is asked to appraise the programme retrospectively, they are subsumed under the group of interns.

and adequately guided by mentors and teacher educators, still they state that there is at least partly not enough time for the needed individual guidance. However, the overall relationship between interns and mentors is quite good. Interns feel well accepted and treated as equal colleagues. An obstacle to successfully practising is seen in problems, which arise at the very beginning of the programme: interns do not feel well prepared for taking up the internship programme. After passing the initial phase of teacher training, they are not quite aware of what the learning targets and objectives of the internship period are. They also report about problems and shortcomings created due to (un-) available resources.

## **4. Report of the Results**

The findings of the present evaluation activity were reported to representatives of the teacher training system and the Ministry of Education. Recommendations for further improvement of the internship programme's implementation and the establishment of a future evaluation approach could be drawn from the investigations that had been performed.

### **4.1 Recommendations to the Teacher Training System**

The findings show that major shortcomings refer to aspects that are related to the (un-) availability of resources. Local stakeholders' lacking knowledge e.g. regarding the necessity to conduct introductory meetings could be traced back to missing information, which needs to be provided by the authorities. The question of the programme's success seems to be directly linked to the coverage of local venues with materials and resources. It seems to be an inevitable prerequisite to ensure the distribution of the relevant materials (foremost the "Guidelines for Internship", but also reports on best-practice examples for action research projects and respective learning materials) to every local teacher training institution. Further steps to improve the equipment of the teacher training institutions were recommended to the *level of the education system* (Ministry of Education). Moreover, adequate training for teacher educators regarding the various issues related to the internship programme should be provided. Courses on assessment techniques are of particular meaning in this regard. At the *local level of NCOEs* it could be recommended to improve the connection of the initial teacher training and the internship period. Interns reported not to be fully informed about the learning targets of the internship, when entering it after having passed initial training. Preparatory courses which take place during the training at college could be designed in co-operation of both teacher trainers and internship school representatives. Further action to improve the computerisation of the col-

leges' and schools' administration should be taken at the local level. The amount and diversity of data which needs to be collected goes beyond what can be handled without the use of computers. Most institutions were appropriately equipped with respective hardware but actually stakeholders weren't adequately trained on how to employ it. Problems that occurred at the level of internship schools seem to be very much connected with the lacking of necessary resources. E.g. interns were assigned with the duties of regular class teachers since the needed human resources were missing. Such deficiencies can only be challenged in the long run and they're interlinked with (e.g. economical and political) developments, that are taking places outside the system of teacher training. After all, the most encouraging fact is that all the stakeholders involved in teacher training and the internship are highly committed to the education of prospective teachers and do any attempt to get the maximum effect out of the available resources.

#### **4.2 Development of an Overall Evaluation Approach**

The present evaluation approach is quality oriented and is aiming at involving the local stakeholders in the assessment procedures. Alongside evaluating the status of the internship programme's implementation it is an important objective of the evaluation activity to provide representatives of NCOEs and internship schools with an evaluation framework, which could easily be applied in the local venues and which promotes a "local evaluation culture". Thus the major requirement seems to be the usability of the instruments. Since the interviewed teacher educators made quite clear that the workload they are having is heavy enough even without evaluation procedures, complex designs of evaluative research (e.g. data gathering in a longitudinal perspective) seem not to be feasible at the level of the local teacher training institutions. In the long run, respective surveys and data gathering procedures could be conducted in the responsibility of institutions such as the NIE, which is quite experienced in this field of research.

At the level of NCOEs and internship schools it seems to be recommendable to focus on a handy set of evaluation routines. These should provide NCOEs and internship schools with the necessary information. Crucial in this regard is the question of the extent to which interns can make use of their internship period in terms of gathering professional experience (classroom teaching and extra-curricular work). Thus interns seem to be the most relevant data source since they can appraise the helpfulness of the programme against the background of their individual experience. Post-interns can additionally provide the teacher training system with a retrospective appraisal based on their experience as appointed in-service



teachers (evaluation of the internship period's actual contribution to their professional development).

The present evaluation framework primarily made use of focus-group discussions and structured interviews (open-ended questions) in order to provide interviewees with the opportunity to explain their opinions and to give information that go beyond, what can be inquired by applying rating scales. At the same time this kind of (qualitative) research always has to face the fact that only a very limited number of interviewees can be included to the selected sample. Additionally a survey on the interns' or post-interns' (retrospective) appraisal regarding the internship period was conducted. It could be helpful in order to collect additional data from greater (randomly chosen) samples. Alongside with interviewees' quality appraisals, these data should particularly be referring to students' or interns' personal dispositions (family background, learning achievements, academic biography prior to teacher training, marks and grades, etc.). Both qualitative (focus-group discussions, structured interviews) and quantitative (surveys, standardised questionnaires) research methods can be rather effortlessly applied in the local institutions. The data gathering instruments, which were applied in the present evaluation activity could serve as an example or a starting point for the respective discussion in the local institutions. One could even think of involving students in the work of data gathering and analysing in order to further their practical work-skills. A detailed plan regarding research objectives, data sources, data gathering procedures, reporting and filing routines and responsibilities is a prerequisite to implement institutional research successfully. Such planning should be done in the self-responsibility of the local institutions and under the guidance of senior researchers or consultants. It seems to be quite recommendable to collect respective data (both qualitative and quantitative) at least yearly in order to obtain a complete data set on every cohort of interns. Such proceeding allows to inquire variation in the estimations of different cohorts of interns over the years. The knowledge that is provided by such research results is inevitably needed in order to appraise a given institution's performance and to develop strategies for further improvement. Only a policy that is based on sound evidence as provided by the knowledge about the stakeholders views, working conditions and personal learning dispositions seems to be able to lead to sustainable quality developments and improvements.

## **5. Discussion**

The main objectives of the evaluation activity were to assess as to how far the intentions originally associated with the internship programme are being accomplished in a sample of primary NCOEs and to develop a

model evaluation process that could be used by the system for future use. The original intentions of the programme are clearly spelled out in the “Guidelines for Internship”, which is highly appreciated by all stakeholders. Data gathered, from several sources using several techniques, clearly reveals that the internship programme is implemented to a satisfactory level in the NCOEs and the internship schools and is making good progress in achieving the intended objectives. It was encouraging to note that the NCOE Presidents and the teacher educators are highly committed to make this programme a success. Internship Committees are functioning in NCOEs to a satisfactory level. High level of cooperation was also evident from the internship school Principals and mentors. The present interns feel that they are quite well supported by the mentors, Principals and the visiting teacher educators in gathering classroom experiences, furthering their professional competencies and carrying out their action research projects. This view was shared by the post interns too, to a great extent. However, the data also revealed that there are several shortcomings hindering the progress of implementation. Most of these shortcomings could be rectified without much effort and cost, provided some of the key mechanisms responsible for the programme’s implementation are placed in order. Special effort has been made to highlight the key strengths and key weaknesses specific to each NCOE surveyed. Further, ways of rectifying the identified weaknesses have been suggested. It is envisaged that the responsible authorities will make use of these recommendations to further strengthen the internship programme that has already made a significant impact in the teacher education field. Further, it is also envisaged that the proposed evaluation approach, that can be claimed as a quality-oriented and non-threatening approach committed to consultation and dialogue, will be utilized productively to evaluate the implementation of the internship programme in rest of the NCOEs in particular, and other similar programmes in the future.

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