

THE 1984 TEACHER EDUCATION REFORM IN MEXICO

— FOCUSING ON THE SURVEY'S DATA —

M. Natividad Lopez Tinajero
Graduate Student of Hiroshima University

摘 要

メキシコにおける1984年の教師教育の改革
— アンケート調査を中心にして —

ロペス・ティナヘロ・マリア・ナティヴィダッド
(広島大学大学院学生)

本論文は、メキシコ合衆国の教師教育政策に関する研究の一部をなすものであり、特に1984年に実施された教師教育改革を中心に取り上げたものである。この改革の成果をより明確にするために、改革の前後にメキシコ州の師範教育に携わってきた現職の師範学校教官を対象にして調査を行った。

1984年の改革は、メキシコ師範教育史上、最も重要な構造上の改革であると思なすことができる。この改革によって、師範教育は、従来大学に限ってのみ与えられていた学士レベルと同等の専門学位授与権を認められた。この事実は、教師という職業の専門職化にとって、大変重要な段階を表している。この改革はまた、師範教育における教育研究発展の促進と教授—学習過程における重要な転換であり、教師教育の質的向上に貢献した。のみならず、現職研修にも重要な転換をもたらしたのである。

しかし、師範学校が真の高等教育機関としての認知を受けるためには、いくつかの課題が残されていることが明らかになった。第1に、他の高等教育機関の間でよりよい地位を得るための教育研究の成果の改善、第2に、他の高等教育機関との交流を促進するための外部への公開、第3に、改革実施を困難にさせている財源不足の改善である。

今日、教師の専門職化のために、師範学校の真の高等教育機関への移行を遅らせている要因を除去する効果的な方法を見出すことが緊急課題である。

I. INTRODUCTION

The present article is a part of a broader study which analyzes Mexican teacher education policy. That study is specifically centered on the reform of normal education carried out in 1984.

From its establishment in 1823, normal education has undergone many reforms. However, the 1984 reform was the most important step taken by the Mexican government within the policy of professionalization aimed to elevate the quality of teacher education. From that time, it was expected that normal schools would become higher education institutions from an academic point of view.

Most of the literature written in this field concentrates exclusively on those aspects resulting from the reform's implementation (problems in educational research development, the teaching practice in the new curriculum, etc.). However, there are few studies that offer a broad analysis of the educational policy in the context of this reform. Furthermore, the mechanisms for the evaluation of this reform were not clearly defined from its implementation and there is also a lack of studies in this regard.

Looking for a better understanding of the reform's background and content, this study included a historical analysis as well as a discussion of matters related to the implementation of this reform in the state of Mexico. Because of the short period that the reform have been in effect, and the difficulty that this possess to an evaluation and analysis based upon historical data, it was designed a survey which was administered to current normal schools' professors who have been involved in teacher education both before and after the reform's implementation in that state.

The survey was divided into two sections, the first section (30 questions) aimed to inquire into the attainments and results of the 1984 normal education reform from a protagonist point of view, and the second section (70 questions) was structured in order to discover those factors that have persisted throughout normal education's history.

The specific purpose of this article is to present a descriptive analysis of the results obtained in the survey's first section which included six relevant topics: relationship between theory and practice; normal schools' functions; curriculum; professors; students; and the status of normal schools as higher education institutions. Knowing the opinion of those who are directly related with normal education in that state will permit us to evaluate the effectiveness of this reform more precisely, making possible, at the same time, the identification of those features that have been fully achieved, those that require to be improved, as well as those features that have remained unchanged despite the reform, and need to be reconsidered. This study could be a good starting point in searching a better options toward the improvement of teacher education in Mexico.

II. FINDINGS OF THE HISTORICAL ANALYSIS

1) Historical background of teacher education in Mexico

Taking into account the normal schools' historical trajectory, Mexican normal education

history may be divided into four stages: (1) Origins of teacher training in Mexico (1823-1886); (2) Definition of normal education features (1887-1923); (3) Normal education as upper secondary level education (1924-1968); and (4) Normal schools as higher education institutions (1969-until present).

2) The reform of 1984

During the fourth stage, normal education was transformed into higher education. The plan of study of 1972 introduced for first time the contents of upper secondary education (bachillerato) into the normal school curricula. However, it was not until 1973 when normal education was actually transformed into higher education. This transformation was expressed as follows by the Federal Law of Education in 1973.

The structure of higher education includes Bachelor, Master and Doctorate's programs.

... Normal education -in all its levels and specialties- becomes part of such higher education structure^①.

This disposition was ratified in 1978 by the Law for the Coordination of Higher Education^②. This major change, however, only took place in the legal arena, while in the academic sphere, normal schools' activities adhered to their traditional practices. Until this time, the multiple reforms carried out in normal education had only increased the number of years required to study at normal schools or adjusted the plan of study by including or excluding some subjects. None of these reforms however, substantially altered normal schools' structure.

The presidential Agreement of March 22, 1984 established that: (1) normal education at its initial level and in all its kinds and specialties had to have the academic rank of a Bachelor in education, (2) all candidates to be admitted to normal schools must have an Upper Secondary School Certificate, (3) normal schools' curricula must adhere to the Secretariat of Public Education stipulations^③. This reform, attempted to eradicate the incompatibility between the higher status of normal education granted by law and the academic practices in normal schools.

Proposals of this reform were qualitatively different from those of previous reforms. Major changes were experienced in normal schools' functions, curriculum, and in-service training. All these changes let us affirm that the reform of 1984 is one of the most important reforms in Mexican normal education history. Nonetheless, twelve years after its implementation, we do not know if its purposes have been fully accomplished.

III. A CASE STUDY OF THE STATE OF MEXICO

Since the application of educational policies in Mexico are not reproduced in the same way in each state of the country, this study analyzes, specifically, the way in which the 1984's reform was implemented and its outcomes in the state of Mexico. This state was chosen because of the following two reasons: (1) its long historical trajectory in teacher education -its first normal school as early as 1882-. Nowadays, this state holds the largest number of normal schools in Mexico, all of them being state normal schools. At present there are 36 normal schools under its jurisdiction; (2) its geographical location, the state of Mexico has developed a large and strong industrial sector, and for this reason, it is the arrival point of those who move from the countryside to the outskirts of the city looking for better life conditions. Consequently, this state has a high educational demand, making necessary the production of more and better prepared teachers.

Furthermore, in order to be able to educate better teachers it is paramount to analyze and evaluate what has been done in the field up-to-date so that successful and promising plans can be drawn.

In order to analyze the reform's outcomes in that state, it was designed a survey which was administered to normal school professors who have been involved in teacher education both before and after the reform's implementation.

1) The objectives of the survey

The first section was designed with the purpose of inquiring into the attainments and results of the 1984 normal education reform from the viewpoint of concerned teachers. It contained 30 questions (see the attached questionnaire). Subjects were asked to respond to each item of a three-point scale, defined by the labels of: (a)Yes, due to the reform, this fact has been fully reached; (b)Yes, due to the reform, this fact has been partially reached; (c)No, it has not happened yet.

2) The sample

The survey was administered during the summer and autumn of 1996. Subjects were a sample of professors currently employed in normal schools. Ten questionnaires were distributed to each of the 36 Mexico State normal schools, making a total of 360 questionnaires and their respective 360 answer-sheets. 350 answer-sheets were returned. The total number of professors at normal schools is 2,182, therefore, the questionnaire was responded by 16.23% of Mexico state's normal school professors. Among them, those pertaining subjects who have been working at primary normal-schools during at least the last 12 years (the time during which the reform have been in effect 1984-1996) were selected. Work-time was chosen as a parameter expecting that the responses had significance

from a historical stand point, and expecting also that such responses could provide relevant data in relation to both periods, prior and posterior to the reform. Applying this criterion, the sample was limited to 110 subjects, 5.10% of the total.

3) Method

In order to get information about the results and attainments of the 1984 normal education reform, subjects were inquired about six relevant topics: relationship between theory and practice; normal schools' functions; curriculum; professors; students; and the status of normal schools as higher education institutions.

It is important to mention that, upon presenting the results, there are used some data obtained in the second section.

4) Results

As figure 1 shows, in inquiring subjects about the attainments and results of the 1984 reform, it was found that the highest scores are placed in answer (b), named "yes, due to the reform this fact has been partially reached." In fact, the higher score's percentages are placed only in answers (b) and (c).

Considering answers (a) and (b) as positive results, in terms of the reform's attainments, it may be concluded that the reform's objectives have not been fully accomplished.

Figure 1 also shows the items that teachers considered not reached yet. The highest scores were placed, in all the cases, in answer (c), named "no, it has not happened yet". Nonetheless, only the last six items (Q11, 17, 27, 12, 21, 27 and 20) were considered not reached by more than 50% of responders.

Analysis of qualitative data revealed that the 1984 reform's major attainments took place basically in the following areas (the phrases in italics make reference to the survey's items, and the data enclosed in parentheses refer to the question number and the percentage of subjects so responding).

A) Normal schools' functions. Since 1984, normal schools were required to perform not only teaching function, but educational research and extension and diffusion of the culture as well. In order to develop these functions the internal organization of normal schools was restructured.

In inquiring subjects about these functions, they stated that: given that (only after the reform) *research is promoted at normal schools (Q6 : b 60%)*, *results of educational research have been improved (Q7 : b 56%)*. On the other hand, *academic extension and cultural diffusion in normal schools has encouraged a stronger link with the community (Q8 : b 59%)* and through this function, normal schools have *achieved a better link with primary education (Q9 : b 57%)*. Nonetheless it can be argued that subjects recognize that there

are still some problems in these areas. As they answered, *there has never been sufficient the economic support to carry out educational research (2nd. section, Q23:51%) and activities of academic extension are limited because financial support has never been enough (2nd. section, Q25:58%)*. In addition, *there are not efficient links among teaching, research, and extension and diffusion at normal schools (Q11:49%)*. Responders affirmed that *results of research at normal schools are not of a good quality (2nd. section, Q68:42%)*, and that *normal schools' graduates are not sufficiently prepared to assume the role of teacher-researcher (Q12: c 62%)*.

The relationship among the three main functions of institutions of higher education has been a debatable point not only at normal schools but also at university level. It has been considered that an optimum interrelationship among these functions is a basic starting point toward the improvement of academic levels. Responders stated that *at normal schools, there are not efficient links among teaching, research, and extension and diffusion*. However, at normal schools these three functions are represented by various co-ordinations, and subjects contradictory answered that *there is an adequate interrelation among the different co-ordinations*.

B) Curriculum. It was transformed into a 4-year curriculum after upper secondary school (bachillerato). In order to achieve the integral preparation of teachers the curriculum was structured in four formation outlines: social, pedagogical, psychological and instrumental outline. There is a general core-curriculum that all students must study during the first four semesters and the remaining four semesters integrate the specialized courses (Major). During this cycle, subjects specifically related to primary education are included.

As for the curriculum, responses were very interesting, many subjects responded that the 1984 *normal education curriculum is theoretically well-supported (2nd. section, Q39:40%)*, that *programs' contents (after the reform) are adequate to reach the desired normal-schools graduates' profile (2nd. section Q46:55%)*. 55% of subjects stated that only after the reform *programmes' contents have contributed to the professionalization of teaching (2nd. section, Q45)*.

Nonetheless, many subjects also affirmed that 1984 programmes' *contents are dense and excessively theoretical (2nd. section , Q40:43%)*, and *programmes' structures are not clear (2nd. section, Q42:35%)*. This answers may be explained by the two following reasons: first, the curriculum of 1984 incorporated for the first time, subjects that were not used to be taught at normal schools, such a courses as educational research, curricular theory and design, educational planning among others were included. In addition, some contents were broadened and the suggested bibliography was enriched including textbooks that traditionally were not used in normal education. Thus, teachers were not familiarized with the new contents. Second, it could indicate that teachers are not well prepared to teach the new contents or that they still perceive teaching as a

practical career.

- C) Relationship between theory and practice. The 1984 curriculum radically changed the social role of teacher by secularizing it and regarding him/her as a teaching professional. Consequently, the importance of teacher participation in educational research stands out, in other words, the teacher was regarded as a producer and user of knowledge through educational research as opposed to a transmitter of ultimate truths. The reform demanded from teachers to hold a scientific view of education as well as to assume a main role in the elaboration of proposals and solutions to educational problems^④. This conception led to a new perception of the teacher-student relationship where both, teachers and students actively participate in the educational process.

Regarding the relationship between theory and practice, most subjects answered that this relation has experienced important changes. *Teacher education has put more emphasis on theoretical rather than practical aspects (Q 1 : b 51%)*. *The teacher-student-knowledge relationship has become more dynamic (Q 2 : b 60%)*. In fact, *verbalism in teaching (lecture methodology, passive role of students) does not exist anymore in normal education (Q 3 : b 61%)*. As a consequence, *the academic level in normal schools has been elevated (Q 4 : b 61%)* and *graduates from normal schools are better prepared to face current problems in primary schools (Q 5 : b 56%)*.

- D) Normal school professors. Related to normal school professors, the most notable attainment was in-service training since *new opportunities for teachers' professional enrichment have been opened (Q13: b 55%)*. As a consequence of the reform, *normal school professors organize meetings in order to discuss themes of actuality (Q15: b 51%)*. Furthermore, subjects considered that *there is a correspondence between the academic level of normal school professors and the curriculum's demands (Q14: b 54%)*. The new curriculum's demands could not be fully reached without a competent staff. The reform demanded from teachers to be conscious about vertiginous development of science and technology as well as to maintain abreast to-date through reflective and constant self-learning. Consequently new opportunities for in-service teachers were opened and the supply and demand for teachers' professional enrichment became more dynamic. This fact will surely contribute to the improvement of the academic level in normal schools. However, it seems that this dynamism does not have a direct relationship with decision making process, since 50% of subjects denied that *decision making process at normal schools is more democratic (Q17: c)*.

Scholars have coincided in affirm that professionals derive their status from the education they receive and the individual and collective autonomy they claim and enjoy in the exercise of their professional duties. Within the confines of a given task, professionals decide for themselves how to proceed. Under this consideration, teachers professional enrichment must have a direct relation with the improvement of academic

levels, but also it should contribute to strength teachers' autonomy.

E) Normal schools' students. The reform aimed to form a critical, reflective professional as opposed to the traditional prospective teacher, who was obedient and passive. It was demanded from future teachers to be conscious of their responsibility in the pupils' integral education. It was demanded from them to hold a scientific view of education as well as to assume a main role in the elaboration of proposals and solutions to educational problems. This conception of teacher regarded them as direct producers and users of knowledge through educational research as opposed to a transmitters of ultimate truths⁵. In summary, it was hoped to develop a critical, reflective professional as opposed to the traditional normal school teacher.

In this area, most subjects stated that, as a consequence of the reform, *normal school students are critical (Q18: b 55%)*. *Students actively create their own spaces for discussion and debate (Q19: b 51%)*. And *graduates from normal schools are better prepared to face current problems in primary schools (Q5: b 56%)*. However, subjects recognized that *normal school graduates are not sufficiently prepared to assume the role of teacher-researcher (Q12: c 62%)*. This situation is likely related to the fact that educational research has not been a function demanded from normal schools. Educational research has been one of the most debatable points of the reform, normal schools have a lot to do in this regard.

F) Normal schools as higher education institutions (Figure 1.2). State of Mexico's normal schools have traditionally worked without having direct communication among them, this situation has not contributed to the improvement of the academic level in normal schools. In this regard, subjects answered that (due to the reform) *communication among the different normal schools has improved (Q22: b 49%)*. However, 43% of subjects denied that *communication among normal schools and other institutions of higher education has improved (Q23: c)*. In order to integrate normal schools into the higher education network it is necessary to promote systems of exchange among the different institutions of higher education. Normal schools should open their doors looking, on the one hand, to learn from other experiences. And, on the other hand, they should show what they are doing. Only in this process of interchange a real feedback could be possible.

In asking subjects about normal schools' higher education status, many of them denied that *normal schools are in fact, institutions of higher education (Q25: c 47%)*. 39% of subjects denied that *normal schools' organization has to do directly with their status as higher education (Q26: c)*. Moreover 45% of subjects denied that *the teaching career is considered to be a professional career (Q24: c)*.

Nonetheless, an item that it is important to point out is number 27 which got the highest negative score's percentage (c 70%). Subjects stated that *financial resources for normal schools have not been increased*. It is well known for all of us that no institution of higher education is able to fully reach its basic functions without sufficient funds.

In this terms it is important to rethink the current administration of normal schools in that state. To maintain 23 primary-normal schools within a sole State seems not to be the best option. As a result of the reform's implementation, in the 1987-1988 academic year, normal schools total enrollment was only 2,921 students⁶. With this enrollment and such number of schools is too difficult to attempt the creation of true institutions of higher education. Consequently, the current administration of normal schools at that state should be reexamined.

Another important results obtained in this area are (1) that related with teachers' perception of teaching as not to be a professional career, and (2) teachers' negation of normal schools as higher education institutions. These are the most critical points that were found in the application of this questionnaire. These points are directly related with teachers' self-perception, they do not perceive themselves as professionals. In addition, in Mexico as in other many countries, teaching does not posses a high social value. We consider that improving the social value of the teaching "profession" is a task that should be started by teachers.

IV. CONCLUSION

Through the new curricula, the reform of 1984 attempted to definitively establish the teaching career as a profession as well as to produce critical teachers who would be exemplary professionals, educated in a higher education institution.

Twelve years after the reform's implementation, it can be argued that it has brought about very important changes in teacher education. Interpreting the survey's results, it can be concluded that this reform has been the most important structural reform carried out in Mexican normal education history. Through the reform, normal schools were authorized to grant professional degrees, a privilege that, to that date, was given exclusively to universities. This fact has represented a very important step toward the professionalization of the teaching career. The reform has also contributed to elevate the quality of teacher education by theorizing and broadening normal education's curricula; it has radically changed normal schools' organization; it has promoted the development of educational research at normal schools, and has produced important changes in the teaching-learning process. Furthermore, it has brought about important changes on in-service training.

However, normal schools have still a lot to do in order to be considered as higher education institutions. On the one hand, normal schools should stop working isolately. They should open their doors in order to promote exchanges with other institutions of higher education. On the other hand, financial resources assigned to normal schools should be augmented according to the functions demanded from them. The lack of funds to

promote normal schools development has proven to be the most difficult obstacle faced in implementing the reform. In addition, it can be argued that in the state of Mexico the existence of such number of primary normal schools (23 at present) has obstructed the transformation of normal schools into higher education institutions.

Traditionally, normal schools have not develop educational research. Thus, they have a lot to do in this field which in itself has been the most debatable point of the reform. Improving educational research products will be the best way of getting a better position among other institutions of higher education. This improvement will be possible when normal schools integrate in a team work among them and with other institutions.

What is important to underline is that normal school professors are convinced that due to the reform, normal schools' standards have been improved. However, it can not be concluded that the reform's objectives have been fully reached. As normal school professors stated, in fact, normal schools are still in a transition period aiming to reach the level appropriated to higher education.

For its implications in teaching professionalization, upgrading normal schools to a higher rank is, nowadays, an urgent necessity in any nation. Consequently, we should reexamine the above mentioned points in order to discover an effective way to eradicate those factors that have slowed normal schools' development, making possible, at the same time, the real transformation of normal schools into higher education institutions.

NOTES

- ① Ley Federal de Educación 1973. Art. 18. In Normas Básicas. Educación Superior, p. 12
- ② Ibid. See Ley para la Coordinación de la Educación Superior. Art. 3, p. 24
- ③ Presidencia de la República. Diario Oficial de la Federación. Acuerdo presidencial del 22 de marzo de 1984.
- ④ Gobierno del Estado de México, Planes de Estudio de las Licenciaturas en Educación Preescolary Primaria pp.16 y 17.
- ⑤ Ibid, pp. 21 y 22.
- ⑥ Gobierno del Estado de México. Secretaría de Educación, Cultura y Bienestar Social. Dirección de Planeación.

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Figure 1. THE 1984 REFORMS ATTAINMENTS AND RESULTS

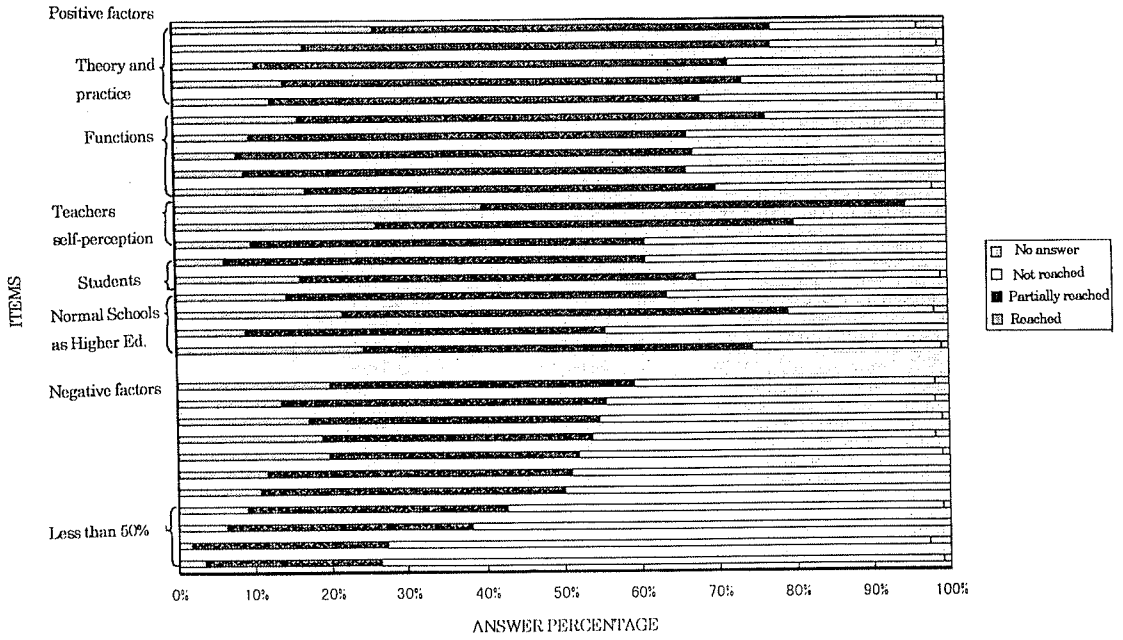
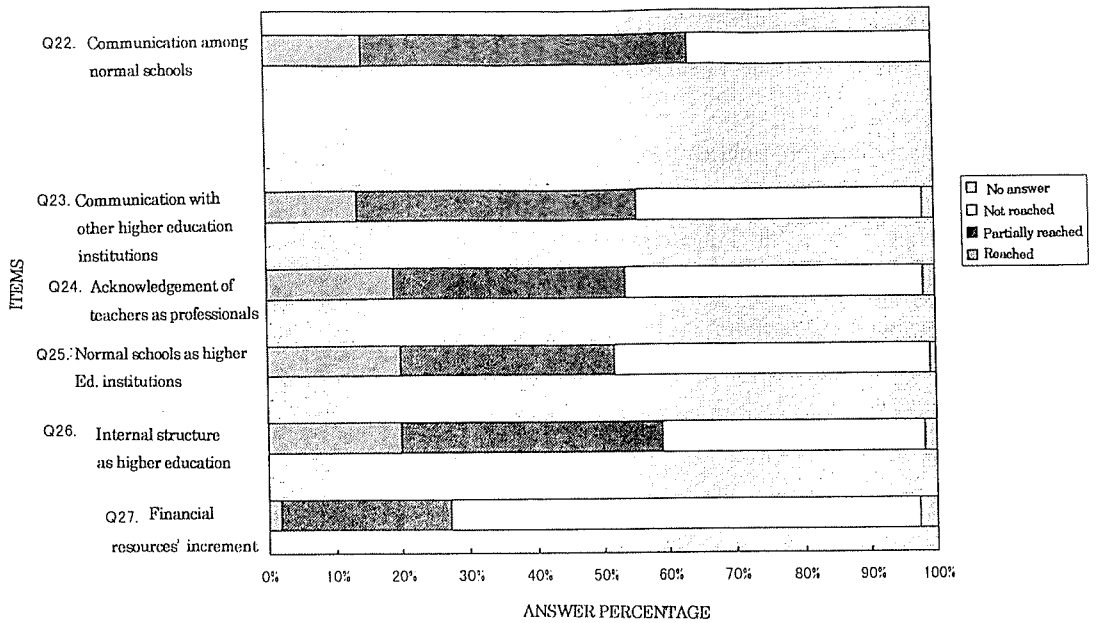


Figure 1.2 NORMAL SCHOOLS AS HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS



THE REFORM' S ATTAINMENTS

QUESTIONNAIRE (First section):

1. Teacher education has put more emphasis on theoretical rather than practical aspects.
2. The teacher-student-knowledge relationship has become more dynamic.
3. Verbalism in teaching does not exist anymore in normal education.
4. The academic level in normal schools has been elevated.
5. Graduates from normal schools are better prepared to face current problems in primary schools.
6. Research is promoted at normal schools.
7. Results of educational research have improved at normal schools.
8. Academic extension and cultural diffusion in normal schools has encouraged a stronger link with the community.
9. Through academic extension and cultural diffusion, normal schools have achieved a better link with primary education.
10. There is an adequate interrelation among the different co-ordinations.
11. There are efficient links among teaching, research, and extension and diffusion at normal schools.
12. Normal schools' graduates are sufficiently prepared to assume the role of teacher-researcher.
13. New opportunities for teachers' professional enrichment have been opened.
14. There is a correspondence between the academic level of normal school professors and the curriculum's demands.
15. Normal schools professors organize meetings in order to discuss themes of actuality.
16. Administrative tasks imposed upon normal school teachers have been reduced.
17. Decision making at normal schools is more democratic.
18. Normal school students are critical.
19. Normal school students actively create their own spaces for discussion and debate.
20. Only students who have a vocation for teaching enter normal schools.
21. Paternalism at normal schools has declined.
22. Communication among the different normal schools has improved.
23. Communication among normal schools and other institutions of higher education has improved.
24. The teaching career is considered to be a professional career.
25. Normal schools are in fact, institutions of higher education.
26. Normal schools' organization has to do directly with their status as institutions of higher education.
27. Financial resources for normal schools have been increased.
28. Pedagogic practice's objectives have been clearly defined.

29. Normal schools' organization is less vertical.
30. After studying the two-year core curriculum at normal schools, students have a real possibility to transfer from one normal school to another.