

Social Inclusion: Indian Education Policy and Issue of ‘Equal Education Opportunity (Equity)’ with respect to Issue of ‘Quality Education’

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Abstract

Education is broadly seen as a tool for Social Transformation instead of means of social justice. The makers of constitution of India accepted education as development goal, that should be, accessible to all sections of the society, and to elevate them so that they became developed and prosperous. The presented paper critically analyse the Indian education policies 1968, 1986 and the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act (2009) with respect to Quality of Education and Equal Education Opportunities. The paper presents two dimension of Quality of education: first as input and output and second as Equal Education opportunities. The paper also provides logical arguments, to show that, Quality of Education is not contradictory with Equal Education Opportunity, rather they complement each other.

Key words: Education Policies, Quality of Education, Equal Education Opportunities, Socially Deprived Children.

Introduction

Education in the society is seen in form of such contributing medium, that not only inculcate human values, but also transforms human-being into human resources, for the prosperity and development of the society .Whereas education acts as an instrument for social change, the same is also considered as the mean of social reproduction (Bourdieu, 1986). Upliftment of any society depends directly upon the quality of education, and now the question arises, what sort of education can realise above mentioned goals?

Indian society has a very complex structure, where several religion, caste, creed, gender and languages co-exist. Therefore, the development of Indian Society depends on the appropriate and proportional distribution of all available resources. Society consists of many sections, which had been victimized of deprivation from decades. Scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, women and some minorities can be placed under such section, who are still at the margins of the society, and are also educationally backward. Thus the society expects

such education system that should provide Equal Education Opportunities (EEO) to all sections.

After Independence in India, many challenges exist with respect to education, and to make education available for all was one of the biggest challenges, that also reflects in the existing educational policies in India. From the Common school system (1964) to The right of children to free and compulsory education act -2009(RTE act 2009), it shows the efforts of making Equal Opportunity in Education available for all. The distribution of limited resources should be done in such a way, so that “Opportunity of education” reaches up to maximum masses. At the time of Independence, “Quality of Education” was one of the important issues amongst the other major issues like “Education for All “and “Equal Opportunity in Education”.

Quality of Education: Input & Output Vs. Equal Education Opportunities (Equity)

Whenever we talk about education, Quality of Education appears as the main concern. Quality of Education is very vast, complex, multidimensional and subjective concept, that has many determined factors. It is also not constant and has been changing over the years due to several factors (i.e., social, economic, political and cultural etc.). Being subjective in nature, it has two main aspects, learners’ achievement and equity. Equity is considered as the main element of Quality of education (Naik, 1979).

In the first aspect of Quality of education, competitions were mainly focused, and those brilliant, who are ahead in competitions only got the Opportunities to move further in life. Here the term brilliant refer to those, who are well competent in language and storehouse of information along with confidence. Such form of quality only fulfills the need of market economy and globalisation.

Naik (1979:182-183) defined the Quality of education by the following parameters:-

- a) Excellence in English language – knowledge of English language considered synonymous with “Quality” of education.
- b) Verbal fluency, linguistic ability and the capacity to remember and reproduce are other important factors with respect to the Quality of education.
- c) Inputs - in educational institutions i.e., general education, professional training of teachers, class size, quality of building and equipments, curricula used and text-book prescribed.
- d) Output – in performance i.e., examination results.

Winch, C. (2010) described Quality of Education, in form of system which receives inputs and delivers output; here input refers to aims, curriculum, pedagogy and formative assessments whereas output refers to summative assessment of outcome.

As per the view of Kumar K. (2010), here, education is considered as the notion of long time investment. It seems that, such form of quality of education nurtures the thoughts against the reservation policy, thus Merit vs. Reservation and Quality vs. Reservation emerges out as burning issues. Here quality of education and equity seems to be contradictory in nature with each other.

In the second aspect, Equity is included as the main element of Quality of education. Those socially deprived groups, who were excluded earlier from the education system, were now included. To make education accessible for all and when special provisions will be introduced and implemented, then it should not degrade the Quality of education in such way so that it may merely restrict up to literacy. In National Curriculum Framework (NCF) 2005 and in RTE act 2009 , both aspects of quality of education were incorporated , but due to the limited resources and hidden agenda of state , it seems necessary to know whether states are taking relevant steps to make quality education accessible for all or not (i.e., both in terms of input and output).

How education will be made accessible to the socially deprived sections (SDS)? What steps had been taken for these SDS for their social Inclusion in education? What are the parameters to insure quality of education? In this era of globalisation, where quality of education merely became „customer satisfaction“ and schools became „market agent“ where quality of education can be purchased depending upon the purchase capacity, in this atmosphere there is need for „equity “, which is an important aspect of quality of education, and thus it became mandatory and essential to know the role of states in this regard.

Analysis of Education Policies with respect to ‘Quality of Education’

In the published documents by UNESCO and UNICEF, Quality of education has always seen in terms of learners achievements. Quality of Education was always present as an important element in the Indian education policies but it emerges out as an independent dimension of education in District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) (Sarangpani, 2010). Though in DPEP, quality has not been defined directly, but “there is whole discourse of quality improvement which is concerned with various dimensions of schools: classroom process, teacher competencies, teaching–learning materials, learning competence, professional and marginal capacities of educational functionaries etc” (Valeskar, 2010, p.76).

Now the question arises whether there is any correlation between the “Equal Educational Opportunities” and mentioned parameters regarding the “Quality of education”. Through different educational policies, several efforts have been made to provide equal opportunities in education, special efforts have been made to include, those sections that were deprived from education earlier. Free books, free uniforms, free meals, scholarships and at present under RTE act 2009-compulsory and free education for children between 6 to 14 years of age has been arranged.

Education Policies and Issue of Quality of Education

Quality of education is one of the main concerns of the world. As we know that the quality of education is subjective in nature, in terms of development goal for education, quality of education has always given special place by state policy makers. From the last two decades quality of education has been focussed on priority, in which the main concern lies on input (i.e., physical infrastructure) and output (i.e., performance and achievements). Policy makers in India also emphasized for improving quality in education through its large scale programmes explicitly DPEP and Serva Siksha Abhiyan. There is need to know whether there is any correlation between equality and quality of education under educational policies, that means whether social Inclusion enhances the quality of education or they are contradictory with each other.

National Education Policy (1968)

On the basis of the recommendation by the Kothari Commission, the National policy 1968(NPE 1968) envisaged a National school system which means that , all students , irrespective of caste , creed , religion and sex would have access of education of a comparable quality up to a given level . It also gave a common educational structure (10+2+3) that was accepted across India. Thus the education for dalits, schedule tribes, and girls were a non issue in the policy, but such major changes has not been done at finance, curriculum and pedagogical level for their education(Velaskar ,2010).

In the later seventies and mid eighties , the main focus of the policy was on the expansion of elementary education, “equality goals of education were bluntly short changed for elitist , modernisation goals widespread education inequality and the failure to achieve universalisation of elementary education (henceforth UEE) became established truisms (Velaskar ,2010,p.70). States were only focussing to achieve the goal of universalisation of elementary education.

National Education Policy (1986)

The second Education policy on education was introduced in 1986(NPE 1986), which emphasized on the removal of disparities and to equalise education opportunities especially for three socially deprived groups i.e., Dalits, Tribal and Girls. In this policy there was an arrangement for compensatory education with respect to two groups namely Dalits and Adivasis. Velaskar (2010) believes that due to lack of sufficient funds the direct affects was on infrastructure provision for the dalits and Adivasis .Now new pattern in form of alternate school was evolved. Compensatory education and alternate school system was consider as the tool for supporting the Equal Education Opportunities. Under this policy, model schools were established to nurture the talented children of dalits who resides in villages, but Kumar

(2010) believes that this concept of model schools became the source of elite demands. Thus this policy of 1986, which emphasized on the equal opportunities in education, also get transformed into compensatory education.

Now it seems to be quite interesting that , whereas, in common school system and neighbourhood school system as proposed by the NPE(1968) ,to provide Equal education opportunities for all, was accepted , both theoretically and at policy level , and in NPE(1986) , where in the case of non-access of EEO for all , NFE was adopted as an option, thus the concept of „Common School“ merely became dream only , and the education is left accessible for only those who have the ability to afford , eventually the only left choice in terms of an optional way by the deprived section , became the truth of our education system . Directly or indirectly such education system, became the mode of nurturing the interests of selected groups (Kumar, 2010). Education in terms of alternate school system (NFE) , for the socially & educationally disadvantage group was not in accordance with the constitutional goals of education as they were prescribed in the Constitution of India .The aim of establishing the Pace-setting residential schools and Navodaya Vidyalayas , was to serve the objective of excellence coupled with equity and social justice (with reservation for the rural areas , SC"s and ST"s), but it also resulted in the fulfilment of the interests of elite classes .

The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act (2009)

Right to Education Act (RTE-2009) is considered as a revolutionary step in the field of education. Under this act, there is a provision of free and compulsory elementary education to the children aged between 6-14 years. There is a provision of 25% reservation in local and private schools for the children belonging to economical and weaker sections of the society. It is perceived to be important steps towards for access to education .Now this is hopeful that the children belonging to the weaker sections of society will get the opportunity to access Quality education. But there are many constraints in the way of implementation i.e., lack of financial resources, poor infrastructure, inadequacy of trained teachers, non-transparency and non-simplicity in the admission procedure. (Oxfam India Report, 2014). Economically and Socially deprived children suffer several problems in educational learning process. RTE at present form does not ensure the completion of education of all children with the commitment of quality Education.

Without Equity can Education be termed as ‘Quality Education’?

As we discussed that many steps were taken at policy level, but can we say that education is accessible to all in present scenario and whether they got the acceptance with their variegated identities to which they belong? EEO in education is still a prevailing challenge. Therefore the utmost need is do some special and extra efforts for providing EEO

in Education for them, so that they can fit in the parameters of Quality in education as prescribed above.

Socially deprived children (SDC) are facing several challenges with respect to opportunities in education. So the challenges for education for these socially deprived sections can be categorised in the following three parts:

- a) Non enrolment in schools
- b) High drop-out rate after admission in schools.
- c) Formal completion in school education, but not in terms of Quality of education (performance) .i.e., no command over language, poor pass percentage etc.

SDC faces multiple challenges (exclusion), as they belongs to socially diverse category , they are first generation / second generation learner and because of this they did not get any parental guidance and support in education , in addition these SDC face other factors that affects their education , such as sibling care , house hold work etc. In schools also, peer and teacher"s behaviour affects their learning atmosphere, as a result their absenteeism percentage increases and also become the reason for their dropout. In spite overcoming all these obstructing factor that effects their education, when they came to schools, then also either they form groups amongst themselves or they faces aloofness that results in the poor quality of education. Through special provisions in education i.e., through specific curriculum and pedagogical devices, the inequality faced by these SDC must be addressed, whether the source of this inequality came from class rooms.

“Equality can have various types depending upon its context, that is why ,with reference to education , we should know the correct type of equality”(Kumar,2010,p.15). Whenever we talk about quality in school education, then our prime focus is based on input and output. As far as SDC are concerned , they did not get the same input (i.e., basic infrastructure , learning strategy , learning environment , pedagogy etc.) as others , and due to this their output (i.e., achievements , performance) also gets adversely affected , and thus these SDC also get deprived in terms of Quality of education , and subsequently the need of special provision in education become essential for them . So, it shows that equality is one of the important aspects of quality of Education that enhance it.

Conclusion

Thus quality of education and EEO is complementary with each other. Both dimensions of quality of education fulfill the goal of education. We can say quality of education as such education that provides equal education opportunity for overall development of every child, without any prejudice. This type of education is beneficial for both, at society level as well as at individual level. At society level it will facilitate employment benefits, increased quantity and quality of human resource and at individual level it will nurture capabilities of every human-being to its optimum.

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