
QUEST FOR QUALITY EDUCATION

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Quality is the watchword in today's globalized world. People from all walks of life expect quality in all the products and services they get. It is only natural, therefore, on the part of people to look for quality very specially in education which is a primary agenda for every developing nation like India. Quality in education is indispensable because it not only plays a significant and remedial role in balancing the socio-economic framework of India, but also is the essence of Human Resource Development. It also determines the prospect of the younger generation, particularly the first generation learners.

Improving educational quality at all levels is a felt need. The impact of globalization is so profound that everyone has become very much anxious to compete with one another and choose the best. It is no wonder that most of the people prefer institutions, which are perceived to be high in academic standards, and well-equipped with latest technology and having a good reputation in their area. But, unfortunately, people have to pay through their noses to send their children to such posh schools. When the rich can afford a costly education, pupils from lower income cannot imagine to enjoy the fruits of studying in rich schools and of quality education. Despite their right to free education, the socially disadvantaged and economically poor children have become victims in the thick of global competition and consequently they lag behind.

What is the real status of education with respect to quality and excellence? Why is there no substantial improvement in the quality of education offered to the common people despite concerted efforts taken by the state and central governments to improve the quality in education? What would be the strategies to foster quality in education? The paper addresses these questions and offers suggestions to raise the quality in education.

Need for Quality Education

Education is a fundamental right and, therefore, no child can be deprived of this fundamental right to education. Today education has come to be regarded more than ever as a crucial tool or factor to accelerate the socio-economic transformation of the society. It goes without saying that quality education is needed to succeed in life. However, does every single individual in the country have the opportunities to access quality education? According to Education For All: Global Monitoring Report 2005 - The Quality Imperative (EFA: GMR), learners' cognitive development and inculcation of values and attitudes that further creative and emotional development characterise the quality education. Philippe Le Hou  rou, World Bank vice-president for South Asia was very emphatic about the need for improvement in the quality of education (Nanda, 2014). Quality education is necessary as it determines the quality of human capital that ensures innovation, higher levels of productivity, and increased economic growth; brings about in the learner a sense of self-worth and an accelerated development;

expands the horizons of knowledge; prepares the young learners to engage meaningfully in a global world; aims at developing skills of cooperation, shared responsibility, critical thinking and communication to take part in the global competition; and finally it inculcates positive and responsible values and attitudes and provides orientation to active participation in the growth of the society. Moreover foreign educational institutions pose a serious threat to Indian educational institutions with their world class infrastructure, financial resources, staff, reputation, etc. This necessitates quality educational improvement. So, learning and acquiring necessary skills are certainly fruits of quality education that builds human capital and ensures social cohesion. To compete in the economy of the future, every child should have a strong foundation in its academics and possess basic skills for adaptability, creativity, and lifelong learning (WorldBank, 2018).

Understanding “Quality Education”

In the global context the driving force behind the 21st Century economy is knowledge. This knowledge can be acquired only through quality education that develops human capital which is a fundamental element to ensure prosperity of a nation. Quality education that not only empowers the younger generation by equipping them with advanced knowledge and necessary professional competencies but also acts as a potential tool for a more sustainable future (Ginkel, 2005). The primary concern of UN’s Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) is to improve access to quality basic education and to reorient existing education for sustainable development by developing public understanding and awareness and by providing training for all sectors of private and civil society.

Education is a service provided to the entire mass of the country. The question in discussion is whether the education provided is of quality. So ‘what contributes to the quality education?’ is the primary concern of this paper. Quality in education can be best understood in terms of the learners and learning outcomes. The learners are the primary “clients” of the education service and they come to a classroom with their socio, economic and cultural backgrounds and their varied learning experiences of the past. Learning outcomes are the result of the process involved in the curriculum transaction.

Quality education refers to relevant academic curricula taught by competent and committed teachers who adopt suitable teaching-learning pedagogical methods that promote understanding rather than rote memorisation in a favourable learning ambience which includes well-equipped classrooms, teaching-learning materials, effective assessment of learning outcomes and leadership. Quality education is not merely meeting the higher academic standards and fulfilling increased academic course requirements. But it is more of engaging the learners intellectually in varied ways that enhance their skills of critical thinking and problem solving, power of imagination, etc.

Reasons for Poor Quality in Education

Let us discuss the reasons for the deterioration of quality of education at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels.

At the Tertiary Level

First, the proliferation of ill-planned and poorly equipped universities and colleges is one of the foremost reasons for decline in academic standards. In most of the colleges students' active participation in various academic ventures are at very low ebb and so no room for creativity and innovation (V.K.Rao, 2003). Second, students who have no real aptitude for higher learning and innovation are admitted. Third, students have a very weak foundation in core knowledge because of irrelevant curricula that do not match with the industry demands and that do not keep pace with the rapid advancements in science and technology resulted in. That is what, NASSCOM President Kiran Karnik (2006) pointed out while addressing the vice chancellors. Finally, political interventions in the appointment of vice chancellors as well as in the recruitment to teaching positions and the prevalence of corruption and favoritism are important reasons why the quality of our universities or centres for higher learning is in a state of despair as rightly pointed out by the former Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh in his address at the 150th Anniversary Function of University of Mumbai in 2007.

At the Secondary & Primary Level

Raghavan (2013) in his article "Why does the quality of education suffer?" rightly draws our attention to the inability of the children at the primary level to read and write and do simple arithmetic, the predominance of one or two teacher schools, inadequate resources and poor governance, shortage of dedicated teachers, teachers engaging in different works like conducting census or election duty and works assigned by the government during school hours, and the inability of the teachers to pay attention to individual students due to large number of students in the classroom. This affects seriously the very objective of quality education.

In his blog, Chanakya IAS Academy (June, 2017) observes that rote learning, non-merit based teachers, inadequate infrastructure, teacher-student ratio, and lack of output oriented approach are some of the factors responsible for the poor quality in secondary education. There is also a lack of emphasis on Problem Solving Skills, Creative Ideas, Group Discussions, etc. It is a known fact that bookish knowledge is overemphasised.

Irrelevant curricula that do not cater to the needs of the learner and the society, lack of innovative pedagogy employed by the teachers in curriculum transaction, poor quality teacher training, lack of specific policy initiatives focusing on the quality of education, teacher absenteeism, lack of funds, etc., act as setbacks to the quality education in schools. The World Bank report mentions that students are poorly equipped with practical competencies and they lack basic numeracy and literacy skills (Nanda, 2014). .

Fostering Quality Education

In his foreword to World Development Report 2018, Mr. Jim Yong Kim has rightly mentioned, "Given that today's students will be tomorrow's citizens, leaders, workers, and parents, a good education is an investment with enduring benefits" (WorldBank, 2018). A good quality education, if delivered well, has salutary effects on the individuals and the society as well. Prime Minister Narendra Modi clearly stresses the need for quality in learning, not schooling. Similarly MHRD Minister is emphatic when he says that improving education quality at every level is a top priority (Khuntia, 2016). Therefore, a multi-pronged strategy should be developed to improve the quality in education.

One sure means to maintain and sustain quality in education is that all educational programmes should keep continuously renewing for its relevance to the changing societal needs, personal needs of learner and to the emerging national development priorities (Govinda, 2014). As suggested by Dakar Framework for Action (2000), the teacher should employ a stimulating pedagogy that brings the curriculum to life and that determines what happens in the classroom and subsequently the quality of the learning outcomes. Need based professional development of teachers working in schools should be planned in such a way that the teachers will be well-equipped with recent trends in curriculum transaction.

The Central Government schemes like Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA), Padhe Bharat Badhe Bharat (2014), Rashtriya Avishkar Abhiyan (2015), National Repository of Open Educational Resources (NROER) and E-Pathshala are to be consistently made use of for providing qualitative education. Quality indicators like classroom-based learning assessment and the National Achievement Survey initiated by the government are essential for teachers to identify the learners' learning deficit by keeping track of their performance, provide them immediate feedback and take remediation measures for quality improvement. Capacity building for teachers and school heads is a must for school effectiveness which is an integral part of quality education. High-quality training programmes can be arranged with the help of the National Centre for School Leadership (Khuntia, 2016).

One of the ten suggestions presented by Sridhar Rajagopalan, Managing Director of Educational Initiatives (2015) to transform the quality of education in India is that reformation in Board Exams can be initiated by the state/centre. The primary focus of Board Exams is to test the level of understanding the children acquired over a period of time and not the rote-learning. Preparing humanistic and reflective teachers and developing more professional teachers to improve the quality of education has been suggested by NCFTE 2009. It is necessary, therefore, to bring in certain sea changes in teacher education programmes for qualitative improvement with respect to curriculum transaction and assessment (Vardhini, 2015). Concerted efforts are to be taken to attract young talent into the teaching profession for quality education. In addition, there is a need to infuse a 'work culture' among the teachers in order to create a 'quality culture' in education at all levels (Singh, 2006).

Goel & S.L.Goel (2010) have made significant proposals to maintain and sustain quality and excellence in higher education. One of the things they proposed is that there should be strong linkages between teaching and research, and centres of higher learning and industries. Furthermore a monitoring mechanism should be in place to evaluate performance and progress of teachers. This will be certainly a step forward towards quality sustenance.

In conclusion, quality education is all about qualitative curriculum transaction in an enabling environment using learner-centred pedagogy. Quality education is characterised by regular assessments to track progress in learning, capacity building of teachers and heads of the institution, focus on learning, ICT-based remediation programmes, well-equipped classrooms, and stimulating atmosphere. Let every educator commit unreservedly to quality education that ensures learning to know, learning to do, learning to be and learning to live together – the four pillars of education.

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