

Recent Challenges and Research on Quality Education in India

Thoshusie Katiry^{1*}

ABSTRACT

An effort has been made through this seminar paper to have an idea of the challenges that are being faced in modern times while providing quality education and the current research that is going on this topic. The paper gives an overview of the quality education as UNICEF's sustainable development goal number four. It tries to answer some specific questions as to why quality education. How to ensure quality education? What are the challenges of implementing quality education? How proper assessment, monitoring, governance, and accountability can help to develop quality education? Can spirituality and morality be of any help in this field? Or the modern technologies like ICT and Artificial Intelligence can assist in this regard? What is the situation of quality education in India? In the end, there will be an attempt to have some suggestions regarding the proper implementation of quality education.

Keywords: *Quality Education, Challenges, Solutions, Research, Indian Perspective*

Quality is an abstract word which comes from the Latin word qualities (value, characteristic, feature, property, ability). It is relative in nature as its meaning, scale and measurement vary according to the place, people and time. Education is also a vast word emancipating numerous dimensions of life in this world. Hence when quality education is referred to it has a wide range of aspects and facets while being relative in nature. It is relative in the sense that by a good quality what is meant in India may be of a very good or high quality in the African countries and likely what is good for the civilized world may not be good for the native tribes of the Andaman. Now the question is who will decide this scale and measurement what is good quality education and what is bad quality education. Can there be a general rule for the whole world to determine the quality of education. Though it seems tough in the common perspective but UNESCO can be of a great help in this regard. After achieving the target of quantity by providing education to the maximum number of beneficiaries through its education for all programme UNESCO now has the job in hands to provide quality education for all because it is found with great concern that almost 35 to 50 percent of the students of the underdeveloped and developing countries do not pose the basic reading writing or numeracy skills. But there are several challenges to reach the target of providing quality education to all. World declaration on education in as early as 1990s and the Dakar framework in 2000 had identified the prerequisite of quality in education for equity and quality as the heart of education. At present also there are many research projects going on throughout the world in the pursuit of

¹Assistant Professor, Department of Education, Kohima College, Nagaland, India

*Corresponding Author

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quality education. Present paper is an attempt to have an overall view of these challenges of the quality education and the researches going on in this regard.

DEFINING QUALITY

The word 'quality' comes from the Latin word *quails* implying 'what kind of'. It has a variety of meanings and connotations. Though it has become a buzz word in debates on higher education, it still lacks precise definition (Ball, 1985; Nigvekar, 1996; Sallis, 1996). Even if we know that quality exists, we may not be able to express clearly what we mean by it. Quality is not a modern concept. It has been in usage since ancient times. For instance, even the Egyptians used the concept of quality 'as a sign of perfection' for building pyramids (Elshennawy, 2004). However, in the field of higher education, the emphasis on quality was noticed in early 1980s. It was taken from industrial and commercial settings. Those days, people talked of academic quality in abstract terms only. In some institutions it was taken for granted, such as, Harvard or Oxford. In 1990s, we find references of quality being poor in some educational institutions, requiring utmost care, without defining what was meant by quality and what cure was needed. By the 2000s, the quality movement in higher education gained momentum as it was seen irresistible. During this period, the fragile nature of quality was questioned and the need for regulation and control was suggested (Saarinen, 2010).

Even today it is difficult to define the term 'quality' precisely because it remains an elusive, relative and ever evolving concept. To many, it is absolute like 'truth' or 'beauty'. Just as beauty resides in beholder's eyes, similarly quality relies on the subjective perceptions of the various stakeholders. That is why it remains elusive and undefined. It is often referred to as a relative term. It not only means different things to different people, but the same person may look at it differently at different moments. Like the ever-changing circumstances around, it keeps evolving. For instance, at one point of time the quality of an HEI was judged in terms of fulfilment of predetermined standards or benchmarks. The focus used to be on higher education as a transformative process in terms of inputs and outputs. Often no attention was given to the political and symbolic underpinnings behind the quest for quality in higher education. Though a lot has now been written about quality assurance, quality audit, quality management, quality accreditation and assessment, very little has been written about the concept of quality itself. It remains highly subjective and value-laden term such as truth, liberty, equality, justice, fairness and so on. Though highly desirable, it cannot be achieved in toto in practice.

WHY QUALITY EDUCATION

According to the EFA Global monitoring report 2005 it is said that the achievement of universal participation in education will be fundamentally dependent upon the quality of education available. People will lose interest in education if the quality of education is not improved. An example of this phenomenon can be seen in the schools of the rural India where the number of dropouts is increasing in spite of the all-out effort of the Indian Government to provide all the physical infrastructure for the educational institutions. It is just because of the lack of the quality education in those rural schools. So, for the retention of the children in the education system is a vital and crucial point of consideration for quality education. If it is answered what will happen if quality education is not provided then it will be clear why the quality education is a necessity now. In India there is not a single university in the top hundred list of 'Times Higher Education World Reputation Rankings'. It is almost same for the other south Asian or African countries. Present society is a market driven society where quality is the key factor to survive in the 'market'. It is a

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hard truth also for education. Education quality is a dynamic, multi-dimensional concept that refers not only to the educational model and outcome, but also to the institutional mission and goals, as well as to the specific standards of the system or subsystem. It is closely related to the human preference of good quality products rather than substandard products. Though education cannot be compared to a product, but it is a commodity now a days. Therefore, its quality must have to be ensured.

So, in brief it can be said that the main reasons as to why provide quality education is for the-

1. Proper management of worldly affairs in a peaceful way.
2. Mobility of humankind from lower strata to higher strata.
3. Empowerment of the humankind to face the future challenges coming out of the different socio, political and environmental issues.

AN INDIAN SCENARIO

Higher education in India has played a vital role in lifting the country from poverty and underdevelopment after Independence. It has been crucial in providing social mobility in a patriarchal and hierarchical society on the one hand and economic growth and national development on the other. The founding fathers always highlighted the importance of tertiary education despite resource crunch. It was seen as the most important 'vehicle for social, economic and political transformation' (Mukherjee, n.d.). India gave due priority to enhancing the access to education on equitable basis immediately after Independence. Only recently its focus has shifted to quality in HEIs to make them more fitting for the market economy in the wake of globalisation and technological innovations. India aspires to become a knowledge hub by equipping learners with the latest knowledge skills and competencies befitting the work environment at a more complex, highly uncertain and interdependent world. It requires inculcating not only the cardinal values of head and heart but also providing the proper base and right aptitude. Today higher education in India not only contributes to economic growth and national development but it has become a billion-dollar enterprise in itself and hence quality matters (Gupta & Patil, 2010).

EQUITY VERSUS QUALITY

In fact, with massification of higher education, we find a rise in the need for quality assurance, especially when India aspires to become an educational hub befitting its rising status as an 'emerging economy' and 'world power in making'. Like many other goods and services, we find a shift in focus from 'access and equity' to 'quality and diversity'. Whereas earlier the concept of quality included efforts towards achieving equity, today the emphasis is on seeking diversity as an inherent condition for quality to serve the interests of global economy. To William Bowen and Derek Bok:

"The overall quality of educational program is affected not only by the academic and personal qualities of individual students who are enrolled, but also by the characteristics of the entire group of students who share a common educational experience.... In a residential college setting, in particular, a great deal of learning occurs informally.... through interactions among students of both sexes; from various states and countries; who have a wide variety of interests, talents, and perspectives; and who are able; directly or indirectly, to learn from differences, and to stimulate one another to reexamine even their most deeply held assumptions about themselves and their world.... People do not learn much when they are surrounded only by the likes of themselves." (1998)

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In fact, the concept of quality acquired a new meaning and significance in the wake of liberalisation of the Indian economy since 1991 and emergence of cutthroat competition in higher education sector worldwide. A need was felt to monitor the quality and standards of the HEIs in India in a more regular, transparent, innovative and creative way in order to keep pace with the best practices worldwide. Generally speaking, quality implies meeting the needs and expectations of the students as clients on the one hand and market and other stakeholders on the other (University Grants Commission [UGC], 2003). Today it has become necessary to assure quality of higher education and professional training delivered by the different HEIs in order to justify 'value for money' and/or 'value for time'. But it remains a big challenge to widen access on equitable grounds and yet maintain high standards in terms of quality.

In case of India, the concept of quality cannot be seen in terms of antonyms— 'equity' versus 'quality'. Rather we have to see it in terms of 'equity plus quality'. H. A. Ranganath (2011, p. 3), the former Director of the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC), suggests that 'widening access to higher education does not imply producing less qualified students', but it implies 'reaching out increasingly to broad range of learners with different motivations and interests. It is primarily due to rapid expansion and heterogeneous nature of the higher education that we find the 'need for dependable assurance' gaining momentum. It has made it imperative to enforce quality on a massive scale to improve the credibility, marketing, legitimacy and acceptability of the Indian HEIs nationally and internationally. That is why assessment and accreditation by external bodies has acquired a new meaning. Though the actions of such external bodies are guided by the national policies and international benchmarks, many developments, such as steep rise or decline in the number of students, changes in funding policies, and involvement of for-profit private and foreign institutions, can also affect the quality assurance activities in many ways (Harvey, 2006).

Since higher education has become a necessary tool for personal upliftment, national growth, social development and promotion of global ethos, the 'diagnostic tools for checking the health of our HEIs' too, must become innovative. We need to evaluate the quality and standards based on consistent performance in teaching, research and community development programmes. We should not forget that hundred percent expectations of various stakeholders can never be met as quality remains an 'elusive' and 'ever-evolving' concept. At the most we can see it as a 'brand-building exercise' with long term perspective to be able to meet the challenges and opportunities thrown by highly competitive and integrated global economy. Viewed from the perspective of the academia, quality or world-class education may imply inculcating 'inquisitive capacity', 'abstract thinking', 'logical analysis', 'scientific outlook', 'preparedness for life-long learning', 'respect for traditional values and culture' on the one hand and others' points of view on the other (Ranganath, 2011). Judging from the perspective of the industry, quality education may imply 'seamless path to work', 'acquiring critical, problem solving and communication skills', 'learning to learn', 'ability to work with diverse (multi-cultural and multilingual) teams in diverse settings', 'having performance based attitude', 'trying to be entrepreneurial and competitive', 'grasping the latest information and communication technologies', 'trying to be culturally sensitive and well-versed in global affairs', and so on. As such, the prime job of NAAC has been to ensure quality, accountability, improvement and continuity based on reliable assessment and accreditation strategies. It is duty bound not only to assure minimum or desirable standards but also to ensure equity by focusing on the special needs of women, disabled, Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Other Backward Classes or non-English

speaking students. It is also responsible towards ensuring availability of efficient energy systems, water harvesting and conservation and eco-friendly ambience on the one hand and civic engagement of the students, staff and faculty on the other.

OBJECTIVE AND METHOD

The present paper is a narrative review of large and small- scale research studies conducted to assess the quality of ECCE in different sectors of India Government, Private, and Non-governmental organizations (NGOs). These studies are mainly conducted by the NCERT, NUEPA, CECED, ASER, National Institute of Public Cooperation and Child Development (NIPCCD), Planning Commission, M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation, and National Human Rights Commission.

CHALLENGES ON IMPLEMENTING QUALITY EDUCATION

So, in brief it can be said that the main reasons as to why provide quality education is for the- 1) Proper management of worldly affairs in a peaceful way. 2) Mobility of humankind from lower strata to higher strata. 3) Empowerment of the humankind to face the future challenges coming out of the different socio, political and environmental issues. How to assure quality education? The main challenge to provide quality education to all. To provide quality education it must have to be known what quality education is. If it is known what to provide then it becomes easier to answer the question how to provide. From the UNESCO's vision 2030 it can be easily found as to what it means by quality education. It is the number four goal of UNESCO's sustainable development goals of vision 2030. According to the world Education Forum, 2015 "quality education fosters creativity and knowledge, and ensures the acquisition of the foundational skills of literacy and numeracy as well as analytical problem-solving and other high-level cognitive, interpersonal and social skills. It also develops the skills, values and attitudes that enable citizens to lead healthy and fulfilled lives, make informed decisions, and respond to local and global challenges through Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) and global citizenship education (GCED)". There are seven targets⁵ for this 4th goal of quality education to ensure inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning. These are- free primary and secondary education, equal access to quality pre-primary education, equal access to affordable technical, vocational and higher education, increase the number of people with relevant skills for financial success, eliminate all discrimination in education, universal literacy and numeracy and education for sustainable development and global citizenship. There are other three factors which are part of these targets and they are safe and inclusive schools, scholarships and qualified teachers. Now to assure quality education these targets have to be fulfilled. To achieve the targets a basic plan is required and to develop a plan the knowledge of present situation is required. To know the exact status of the present education system a proper assessment is needed.

Proper assessment for quality education: The first and foremost challenge to provide quality education is to properly assess the present quality of the education to find out the dimensions where there is a need of improvement and which sector needs to be emphasized. Once the assessment is done then a plan can be implemented for providing quality education. Therefore, the assessment is the primary challenge that needs to be addressed and for that we need proper and scientific inspection and monitoring system.

Proper Inspection, monitoring and overall governance for quality education: One of the major issues is the lack of proper governance in the overall education sector. It is one of the crucial challenges for providing quality education in current scenario. Proper inspection with

required guidance for the educational institution along with the parental monitoring is the need of the hour. The institutions of inspection and governance for education sector must be well trained with adequate monitoring from the authorities to enable them to provide a level playing field in providing quality education and by thus helping them to remain valid in the modern educational perspective otherwise they will perish if they cannot provide quality education to the masses.

SPIRITUALITY, MORALITY, ETHICS AND QUALITY EDUCATION

Today's world is a materialistic world. Everyone just thinks about his or her personal gains. There are very few people who think about the society or the world. It is one of the consequences of the modern education system which only forces people into rat races. There is no peace and harmony of life in this process. So, the only way out is the time-tested spirituality, morality and ethics which will ensure quality education and in return quality education will also ensure peace of mind without involving in the rat race of this competitive world. In early India there was the system of Guru Shishya Parampara. There was no quality issue then as all the teachers were quality teachers and what they taught were quality education. Also, the students had the choices of selecting their own teachers according to their needs and wishes. As there was the practice of spirituality which taught to be non-materialistic and free from any discontent and desire, the education was more and more fulfilling. So, an ample amount of attention may be given to the consideration of the idea of introduction and the persuasion of the scientific spirituality and morality in the education sector in its true sense which will be according to the need of the present day aspirations. This will help in the development of the quality of education with proper utilization of minimal resources available.

Use of ICT, Artificial Intelligence and other modern technologies for the development quality of education: To provide quality education the thinking process must have to be innovative. The innovation in the field of technology with the advent of artificial intelligence is a great boon for the education sector. Artificial intelligence and the other technological innovations like app-based learning, virtual learning and augmented reality used for the educational purpose. With the help of these technologies the present teaching learning experiences may be supplemented by the more adaptive and personalized learning pedagogies. As these will provide the two-way communication and individual attention to the learners the quality of education must be increased. But only the above-mentioned methods will not be helpful but an integrated mechanism is needed and therefore the need of the hour is TQM in education.

Total Quality management in Education: The best answer to the question of how to provide quality education is the proper management of quality education according to the resources available by adopting a holistic approach in the form of Total Quality Management. It will provide an integrated approach towards achieving the goal of quality education. According to 'Investopedia' 'Quality management is the act of overseeing all activities and tasks needed to maintain a desired level of excellence. This includes the determination of a quality policy, creating and implementing quality planning and assurance, and quality control and quality improvement. It is therefore referred to as Total Quality Management (TQM). In general, quality management focuses on long-term goals through the implementation of short-term initiatives. The concept of total quality, introduced by Professor W. Edwards Deming in the 1950s, can be applied to almost every organization of educational institutions.

Indian perspective: Indian perspective for the quality education is not different from the world. The goal of universalizing primary education has almost been achieved. Yet there is not a single Indian University in the top 100 list of the world top University rankings by 'Times Higher Education World Reputation Rankings', 2017. Therefore, in India the focus has been put on quality education. Samagra shiksha aviyan is a footstep towards this goal. This Indian government scheme will help to develop the whole education sector from primary to higher studies along with the skill development and the appropriate teacher education and orientation. By 2030 the scheme targets to eliminate gender and other disparities in education, provide opportunities for the youth to acquire adequate literacy, numeracy, technical skill and knowledge for sustainable development and lifestyle by providing ample scholarships and qualified teachers. But the problem of proper monitoring and accountability is a major problem here which if not checked may prove fatal for acquiring SDG4.

FINDINGS, DISCUSSION, AND CONCLUSION

What is the future of the quality education? Well, it seems bright as there are many researches and projects going on in this regard as how to improve the quality of education within limited resources. Actually, all the researches in the field of education can be said are for the improvement of the quality of education. Yet there are specific researches going on the specific topic of quality education. Many are almost ready for implementation.

Below are the few to mention

- a) **Evaluation of the quality education project:** Professor David Stephens from the University of Brighton collaborated with Professor Clive Harber of University of Birmingham and a team of African researchers on a four-country study of quality in education in Sub-Saharan Africa. They evaluated the work of the Quality Education Project (QEP).
- b) **Learning Study (2000-present):** Learning study is a collaborative classroom action research with the aim of improving student learning in Hongkong. It features teachers' collaboration in co-planning, implementing and reviewing a research lesson with Variation Theory developed by Ference Marton as the guiding principle of the pedagogical design. Over the past 15 years, their Learning Study project team are working on this topic with the support from the Hong Kong Education Bureau (EDB) and the Quality Education Fund (QEF).
- c) **Expanding access to quality, relevant and inclusive secondary education in sub-Saharan Africa:** Pauline Rose and Ricardo Sabates, University of Cambridge's Engaging policymakers to enhance quality teaching for all children in Pakistan (Pauline Rose, University of Cambridge) Pathways to quality in higher education by Monika Nerland and Tine S. Prøitz, University of Oslo, Norway.
- d) **Study "Daring to Educate More: Recommendations for Better All-Day Schools"**-It is a concept on high quality in all-day schooling in Germany, jointly developed by Bertelsmann Stiftung, Robert Bosch Stiftung, Stiftung Mercator, and Vodafone Stiftung Deutschland.

Under the New Education Policy of 2020, we find a clear direction on quality. It lays emphasis on 'separation of functions' while 'eliminating conflict of interests. It is suggested that a single regulatory body would help in providing the basic requirements, such as financial probity, adherence to due procedures, empowering the HEIs to take their own decisions and ensure expected outcomes, and so on. It also emphasises on accreditation by independent boards with high sense of integrity. It aims at curbing 'commercialisation of

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higher education' on the one hand and improving quality on the other. There is no scope for for-profit HEIs under this policy as yet. All surpluses are required to be reinvested into the educational institutions only, though it acknowledges the need for collaborations with foreign universities in national interest. However, there is no consensus among various stakeholders whether it would be a good idea to have a single regulatory authority for a vast country with diversities like India. Based upon the best practices adopted by the external quality assurance bodies abroad, Antony Stella (2002), an authority on quality assurance in higher education, suggested the following:

- The concept of quality should be seen as ever evolving. It is a holistic concept that can never be achieved fully.
- Assessment and accreditation should be seen as 'means' to quality concerns and not an 'end',
- Assessment can be useful only if it is acceptable to the institutions concerned, not otherwise,
- Quality assessment depends to a large extent on the judgement of peer group rather than quantitative indicators.
- The units of assessment chosen should be viable, feasible and practical in local context.
- Quality assessment should be seen as a complex issue and not just an application of the pre-determined criteria.
- It is an extravagant way of assuring minimum standards as it involves huge costs in terms of fiscal resources and administrative prowess.
- It is important to avoid overloading the External Quality Assessment (EQA) with 'multiple' or 'conflicting roles' in order to achieve better results,
- Even EQA needs to evaluate their criteria and processes regularly in order to keep pace with the changing needs and circumstances,
- It is important to keep scope for variance. EQA should serve as agents of change rather than the bodies seeking conformity in toto.

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Conflict of Interest

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