

Research Paper

Issues and Challenges in Education System in India: Interface among School Administrators, Teachers, Students, and Parents

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ABSTRACT

The robust interface among four important agents in India education system viz., school administrators, teachers, students, and parents are the lynchpin of the Indian education system. While a number of studies have explored this inter-relationships in parts, this paper makes inferences through assessing this whole interface in a coherent manner. Extremely multifaceted conflictual inter-relationships among these four agents are observed in Indian education system which substantially impedes the scope of shaping up of the students' behavioural traits and ultimately quality education for all. Political priority, appropriate public policy and regulations are critical for effectively addressing such conflictual interface among the studied four agents. Since behavioural traits are important determinants of educational and life outcomes, this paper, in the context of assessing the inter-relationships among these four agents, conceptually discusses and subsequently suggests that empirical testing of Dunning-Kruger effect and Big Fish-Little Pond effect are vital for each of the agents.

Keywords: *Education System; Behaviour of Agents; Education Quality; Education Policy*

Educational investment on children has intergenerational consequences on demographic dividend with multiplier effect as it leads to improved educational as well as health outcomes and better employment opportunities, and as a result, ameliorates macroeconomic growth and development (Schultz, 1961). In other words, the socio-economic returns from the investment in education is conspicuously high (Carneiro and Heckman, 2003), and in fact, the direct and indirect benefit spillovers of education are considerable and often hard to measure empirically (Weisbrod, 1962). While majority of the Indian studies' emphasis have been revolved around issues and challenges regarding the educational attainments, the interaction among the four agents viz., school administrators, teachers, students, and parents in Indian education system remains relatively unexplored. Reinforcing the interface among these four agents is fundamental for effectively imparting quality education with personality development, which is envisaged to lead to the desired educational attainments.

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The Indian education system has traditionally been exam-centric and not learning-centric (Patel, 2013) with a substantial differential between the prepollent teaching of theories and their diminutive practical application (Kumar and Sahithi, 2019). In India, the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT), the apex body for curriculum development and syllabus creation for school education, is heavily criticised because of its burdensome syllabus with varied pattern across various national and State educational boards that lacks research and development, and thereby, considered as outdated (Kharbanda, 2022). This also gives rise to 'educational inequalities' as different schools teach different values to their respective students which leads to uneven life chances to the children across the country (Majumdar and Mooij, 2012). While Finnish and Japanese education systems are recognised as best because of their foremost focus on learning rather than testing (Kumar and Sahithi, 2019), the marks and grades-led Indian education system, conversely, imparts undue pressure on children, due to which, they tend to cram and memorise the lessons in lieu of understanding the concepts (Majumdar and Mooij, 2012). According to the authors, this severe issue is further compounded with congruently tuned mindset of the parents as they tend to conform to such pressure-induced educational system. Parry (2005) aphoristically described such rife education system in India as "education treadmill", Majumdar and Mooij (2012) pithily described as "parrot-training", and Sen (2019) expressed such system as "first boy syndrome" that afflicts the students of excellent skills in extra-curricular activities. In this context, the Ministry of Human Resource Development of the Government of India presented the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 that aims to address *"gap between the current state of learning outcomes and what is required must be bridged through undertaking major reforms that bring the highest quality, equity, and integrity into the system, from early childhood care and education through higher education. The aim must be for India to have an education system by 2040 that is second to none, with equitable access to the highest-quality education for all learners regardless of social or economic background"* (MHRD 2020: 3).

Post New Economic Policy 1991, the Indian education system gradually shifted to neo-liberal privatisation. Congruently, students and parents revealed their shift in preference for neo-liberalism with the aim of competing with global standards. However, a number of studies argued that the NEP 2020 continues to be in consonance with prevailing neo-liberal education system that gained popularity post the New Economic Policy 1991 (Priya, 2020), which needs to be evaluated about *"how it reneges rather than what it says"* on the commitment of universal education *"through various subterfuges"* (Patnaik, 2020). Priya (2020) also argued that the NEP inadequately addresses (i) how education should reach all; and (ii) how to improve the inter-relationship between school administrators and teachers, which is one of the crucial factors for effective transmission of education to the children. Besides, the NEP has not laid required emphasis on how to rationalise the prevailing burdensome academic curricular contents (Sunny, 2021) while it has recommended to restructuring of the school curriculum.

What these aforementioned critical discussions signify is that the interface among four important agents in India education system viz., school administrators, teachers, students, and parents have not gained required focus at the policy realm while they combined are the lynchpin of the Indian education system. Thus, in order to strengthen the education system, this study seeks to assess this whole interface in a coherent manner since a few studies have explored this inter-relationships in parts. The article proceeds as follows. Section 2 critically evaluates how the inter-relationships among school administrators, teachers, students, and

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parents work in the education system with plausible implications on children's educational developments. Since behavioural attributes are well-acknowledged as important determinants of educational and life outcomes, Sections 3 and 4 critically discuss the need and significance of assessing the interface among these four agents in regard to the gap between self-perception of competence and actual competence of each of the agents through the Dunning-Kruger effect and Big Fish-Little Pond effect, respectively. Section 5 concludes.

Interface among School Administrators, Teachers, Students, and Parents in the Education System

Teachers' job satisfaction has been extensively studied in past three decades (Baroudi *et al.*, 2020), which is a major determinant of the interface among school administrators, teachers, students, and parents. The conceptual framework regarding how conflictual multi-dimensional inter-relationships among these four agents have been ensuing in Indian education system is presented in Figure 1, which are critically discussed in this Section through stepwise processes. We have formed this entire conceptual framework based on the findings of Mulford (2003); Karakus and Savas (2012); CooperGibson (2018); and Gray and Seiki (2020).

The top-down management in each school irrespective of public and private, and its efficiency gains at the school-specific level could be sundered from any school administration to its personnel. It is widely acknowledged that school administration is governed by certain rules and regulations. However, the personnel of school administration are subjected to undertake decisions, which often could be outside the ambit of imposed rules that could likely bring the scope for exercising a certain level of discretion while practicing the governing rules and regulations which could either be driven by their own profit-making motives or societal welfare making intentions. Such ambiguity in administration with differing degrees across schools influences teachers' approach towards teaching and behaviour towards the students.

Teachers become demotivated in teaching, and thereby, their decisions to move from one school to another or even quit the profession itself are triggered by mainly three factors viz. lack of respect, low pay, and increased workload and stress. However, these three factors collectively contribute to the teachers' decisions of leaving either the school or the profession itself. The issues relating to teachers' low pay are much complex than one commonly perceives. Without filling up of vacancies, employing ad-hoc teachers has been a common practice of cost curtailment in all types of schools (government, government-aided, and private recognised). This stems from the evident 'teacher surplus' in India (Datta and Kingdon, 2021), and the school administration use this substantial differential in demand for and supply of teachers to subterfuge them. Understandably, the teachers find this as discourteous and disrespect and distrust grows between these two agents in Indian education system. Giving teachers' quality a backseat has been a serious cause of concern across the country.

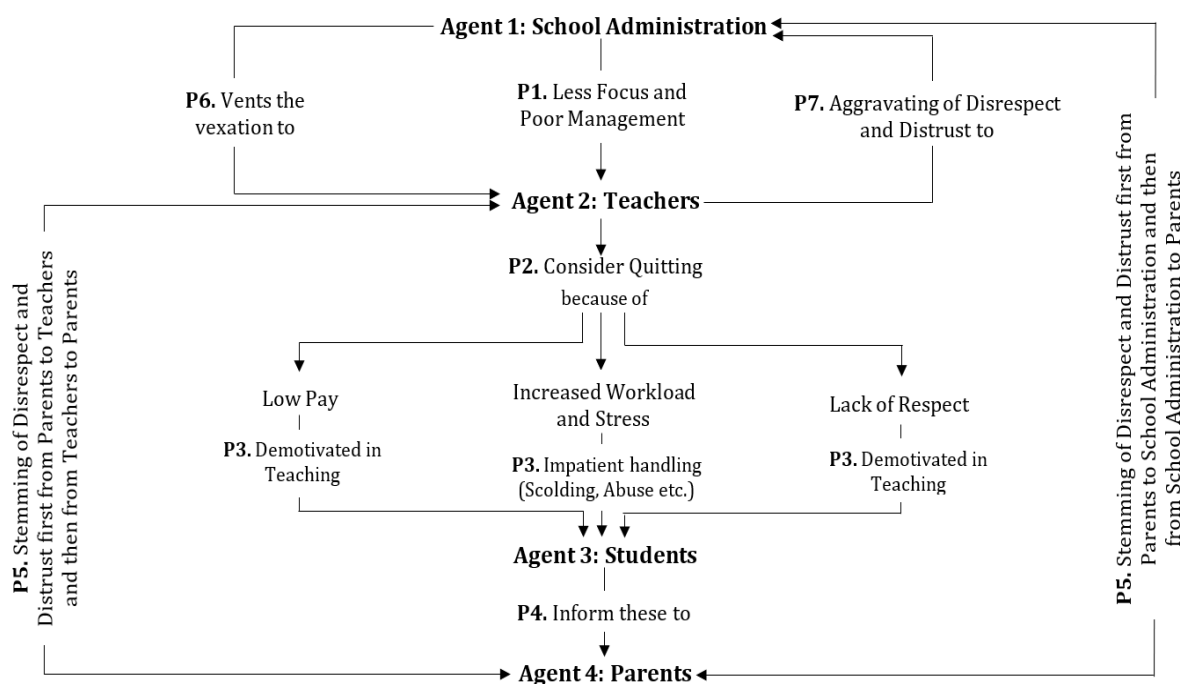
In the context of increased workload and stress, Majumdar and Mooij (2012) mentioned that in India "*Rampal and Mahajan (2003) look closely at classroom processes. A large number of teachers follow the 'chalk and talk method'. They stand at the board and address students in an authoritative or even in an intimidating tone, quite unmindful of whether the children are able to follow him/her..... teachers ask students to copy lessons from textbooks so that*

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they ‘[can] attend to administrative tasks’”. While accomplishing the massive syllabus within stipulated time in itself poses heightened pressure on the teachers, getting simultaneously involved in administrative works because of inadequate non-teaching staff, further aggravates the behaviour of teachers towards students. This gives spurts to impatient handling of students through scolding, abuse and so forth. Besides, in the context of teachers’ heavy workload and stress, it is also important to mention that high pupil-teacher ratio (PTR) has been a serious cause of concern across States in India. According to the UDISE+ Report 2021-22 of Ministry of Education of the Government of India, the numbers of students per teacher in government, government aided, and private unaided recognized schools were 29, 33, and 23. Such high PTR, consequently, reduces the scope for student-specific required care (Muralidharan and Sundararaman, 2013).

Such issues related to the teachers that stem from neglect and poor management by the school administration, have been adversely affecting the teachers-students followed by teachers-parents relationships. Particularly, excessive workload-led impatient handling of students triggers resentment among the parents, and disrespect and distrust start to stem from parents to both the teachers and school authority, and consequently, from the teachers and school authority to the parents. This, in turn, further exacerbates the inter-relationship between the school administrators and teachers since the former vents their vexation to the latter, which further increases the magnitude of the teachers’ disrespect and distrust to the school administrators, and thereby, they tend to consider changing of school or even leaving the teaching profession itself.

Figure 1: Interface among Four Agents [School Administrators, Teachers, Students, and Parents] in Indian Education System: A Conceptual Framework



Source: Authors' Formation based on Mulford (2003); Karakus and Savas (2012); CooperGibson (2018); and Gray and Seiki (2020).
 Note: P1, P2, P3, and so on denote Process 1, Process 2, Process 3, and so on.

Dunning-Kruger Effect for these 4 Actors

The Dunning-Kruger effect, propounded by the social psychologists David Dunning and Justin Kruger, is a cognitive bias wherein people erroneously overestimate their knowledge and/or ability in a specific field. Kruger and Dunning (1999) tested several Cornell University undergraduates in terms of their sense of humour, grammar, and logic, and found that those who achieved in the lowermost quartile estimated themselves to be far above average. Based on such evidence, the authors expounded the fact that due to the lack of metacognition (aware of self-awareness), people fail to objectively evaluate their competence or incompetence (see Figure 2). In other words, individuals who have adequate knowledge and skill in a specific area, tend to measure their performance more accurately when asked to assess their own performance, and vice versa.

After coming this effect into existence, many scholars empirically tested this theory in various socio-economic-political aspects, and they have found that people who don't know much about a subject, they don't have the knowledge and ability to track their personal lapses (Ehrlinger *et al.*, 2008; Lumbanraja, 2017). Because of these blind spots, they can't see where they're going wrong, and they therefore keep on assuming that they themselves are doing great. Such unveiling overconfidence, often, becomes self-defeating (Bastani, Giebe, and Gürtler; 2023).

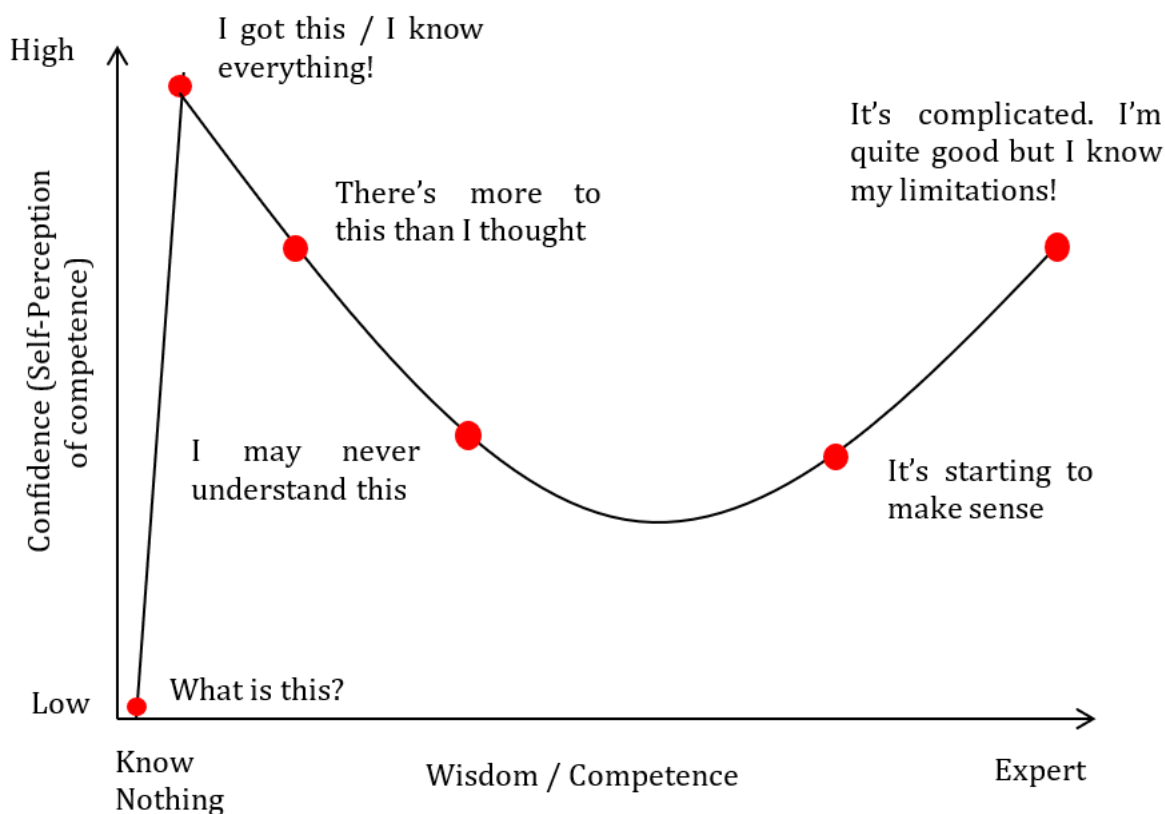
The Dunning-Kruger effect leads to complacency, which consequently stops the person from engaging in the process of self-improvement (Lackner and Sonnabend, 2020). This important theory needs to be tested on all the four actors for better understanding of the gap between self-perception³ of competence and actual competence and understanding of each of the agents, which would throw insights on the interface among these four agents. In addition, the Dunning-Kruger effect needs to be examined on teachers⁴ as well as parents as to how they perceive the level of competence of students against students' actual competence. This would elucidate as to how conscientiously the teachers and parents monitor the children.

Ideally, the findings from this analysis should predominantly serve as an input to the school administrators for effective policy revision for the teachers as well as students. However, the result from testing the Dunning-Kruger effect on the school administrators might bear insignificant implications on the other three actors (teachers, students and parents) as well as on the overall education system. It is primarily owing to the purview of the practice of falsification by the school administrators. In this respect, it is important to mention that Hallman and Spiro (2022) found that small falsification is often very costly while large falsification is only marginally more costly. But, if the cost of falsification (small or large) by the school administrators is exiguous, then the likelihood of intentionally being oblivious towards the welfare of teachers and students will be very high, even though no Dunning-Kruger effect on them will be found. This particular behavioural aspect on school authorities requires a detailed separate research in Indian context.

³ For parents, this will not be the self-perception. It will be the perception about competence of their child.

⁴ Hierarchical classroom environment in India is a serious issue, which can further be compounded by the issue of the teacher being authoritative. This would not only impede the process of learning but also bear enormous ramifications on the students' behavioural traits (Majumdar and Mooij, 2012).

Figure 2: Illustration of the Dunning-Kruger Effect

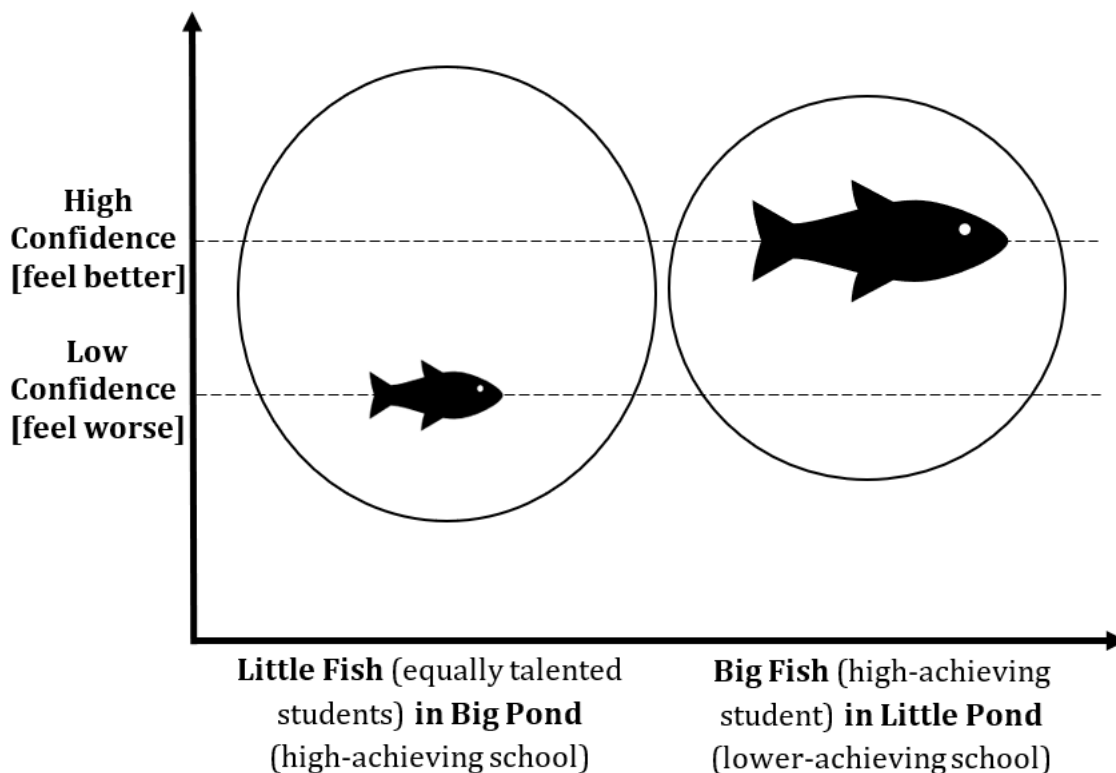


Big Fish-Little Pond Effect for Students

The big fish little pond effect (BFLPE) is a ‘frame of reference’⁵ model introduced by Herbert W. Marsh and John W. Parker in 1984. The “Big-fish-little-pond” is a concept well-acknowledged among education professionals which postulates that students in higher-achieving schools usually compare themselves with their peers and contemplate themselves comparatively less proficient, whereas equally performing students in lower-achieving settings have more confidence (see Figure 3). As humans, we have a propensity to compare ourselves with others in terms of our abilities and, because of that, we start to feel better or inferior about ourselves. This is basic to who we are. This phenomenon affects girls and boys of different socio-economic classes equally across the globe (Loyalka, Zakharov and Kuzmina; 2018), and as the BFLPE doesn’t differ by gender means it’s something that is fundamentally human.

⁵ In social sciences, framing comprises a set of concepts and theoretical perspectives on how individuals, groups, and societies organize, perceive, and communicate about reality.

Figure 3: Illustration of the Big-Fish-Little-Pond Effect



Researchers have observed that when there is a “big fish” (high-achieving student) in a “little pond” (lower-achieving school), the student possesses more positive academic self-concept. Conversely, when an equally talented student (little fish) is in high-achieving environments (big pond), he/she compares himself/herself to his/her peers and conclude he/she do not measure up.

CONCLUSION

In all types of schools (government, government-aided, and private recognised) in India, due to the elevated workload-led stress among the teachers compounded with low pay and lack of respect from school administration, they become demotivated, and thereby, they tend to demonstrate unfavourable teaching practices such as impatient and punitive responses to children’s behaviours, and less attention to socio-emotional development, which ultimately lead to less optimal child outcomes regarding not only education but mental health and various behavioural traits as well. This also leads the teachers to fail in assessing the overall cognitive ability of, and level of confidence among the students. Besides, the impatient handling of students leads to conflictual inter-relationships between teachers and students, and subsequently, between parents and teachers, and parents and school authorities. Such vicious cycle of conflictual inter-relationships among the school administrators, teachers, students, and parents in Indian education system is certainly uncalled-for, and thus, this should gain urgent focus at the policy level.

Behavioural traits are important determinants of educational outcomes in particular and life outcomes in general. Shaping up of behavioural traits among children is intriguing but extremely complex task nonetheless. It is due to the fact of the intergenerational transfers of culture and beliefs. Thus, in the context of assessing the inter-relationships among these four

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agents, empirical testing of Dunning-Kruger effect and Big Fish-Little Pond effect are vital, and upon finding the presence of these effects particularly in students, necessary student-specific customised measures must be undertaken with greatest possible priority.

Over the years, public spending on education relative to Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) continues to remain low and varied across States in India. This even falls short of the recommended 6% by a considerable margin across most of the States. The Kothari Commission in 1966, for the first time, recommended that the public spending on education must be increased to a minimum of 6% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Of late, the same target of 6% was also reiterated by the MHRD in its NEP 2020. While the States have been failing to touch this target for a prolonged period of time, the increase in public education expenditure is foremost factor for necessary and effective public service provisioning when teacher and other staff vacancies and high PTR with limited infrastructure continue to be a serious cause of concern for long. While public spending can bear implications for certain aspects, political priority, appropriate public policy and regulations are critical for effectively addressing such conflictual interface among the studied four agents.

This article may be viewed as preparatory study for further research since primary survey would be highly imperative to examine the interface among these four agents in greater detail, and empirical testing of the Dunning-Kruger effect on these four important agents and Big Fish-Little Pond effect on students in Indian education system.

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Conflict of Interest

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