

Quality Education in India

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Abstract: *Quality education is a key factor in ensuring the future success of our nation. India will have the largest number of young people, but also has one of the highest rates of children out of school. The education system in India is based on an old colonial model that neither serves our current need, nor produces employable graduates with 21st century skills. This study looks at different perspectives on what constitutes quality, what the current state of education is in India, and how this may be improved. It also highlights positive advancements made in recent times, and what the needs may be in the future.*

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I. Introduction

The future of the world depends on the children of today being good citizens of tomorrow. Creating good citizens of tomorrow is no easy feat. It is a massive agenda, which needs to be broken down into a number of smaller pieces. One important piece is providing quality education to children. Many children around the world do not have access to quality education, and this has to change. How children learn and what they learn needs to be looked at in a new way. Quality can be measured in a number of ways. It is important to understand the current context of general education. It is agreed that education is important for all, and that it must be of high quality. There are differing opinions and guidelines on what “high quality” entails, and how it is to be achieved, so a few perspectives are presented in this chapter.

II. Methodology

This study was conducted through qualitative research, analysing available reports, presenting different perspectives on education, and interviewing stakeholders. Quantitatively, it presents available statistics on the current status of education in India.

III. Findings

In today’s world, education is supposed to be much more than going to school to learn something that will make one employable. Employability does continue to play an important factor, but should not be the be-all and end-all.

Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights provides for the right to Education, and the World Education Report 2000 spoke of The Right to education: towards education for all throughout life (Smyth, 2000).

“Education must fully assume its central role in helping people to forge more just, peaceful and tolerant societies.”

—Ban Ki-moon, Secretary-General of the United Nations (UN), September 26, 2002 (“Secretary-General’s remarks on Launch of Education First Initiative [as prepared for delivery]”, 2019).

The United Nations’ 4th Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) focuses on Quality Education. It states that education is a basic human right and is critical for the future of the world. The SDGs represent a global agreement of standards that must be achieved by the year 2030. This includes

- “By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and Goal-4 effective learning outcomes
- By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and preprimary education so that they are ready for primary education
- By 2030, ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university
- By 2030, substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship
- By 2030, eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations

- By 2030, substantially increase the supply of qualified teachers, including through international cooperation for teacher training in developing countries, especially least developed countries and small island developing states ("Education - United Nations Sustainable Development", 2019).

Towards these new ideals of education, many international organisations have also issued reports on the current status of education in different countries, and what needs to change.

According to a joint report released by ASCD (USA) and Education International (Europe), there are three pillars to a quality education:

- access to quality teachers
- quality tools for learning and professional development
- the establishment of safe and supportive learning environments (ASCD, 2015)

World Bank noted that while the number of children in school may be increasing, the quality of education isn't. They proposed 6As for education reform:

1. **Assessment:** Assessments and benchmarking are necessary so schools know where they stand.
2. **Autonomy:** Schools should be empowered to run as they see necessary to improve quality.
3. **Accountability:** Along with autonomy, accountability is necessary. Schools need to feel responsible for quality improvements.
4. **Attention to teachers:** Studies have shown that a good teacher is critical for improved educational quality. Ongoing, in-service training is also required.
5. **Attention to early childhood development:** More and more, research is showing that Early Childhood Education is critical
6. **Attention to culture:** Culture is one thing that is important but often neglected and not given the importance it deserves. This focus on culture can take many different forms, but directly impacts quality of education("The Six A's of Quality Education", 2019).

The current status of education

Quoting the same ACSD report, "The SDGs reflect a global consensus in our young century that education is a human right and a public good that is critical to the health and future of the world. But ours is a world of severe challenges, with millions of students under fire, unsettled and unschooled due to conflict and governments globally failing to meet their funding commitments to education, especially with regard to their poorest citizens. Education advocates have a responsibility to promote policies that integrate schools, communities, and nations into a system that supports development of the whole child, ensuring that each student is healthy, safe, engaged, supported, and challenged."

According to a UN report, the current statistics indicate that

- 57 million primary age children around the world are not in school (UNESCO, 2015).
- Almost 50 per cent of out-of-school live in areas affected by conflict and war.
- 250 million primary school children are unable to read, write or do basic mathematics ("250 million primary school age children can't read, write or do basic math: UN report", 2019).
- 617 million young people do not have basic literary or numeric skills.

A UNESCO infographic released as part of the 2015 World Education Forum Report shows the urgent need for improvement in quality. It also places emphasis on the need for cultural diversity (UNESCO, 2015).

At a December 2018 UNESCO high-end Global Education meeting, Stefania Giannini, UNESCO, stated "we are globally not on track to achieve SDG4 targets by 2030." A declaration released stated that, among other things, we must strengthen education for global citizenship (Hub, 2019).

General Education in India

India is one of the countries with the highest rate of children out of school ("UN calls for change as 57 million children have no school - CBBC Newsround", 2019).

The Indian education system has come under a great deal of criticism ("Why the world's biggest school system is failing its pupils", 2019), for being based on an old colonial template that promotes rote learning, not thinking (Thakur, 2019), and being largely ineffective in preparing children for life outside school and empowering them with knowledge (CNES, 2019).

India is a vast country, and there are various boards and organisations that oversee education and provide guidelines and directives at different levels. Each state has its own education board, and there are centralised boards. Parents can choose which board they want their children to study under. Education is imparted in many different languages, and with different methodologies.

For the purpose of this study, we will examine pre-primary and primary education, both historic and current, to provide us an insight into how schools function and education is imparted in India today.

Brief history of the Indian Education system

Vedic System of Learning

This method of education started in Ancient times. The Vedic System of Learning was holistic and disciplined, and involved the student leaving home and living at the gurukula (Biswal, 2019). Gurukula literally translated to family (kula) of the guru, which makes it much more than a school (Kachappilly, 2003). Students attended the gurukula from the age of eight, sometimes until their twenties.

The curriculum during Vedic period was focused around the teaching of Vedas and Vedic literature, spiritual and moral lessons. Other subjects existed and were taught, but only in support of and subservience to, Vedic learning.

According to Kachappilly (15): "At first the different subjects included in the curriculum were strictly subservient to the primary needs of the study of Veda and sacrificial rituals. In the course of time, however, these sacrificial rituals themselves led to the growth of scientific study and specializations. Thus, Geometry and Algebra arose out of the elaborate rules for the construction of altars. Sometimes it was necessary to erect a round altar covering the same area as a square one, giving rise to problems like squaring the circle. Astronomy and Astrology grew out of the necessity of finding out the proper times and seasons for sacrifice and other purposes. The foundation of Anatomy was laid in the dissection of sacrificial animals. Grammar and Philology had their origin in the care to preserve the sacred texts from corruption and fix the methods of their proper pronunciation."

The system of education was open to both genders, and all students were considered equal, irrespective of their social status outside the Gurukula. The three main aims of the Guru were to introduce and promote creativity among his students, to equip the students with confidence and ability and to teach them to main integrity in their words and deeds.

It was believed that if the Guru could instill these values, then learning and other things would naturally follow. (14)

The Guru followed a personalised a curriculum for each Shishya, imparting knowledge he felt was necessary, and also what each Shishya was interested in.

The aims of Vedic Education included:

- Personality Development
- Character Formation
- Performance of Civic and Social Duties
- Practical education
- Preservation and Spread of Culture
- Achieving Enlightenment

Advantages of Vedic Education

The Vedic System of Education worked well for many reasons, not least because the Guru was able to give individual attention to each Sishya and customise his/her learning. Since students were in the Gurukula for many years, as decided by the Guru, there was enough time for the Guru to teach in depth. Sishyas learnt much more than just book knowledge, and came out ready to face life.

Disadvantages of Vedic Education

In the Vedic System of Education, the Guru was the singular force in the Shishya's life. If the Guru was inadequate, this negatively impacted the Shishyas. In certain cases, Gurus used to withhold important information from Shishyas. Shishyas were also expected to perform menial chores and housework (Kashalkar-Karve, 2013).

The Gurukula system went into decline with the introduction of the colonial system of education into India. It has been argued that a revival of vedic education would benefit modern India (Joshi & Gupta, 2017), but it is unrealistic to imagine it can be recreated today, in modern circumstances.

Colonial Era (18th century – 1947)

The system of education that the British brought with them was aimed at creating officers that would serve the crown, collecting taxes and doing other administrative work. English became the language of the country, and students had to follow printed textbooks. There was more focus on obedience than learning and creativity.

The education system centred around the intelligence valued by the Imperial administration. The first three universities created by the British in Calcutta, Bombay and Madras were designed to train and create government servants in large numbers ("Reimagining intelligence in the classroom", 2019).

Post Colonial Era (1947-Present)

The Indian education system has not changed much since independence. English continues to be a sought after medium for education, although instruction in many Indian languages exists. There are a mix of government and private schools, in a ratio of approximately 7:5. There are a number of Boards of Education, state, central and international, and a number of different curricula and teaching methods. Under the Article 21-

A Constitution of India, free and compulsory education is a Fundamental Right from age 6 to 14. Most education in India follows what is now referred to as rote learning or the traditional method. According to John Dewey, traditional education is meant to teach the next generation the skills, facts and standards of social and moral conduct required for material and social success (Dewey, 1938). Teachers are instruments of knowledge, and students are expected to obey, receive, and memorise. There was an emphasis on rote learning, or memorizing without learning the meaning. All students are taught the same material at the same time, and those that did not learn quickly enough failed, instead of being allowed to learn at their own pace.

Indian Policy on Preprimary Education

The 2011 Census showed that India has 164.68 million children under the age of 6, and the government has, in recent years, taken steps towards ensuring Early Childhood education.

Although early childhood education is not covered under the right to education, Article 45 of the constitution directly states to provide early childhood education to all children. The 12th Five Year Plan acknowledges the importance of early childhood education.

In 2013, The Government of India released the National Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Policy, caters to all children under the age of six. This policy, and the Integrated Child Development Program, are both being implemented by the Ministry of Women and Child Development. Over 38 million children, through 1.4 million anganwadi care centres are being benefitted (Kaul & Sankar, 2009).

Primary Education in India

According to the Ministry of Human Resource Development India approximately 1.5 million schools, which is about one school for every 200 children. Overall, about 29% of children are in private schools across India, with that number being over 50% in most urban areas (Desai, Dubey, Vanneman & Banerji, 2019).

The Indian education system is government by the National Curriculum Framework, set out by the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT). The most recent National Curriculum Framework was laid out in 2005. It oversees syllabus, textbooks and teaching practices. The government also appointed a committee, headed by Dr. K. Kasturirangan, to prepare a new National Educational Policy Report, which is scheduled to be submitted in 2019.

The 86th Amendment to the Indian Constitution introduced Article 21A, which gave the right to free and compulsory education to all children from 6-14 years of age. The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act, passed in 2010, guarantees every child the right to quality elementary education.

The two main central education boards in India are the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) and the Indian Certificate of Secondary Education (ICSE). The CBSE is managed by the government of India and follows NCERT curriculum. There are over 19,000 CBSE schools in India. The Council for the Indian School Certificate Examination, which conducts the ICSE exams is a private board. Individual states also have their own boards, and students also have the option to write examinations under international boards like the International Baccalaureate and the Cambridge International Examinations.

There is a well-acknowledged lack of qualified teachers in the education system, with there not being enough teachers, and in many cases, existing teachers are not qualified enough.

Interview with Vikram Krishnan, Chairman, Sishu Griha Montessori and High School

Interview conducted over email on January 17, 2019

1. What your opinion on the Indian education system today including governmental policies (like the National Education Policy)?

The Indian education system has come a long way from having an extremely rigid course to a somewhat more flexible environment today. With careers in various industries today rather than one being forced to become a doctor/ engineer, the education system in India has also catered to the evolving environment. We still have a long way to go as all stakeholders must realize that one must be given the opportunity to grow in a field of his/her choice, for eg, a young adult may want to excel in the field of sports, while another may want to become a doctor, they should be allowed to move with their interests and at the same time Public/Private organisations should promote such environments.

That being said, and even with Indians securing high paid positions all over the world, we still have a long way to go at the grass-root level. Current policies and new ones must be carefully looked in to by the Government. The future of a nation lies in education. With several good Government schools in the past, today we are down to just a few. Even with the number of teachers going up at Government schools, the quality of teaching at Government schools have come down. RTE having a noble cause to educate all, has not been planned and implemented properly, this too has seen close to 7,000 Government schools in Karnataka shutting down. Even though several schools do not believe in detaining children, the RTE Act provides a layer of protection to children as they know they cannot be detained, where is the motive to do well then? Teachers at Government schools are given crash courses to learn subject which is not the right approach.

Government policies lie with the state and not the center when it comes to education, so each states has its share of problems. There is no uniformity in education policies for a country like ours that is so diverse. RTE being the centre's decision, states are allowed to customize it according to their requirements.

2. What needs to change within the Indian education system?

- All stakeholders must be more open to accepting a holistic approach to education rather than the typical text book
- Policies must be framed and implemented keeping in mind the development of a nation through education, rather than only looking at GDP
- India having a rich and evolving education system before the British ruled us, it should be looked in to again rather than looking at the West for everything
- Even with such a diverse country, uniformity in education policies is a must so that all children are given the same opportunities
- Teachers should be given a free hand to bring in their knowledge/ ideas rather than being told what to do at all times

3. What is the role and need for different educational boards - in particular which board do you think is best?

Haven't looked in to other boards as yet, so cannot comment. From the little I know about IB, I feel it is a better approach as it encourages a child to excel in his/her interests.

4. What is the role of external organisations in a school context? Should schools tie up with external organisations with specialisations in particular fields or should they run everything in house?

External organisations must be a part of the school rather than seeing themselves as a service provider to the school. They must understand the culture of each school they tie up with, and blend in. With professional and experienced people running such organisations, they must have a lot to offer to schools.

Having everything in house would be ideal, however in today's world where opportunities are plenty, it may be difficult for schools to have everything in house. While the requirements for having qualified teachers as per the curriculum is a must, schools could look at external organisations that provide the best.

5. How important is teacher training? How should it be done?

Teacher training is a very important aspect for any school/ teacher to evolve in today's dynamic environment. Be it in a certain subject/ behaviour/ culture/ etc.

School's should tie up with well reputed organisations that understand the culture of the school and can bring in various training programs from across the world. At the same time, senior members of the school should conduct workshops for the rest of the faculty so that new members understand the culture and ethos of the school

6. What is the role of art, culture, music in general education?

I feel that these subjects play an equally important role as compared to academics. Music, culture, and art have no language barriers and unite us. When promoted in the right environment, it encourages healthy competition.

7. How much inter and transdisciplinary studies are possible and necessary in the school context?

Both are important for students as well as teachers, as being open to another's discipline is only going to help the world evolve.

Quality and standards

According to Bill Gates, "The biggest disappointment when it comes to India is its education system" (Business Standard Editorial, 2017).

India has not yet achieved its target of spending 6% of its GDP on education, which results in a widespread lack of infrastructure and resources, including quality teachers ("Public Financing of School Education in India: A Fact Sheet - CBGA India", 2019).

The 2016 report (Pratham Education, 2017) by the ASER Centre had the following findings regarding the quality of primary education in India:

- 60% of Standard 3 children are unable to read a Standard 1 level text
- 70% of Standard 3 children are unable to read simple English words

- 75% of Standard 3 children are unable to carry out 2-digit subtraction
- 75% of Standard 5 children are unable to do simple division problems
- 75% of Standard 5 children are unable to read simple English sentences

Other rankings also show Indian education to be less than ideal. UNESCO has ranked India as 168 out of 234 countries with a literacy rate of 72%, while the United Nations has ranked India as 145 out of 191 on the Education Index.

Some of the problems with the Indian education system today include:

1. A lack of funds for infrastructure including classrooms, libraries and toilets
2. A lack of qualified teachers
3. Emphasis on rote learning
4. Outdated assessment methods and a focus on marks
5. A lack of focus on skills which can lead to employability
6. A lack of holistic development
7. A one size fits all model
8. Lack of creativity
9. Insufficient, inefficient or ineffective advisory bodies, policies and boards

India has many educational institutions of extremely high caliber, which have produced world-class leaders, but the average school functions at a level below ideal standards. Private schools in many cases fare better than those run by the government. In municipal and government schools, there are a number of issues which result in the quality of education imparted (in most cases) to be substandard. The moment that people can afford or have access to private schools, they opt for them. There is also a very strong urban-rural divide.

While examining the poor enrolment rates in rural areas, it is easy to assume that parents choose not to send their children to school, or don't see a value in education. However, attending school, even when it's free or nearby, may not always be possible for children.

The NCERT's Fifth All India Educational Survey (1989) found that 94% of the rural population had a primary school within a kilometre. However, roads may be rough or unsafe, making it impossible for children to walk to school (Verma, 2011).

Also, though education is free, students must buy uniforms, books and other items. Families with a severe lack of financial stability may not be able to afford these, and require children to work as well.

Additionally, students from the Indian education system have often been called unemployable, since they are not being trained beyond the rote system for available employment opportunities.

In recent times, the Government of India has released a number of initiatives directly and indirectly aimed at improving education in India.

Startup India, is aimed at promoting financing for startups. Swacch Bharat, a movement for a clean India also focuses on building toilets in schools so that drop out rates (especially among girls reduce). The Atal Innovation Mission (AIM) is aimed at promoting entrepreneurship among students. Atal Tinkering Labs (ATLs) established under this have been set up in schools as workspaces where students can experiment and innovate. They have also been a number of initiatives for training towards employability.

Another area, which is being explored, and should be explored further, is the inclusion of arts education. The SaPa in Schools program currently works with over 25,000 children, primarily in Bangalore, across both private and government schools. Music education has been shown to increase creativity, the ability to work in teams, left-right brain coordination, and aid development in children. It is one of the most direct ways to develop 21st century skills in school children.

It is also worth noting that quality of education in India is exclusively with the government. Much of India's education system is managed and run by private organisations, both for and non-profit operators, and entrepreneurship in education is fast catching on in India. In 2016, the Indian Education market was valued at \$100 billion, and that is expected to reach \$180 billion by the year 2020.

There is a long way to go for India's education system, and in addition to focus on universal education, there must be emphasis on teacher quality, access to better infrastructure, and movement away from rote learning into a more creative, learn to learn mode. This will lead to increased quality, better citizens, and ultimately increased employability.

IV. Conclusion

Quality can be measured in a number of ways, but at a most basic level, students should have access to quality teachers, quality tools, and safe and supportive learning environments. Students need to be taught more than what makes them employable, because no one actually knows what jobs and careers will exist in the future.

What students need more than anything, are those skills, which used to be known as soft-skills, which are now referred to as 21st century skills. They need the ability to be kind and compassionate. They need the ability to think creatively and work in teams. They need to learn to be global citizens.

One way in which children can acquire a number of these skills is through high quality music education. Children who learn music benefit in a number of ways have been detailed through numerous studies. It has been shown beyond a doubt that all children should learn music in their formative years.

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