

Globalisation And School Education In India: Some Data Gaps

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Abstract: The structure of Indian education is top heavy and bottom weak. This is known as the inverse pyramid structure in the literature. This is an indication of a lacuna in the policy and reality in context of universal primary and elementary education. The aim is elusive now. Another side of this is free and compulsory education, a propagated policy of the government for quite a long time. Is it really free? Compulsory in what sense? How much of monetary and other resources required for achieving this minimum requirement of education to meet the challenges of knowledge economy? These are some of the questions that need probing in the present day context of globalisation and knowledge economy. There are issues related to the efficiency and equity in the context of socio-economic goals that call for a scrupulous examination. Are we equipped with the data to answer these questions? Despite tremendous availability of data, there exist some gaps.

Key words: Education, data gaps, globalisation

Introduction

"Education is of great intrinsic importance with assessing inequalities of opportunity. It is also important determinant of individual's income, health and capacity to interact and communicate with others. Inequality in education thus contributes to inequality in other important dimensions of well being." (World Bank, 2006). Skills and knowledge acquired through knowledge are also considered as the driving forces of economic growth and social development. Countries with higher and better levels of skills adjust more effectively to the challenges and opportunities of globalization (GOI, 2006). The economy becomes more productive, innovative and competitive through the existence of more skilled human potential. Increasing pace of globalization and technological changes provide both challenges and growing opportunities for economic expansion and job creation. The transition to a more open economy entails taking advantage of these opportunities. The level and quality of skills that a nation possesses are becoming critical factors in the whole process. With the liberalization and globalization of the Indian economy, the rapid changes witnessed in scientific and technological world and the general need to improve the quality of life and to reduce poverty, it is essential that school students acquire a higher level and better quality of knowledge and skills than what they were provided earlier. The structure of Indian education is top heavy and bottom weak. This is known as the inverse pyramid structure in the literature. This is an indication of a lacuna in the policy and reality in context of universal primary and elementary education. The aim is elusive now. Another side of this is free and compulsory education, a propagated policy of the government for quite a long time. Is it really free? Compulsory in what sense?

How much of monetary and other resources required for achieving this minimum requirement of education to meet the challenges of knowledge economy? These are some of the questions that need probing in the present day context of globalisation and knowledge economy. There are issues related to the efficiency and equity in the context of socio-economic goals that call for a scrupulous examination. Are we equipped with the data? Despite tremendous availability of data, there exist some gaps. The present paper attempts to understand these gaps. The two main policy areas that need to be addressed are the overcoming of barriers to education by certain groups and the funding of education as a public service. (OXFAM, 2004). The well known feature of the education sector is complementarities of three levels of education, which are sequentially connected. It is self-evident that the working of the whole system gets crippled when one level, especially elementary education, which is the base/foundation of the whole system, is kept weak. The cycle of low access, equity and quality starts from here affecting in turn, the other two higher levels and vice-versa. (Shah, 2006). Access, equity and quality triangle has remained elusive for the entire education system. Unless it ceases to be elusive at the foundation level of the education, namely elementary education, it is presumptuous on our part to expect it to get converted into a reality at the higher levels of education (Shah, 2006).

Poor Allocation of Funds

"Governments around the world recognize the importance of education for economic and social development and invest large shares of their budgets to education. The provision of schooling is largely determined and financed by government. This requires central government intervention in regional and community education systems" (Patrinos, 1999) There are some trends that cut across all the issues relating to youth and education. Firstly, it is essential that governments and other sectors ensure that there is adequate funding to all schools to enable education capacity and quality and to make education accessible to all. Secondly, while the processes of globalisation make education more accessible to the privileged, marginalised, disadvantaged and isolated groups are left behind. Thus, the key players in the education system must ensure it is inclusive and addresses rather than aggravates inequalities. (OXFAM, 2004). The need for increased expenditure on education has been talked about since the

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late sixties. The allocation of funds for education as a percentage of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) has been steadily declining since the implementation of the New Economic Policy (Shah and Agrawal, 2003). This investment has continued to decline in spite of the levy of the 2 per cent (+1%) Education Cess and a substantial portion of the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) funds coming from international agencies. The present level of investment is as low as the level achieved 20 years ago — 3.5 per cent of the GDP. The political will to mobilise adequate public resources for education has reached a low-ebb" (shah,2006a). Official figures suggest that the government spends approximately Rs.1000 per year on a school going child [GOI 1997]. What does this money buy in terms of basic skill acquisition? A very rough estimate, based on a variety of government and other studies, suggests that, on an average, four years of schooling generates learning levels worth two years across the country. (sadgopal, 2006). Tavleen Singh in an article (2008) points out "It is when you look at the Indian education system through rural eyes that its monumental absurdities become painfully evident. Anyone who has bothered to inspect village schools in India will confirm that what they offer is a literacy programme". Generally, children who are fortunate in being born to educated parents or having caring, competent teachers do very well, and are able to find jobs demanding high productivity. However, the average is appallingly low. The results are low productivity, poor skills, and massive unemployment even after several years of schooling, or even college education. Various studies have shown that children coming from a deprived background do not have a supportive learning environment and feel alienated in schools. The government school teachers, even motivated ones, find it difficult to address their special needs. (Aruna,1998). Therefore, it is increasingly being realized that only by improving the quality of education the positive effects of growing enrolments can be sustained. Several studies have been carried out at the micro level in this regard. However, aggregated data at the macro level is unavailable.

Three dimensions of equity

Equity and Efficiency are the two important aspects of any educational policy. Equity in very broad sense can be used to understand in three ways. Opportunity based equity: opportunities to all irrespective of caste, community, gender and region. Performance based equity: culture that promotes desire to learn. Equity of accessibility to quality education, financial and other help to the needy to facilitate individual accomplishment.(OXFAM,2002). UNESCO at a Ministerial Round Table (on Quality of Education), held in 2003 had reaffirmed the importance of good quality education to all. Rather the report promotes access to good-quality education as a human right. Hence, it is imminent that the data pertaining to this is available Equity makes education fair (or lack of it makes it unfair). It requires that per pupil funding needs to be larger for disadvantaged pupils. If every child could make appropriate academic growth each year, equity could be achieved and can reflect in to equality of simple group averages (Oxfam, 2004). Hence, it is important to disentangle the effect of pupils' background from the effect of school quality. However, there is insufficient data related to the pupils'

socio-economic background and the quality of school teaching. Also, statistical information on performance based fund allocation and its utilization for public and private schools may throw some light on financing and its utilization in the private and public schools. Moreover, the opportunity cost of education is different for the pupils belonging to different economic strata.. This might help in understanding the high drop out ratio and policy suggestions for universalizing elementary education. Recently, government has introduced educational cess- an attempt to augment educational budget and also to fill the gap of 6% of GDP to education. Is this going to the education sector really or merely bridging the budget deficit? How is this money being allocated to various levels of education? These are some of the questions that need probing. However, no information is available on these counts. The participation of children is a means to a much larger end, that of preserving and adding a new vibrancy to our culture of egalitarianism, democracy, secularism and equality. These values can be best realised through an integrated and well-designed curriculum that enables children's participation. As The National Curriculum Framework 2005 mentions, existing environment of unhealthy competition in schools promotes values that are the antithesis of the values. Much of the statistical information pertains to the opportunity based equity

Globalisation and commoditification of Education

Education is becoming an internationally traded commodity in the present day of globalisation. No longer is it seen primarily as a set of skills, attitudes and values required for citizenship and effective participation in modern society- a key contribution to the common good of any society or the externalities. Rather it is increasingly seen as a commodity to be purchased by a consumer in order to build a "set of skills" to be used in the market place or a product to be bought and sold by the MNCs. (Agrawal, 2005). The process is irreversible. The quality of this commodity in general depends upon the cost of it. (Shah, 2006a). The shifting nature of public education funding calls for the very definitions of public and private education. The degree to which privatization and autonomy are found in institutions and systems varies, There is a plethora of schools catering to the students with varying paying capacity. Normally the Government schools are for poor people, Government aided ones are for middle classes and the unaided/private are for the rich and super rich population. These categories of schools in general sequentially offer better quality. Better quality of education in what terms? If in terms of internal efficiency, then a comparison of the performance of the students in schools managed by different bodies is called for. There is also a yawning gap between the performance of the students in the rural and the urban areas. It is not out of place to understand and analyse this gap. This might help in the policy formulation to bridge this gap. There is little information available on educational expenditure incurred by private households at various levels of education. With growing income of the private households and changing patterns of consumption, it would be interesting to understand the private expenditure on various levels of education under various heads of expenditure by socio-economic groups. In a knowledge economy the private returns on education are also growing. Hence, such

information would help in understanding the rates of returns at various levels of education. In the current global climate, market has been put forward as the hallmark of efficient and effective provision of goods and services that benefit all. This ideology has formed the basis for policies in India. However, it is being debated whether the market can ensure the best outcome for social or common goods such as education. Advocates for privatisation claim that such a system ensures the accountability and efficiency of educational institutions, improves the quality of courses and makes such institutions more accessible (Tooley1999). It has also been noted that privatisation can play a useful role in plugging gaps in dwindling public sector budgets and reducing budgetary pressures (Oxfam International 2002). Statistics have been emerged as an indispensable tool especially in developing countries seeking a sound basis for development plans. The key role of education in the economic and social programmes of countries at all levels of development has long been proved. There has been very rapid growth of educational activity throughout the world during the last half century, whether measured in terms of enrolment, employment, or expenditure. Rapid expansion on such a scale is likely to be of uneven quality even within a country unless its direction and thrust are guided by a careful choice of objectives, and of the most effective means for attaining them. Furthermore, the programmes chosen must be evaluated periodically in terms of their effectiveness in attaining the desired objectives. Statistical data of all kinds play an essential role in the design, control and evaluation of such programmes. If we put it in an abstract way, the statistical measurement of educational development in different spheres is important to indicate the extent of economic and social wellbeing, to serve as a benchmark for future planning, to serve as instruments of monitoring, evaluation and control of on going programmes, to facilitate spatial and temporal comparisons of development and to serve as a criterion for granting aids and loans [Singh (1994) and Singh (2002)]. Educational statistics can be used most effectively if they are based upon standard terminology, concepts, definitions, methods of tabulation, and classification. Such standards should be applied as widely as possible to ensure maximum comparability not only in data obtained from different sources on the same or closely related events, but in data obtained from the same sources at different points of time. Different sources provide data on school education. In fact, there is a significant improvement in terms of the number of agencies and coverage. Despite this, there exist some gaps that need urgent deliberations for a concerted and concrete action plan.

Concluding remarks

The Government of India has assigned high priority to the education sector not only to achieve the Universalisation of Elementary Education by 2010 but also to improve the quality of education at all levels. Also due to policy of economic liberalisation and globalisation it becomes all the more necessary to improve the quality of human capital to face the new challenges and competition in the world of work. As a consequence, establishing a strong statistical system to conduct the educational surveys on Census basis and to undertake issue based studies/sample surveys in a most efficient manner has become essential

(GOI,MHRD).This would help in planning at macro and micro level in a more realistic manner. With the use of information and communication technology, the implementation of policy at the grass root level is possible.

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