

The Question of Quality Education in West Bengal in the Context of UNICEF Working Paper Series 2000

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Abstract

For the last few decades philosophers, educationists, government and NGOs are talking about Quality education extensively. We need more quality in education. Many governments throughout the world are trying hard to enhance the quality of education. In India Central Government as well as the state government is also trying to increase the quality of education keeping in mind about MDGs and SDGs. Unfortunately it has been observed that in the Indian State of West Bengal, even trying hard the government is facing severe challenges to achieve the target. In this research article the researcher will try to point out the present scenario of education in the context of UNICEF's Working Paper Series 'Defining Quality in Education' which was presented in June, 2000 at the meeting of The International Working Group on Education Florence, Italy.

Keywords: *Quality Education, MDG, SDG, failure, UNICEF*

Introduction:

'Education' itself use to be a 'Quality'. Unfortunately today we created such a society and education system where only 'Education' is no more a 'Quality', we use the term 'Quality Education' to denote good quality of education. In the month of September, 2000, leaders of 189 countries met at the UN in New York and finalized the Millennium Declaration, it was a commitment to work together to build a safer, prosperous and equitable world. It is known as the Millennium Development Goals, where Education got an important place. The aim was that all boys and girls should complete a full course of primary schooling by 2015. Then in the next month of the same year UNICEF published Working Paper Series, which was actually a paper presented by UNICEF at the meeting of The International Working Group on Education Florence, Italy in the month of June, 2000. Here they defined what Quality Education is.

It is a matter of fact that only 'primary schooling' where emphasis is on literacy and numeracy, is not enough to achieve the 'aim of Education'. 'Quality Education' should be provided in the primary level because it is the very basic of the child.

Objective of the study: The objective of the present study is to describe the status of quality education in West Bengal as mentioned in the UNICEF Working Paper Series 2000 'Defining Quality in Education',

Methodology: This is a qualitative research. It is descriptive in nature. Observation and documentary analysis has been done.

Quality Education as per UNICEF: In the working Paper Series UNESCO observes that 'Quality education includes:

Learners who are healthy, well-nourished and ready to participate and learn, and supported in learning by their families and communities;

Environments that are healthy, safe, protective and gender-sensitive, and provide adequate resources and facilities;

Content that is reflected in relevant curricula and materials for the acquisition of basic skills, especially in the areas of literacy, numeracy and skills for life, and knowledge in such areas as gender, health, nutrition, HIV/AIDS prevention and peace;

Processes through which trained teachers use child-centered teaching approaches in well-managed classrooms and schools and skilful assessment to facilitate learning and reduce disparities;

Outcomes that encompass knowledge, skills and attitudes, and are linked to national goals for education and positive participation in society' (UNICEF Working Paper Series, 2000).

Analysis and Findings: Government of India has realized long ago that the health of the children is very important. For that, Government of India has launched Mid Day Meal Scheme way back in 1995, under the name of 'National Programme of Nutritional Support to Primary Education. Later in October 2007, the scheme was renamed as 'National Programme of Mid Day Meal in Schools,' also popularly known as Mid-Day Meal Scheme. Again in September 2021, this scheme was renamed as 'PM POSHAN' or Pradhan Mantri Poshan Shakti Nirman. At present almost 11.80 crore children studying in almost 11.20 lakh schools under this scheme throughout the country. Government of West Bengal is also doing an excellent job and secured a good position in the country. The eligible students are getting benefit from this scheme.

Regarding environment of the government and government aided schools the environment is not very healthy. Many schools even do not have hygienic washroom. Though most of the schools are safe but some unexpected events also occur sometimes. For example few days back on September 17, 2022, a bomb exploded at an Urdu medium school in Titagarh, North 24 Parganas district. The explosion triggered panic among students and teachers. Fortunately there were no casualties. Overall, in the post-pandemic situation the environment of the educational institutes have degraded a lot whether government or private school.

Most of the government schools are not very gender-sensitive. Few decades ago the situation was very bad but now things are changing. People are more aware and sensitive towards gender issues.

Another major problem of schools, specially government and government aided schools are inadequate resources and facilities. Teacher-student ratio is not satisfactory in most of the schools. Infrastructural facilities are also in a very poor condition in most of the schools of the state.

Content area is quite good. Curriculum for the acquisition of basic skills, especially in the areas of literacy and numeracy are quite okay. But if we talk about skills for life and knowledge in gender, health, nutrition, HIV/AIDS prevention and peace, the performance of most of the schools are not satisfactory. Life style education has been started in schools of West Bengal, unfortunately government was forced to cancel the subject from school curriculum.

It is a matter of fact that that the country is facing severe shortage of well trained, motivated and committed teachers. "There is a general decline in morale among school teachers, especially those in primary schools, and consequently it is no longer seen as an attractive profession for qualified young people." (NKC,2009).The situation of West Bengal in this area is extremely horrifying. Teacher training institutes of West Bengal are not performing properly at all. It seems that most of the teacher training institutes have forgot the proper aims of education. Only well trained, qualified and motivated teachers can make some change but most of the teacher training institutes are failing to create proper teachers.

The National goal of education is to make such individual who will be "*resolved to constitute India into a SOVEREIGN SOCIALIST SECULAR DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC AND SECURE TO ALL ITS CITIZENS;*

JUSTICE, social, economic, and political;

LIBERTY of thought, expression, belief, faith, worship; and to promote among them all-

FRATERNITY assuring the dignity of the individual and the unity and integrity of the Nation..." (Preamble, Constitution of India.)

Apart from this economic and technical development are also other goals of the nation regarding education. To achieve this goal government have made many bodies like CBSE, ICSE, UGC, AICTE, NCTE, NAAC etc. Year after year, thousands of people are engage to ensure that the countrymen can get proper quality education. Committees after committees has been formed, they submitted their report, according to those report curriculum has been framed, duties and responsibilities of the teacher has been designed, several thousand crore rupees has also been invested. Unfortunately we failed to make such individuals in most of the cases.

Present Society:

The India of 2000 and the India of today have very few similarities. The change that is going in Indian society is not only rapid but it is changing in a supersonic speed, where people are becoming a part of this change unconsciously. We cannot deny the fact that education system plays an important role in this change.

With the advent of Globalization, our thought is preoccupied with 'how we can make our life much more easy and beautiful'. Day by day, we are becoming self-centered. The concept of nuclear family has already stretched its dangerous paws in the remotest part of the country. With the development of ICT in industry, the world of media has become the main threat to cultural diversity. It is WE, who can preserve and destroy our culture and root, our individuality but as we human beings are also a kind of animal, with all animal instinct, it becomes very difficult to take under control all those

animal instinct. This instinct forces us to think about only our own self and self-benefit. Consumerist philosophy only plays the role of a catalyst.

Now, Education better to say, Proper Education, Quality Education is the only weapon with which we can fight against all the evil forces.

- The literacy rate which was 18.33% in 1951, reached to 74.04% in 2011.

God news, but the fact is, huge amount of gender inequality is there. Only 65.46% women in India are literate. Currently India has the largest illiterate population of any nation on earth. (Office of The Register General, India)

- The aim of education is to make perfect citizen who will make a better peaceful society. The fact is that, Crime is another characteristic of Indian society. Here crime is present in various forms. NCRB data shows that crime is increasing in Indian society.

“According to the crime record, 9,523 cases of crime against children were registered in 2021, up from 6,191 in 2019. At 10,248, the figure was higher in 2020, the first pandemic year (timesofindia.com). Crime against women is also increasing.

- Female Criminals are also increasing day by day. ‘The Crime in India Reports reveal that the number of females arrested for criminals activities in 2003 were 1,51,675, and this shot upto 1,54,635 in 2007.

- Hundreds of female children were murdered before their birth. Though the population continues its explosion.

- Corruption is another characteristic of Indian society. Recently West Bengal is also witnessing unprecedented corruption in different sectors. It has been observed that even the highly educated people are also involved in corruption.

- Drug addiction is another problem in Indian society. ‘Cultivation of illicit narcotic substances and drug trafficking affects the health of the individuals and destroy the economic structure of the family and society. Drug trafficking results in growth of organized crime, which affects social security.’(wikipedia.org). Many youths in West Bengal are addicted in substance abuse. The number of drug addicted people is increasing day by day.

Such is the situation of Bengal society. Apart from this seamy-side, there are many bright sides as well. In this paper, the researcher has dealt only with the dark side, because this side is important for the future development. Now let’s examine the reason behind such situation.

It has been observed that many educated people are involved in crime, violence and corruption. Now the question is why educated people are involved in crime, violence, corruption? One simple answer is, they never got quality education. If we really want to make a good society, we must provide quality education to the students. If we can’t provide quality education then we will not be able to make a good society.

The teachers play an important role in achieving those goals. The problem is that we don’t have enough such qualified teachers. “Teachers are the single most important element of the school system, and the country is already facing a severe shortage of qualified and motivated school teachers at different levels. It is urgent to restore the dignity of school teaching as a profession and provide more incentives for qualified and committed teachers.” (NKC, 2009).

Day by day, teaching is becoming simply a job- a way of living hood. The fact is teaching is not simply a job. It is much more than that.

5.2 portion of NCF 2005, gives a clear idea about the ideal teacher. In ‘National Curriculum Framework for Teacher Education 2009’we find a complete teacher in the Changing School Context and its Demands. NCTE has made all the arrangements to build a proper quality teacher. The problem is, in this competing world, we everybody wants to secure our future. Today majority of students use to go to educational institute to get a certificate, not for proper education. The case is same with the teacher training institutes.

“The training of school teachers is extremely inadequate and also poorly managed

Both pre-service and in-service teacher training programs face major problems at present, at the national level and in almost all states. With respect to pre-service training, there is a proliferation of private colleges awarding the B.Ed. degree, and these are inadequately monitored or regulated. A significant proportion of those who receive B.Ed. degrees do so through correspondence or distance learning courses, which involve absolutely no practical exposure.” (NKC,2009).

Apart from that majority of teachers are not satisfied with the state government’s pay principal. This is a state where the teachers are under paid compared to any other state of India.

Out of The eight Millennium Development goals (MDGs) the 2nd goal of is to ‘achieve Universal Primary Education by 2015’. We failed to achieve.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Agenda is “a plan of action for people, planet and prosperity”. It comprises of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) is the education goal. It aims to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.”

Almost half of the time has already passed. Yet we have not achieved anything significant. Only 8 years we have in hand. Present activity of the state is not very bright as that we can achieve the target.

Conclusion and Suggestions:

If things continue in this way Bengal will never be able to achieve the goal of education. So, the government must take strict action before it goes out of control. State government can do the following things to enhance the quality of education:

- The administration must monitor the quality of education/ training provided in the teacher training institutes.
- The authority must assure that the entire teaching community is aware about the aims of education as well as the national goal of education.
- Teacher-student ratio must be maintained properly.
- School administration must ensure joyful and trauma free environment.
- School environment should be child, disability and gender sensitive.
- Teachers must be tech savvy and more students friendly. Teaching learning environment should be child-centric.
- Teachers must update themselves in their subject. The concept of lifelong learning will have to be adopted.
- School must have proper infrastructure.
- School/teachers must talk to the guardians and keep a healthy relation with them.
- Technical and vocational skills, for employment must be addressed properly.
- School must focus on that ‘all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture’s contribution to sustainable development’(sdgs.un.org).
- CCE should be followed while evaluating the students.

A day will come when politicians, administrators, and every man will live above their vested interest, hate and greed. If we practice the suggestions mentioned here, we can easily achieve national as well as universal aim of education.

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