Education Quality – Chasing the Elusive Goal

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The Elusive Triangle


Indian education -- a "dual" system with a core of high standard institutions, mostly private and fee-charging, serving the privileged. Definition of quality itself has been shifting. Often defined in terms of inputs. Exam results gave a mixed picture and their validity suspect.
Hindrance to Quality

Naik Observed:

- With limited resources, expansion had priority over quality programmes.
- Educational administrators preferred easily organised quantitative actions.
- Quality improvement demanded a concentration of resources and phasing of effort.
- Careful planning and intensive human effort were scarcer than funds.
- Student unrest; strikes by teachers, political and communal conflicts destroyed promising initiatives.

Contradictions and immense problems involved in bringing about a transformation of the educational system – when the over-all social situation is inegalitarian and hierarchical.
Quality - A Recurrent Theme

Quality, n. - the standard of something as measured against other things of a similar kind, the degree of excellence of something, or a distinctive attribute or characteristic possessed by someone or something. (Merriam-Webster).

It is relative and context-specific, rather than absolute.

An evolution in the expression of quality concerns through the decades since the 1990s can be seen.

The theme statement of WEF 2015, Incheon - “Good quality education, provided by trained and supported teachers, is the right of all children, youth and adults, not the privilege of the few.”
Diverse Perspectives on Quality

The rights based perspective - quality education at basic level a right

The humanist and constructivist perspective - education as a social process with strong agency of the learner.

The behaviourist tradition - education system as a standardised, externally defined and controlled process.

The critical tradition -- education prompts social change. Curriculum/pedagogy encourage critical analysis skills and learner agency.

The adult education/andragogy tradition - premium on learner self-motivation, learner experience, critical reflection.

Not mutually exclusive; vary in their value as guide to educational planning, setting objectives and assessing quality.
Figure 1: A framework for understanding education quality

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Learner characteristics</th>
<th>Enabling inputs</th>
<th>Outcomes</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teaching and learning materials</td>
<td>Literacy, numeracy and life skills</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Physical infrastructure and facilities</td>
<td>Creative and emotional skills</td>
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<td>Human resources: teachers, principals inspectors, supervisors, administrators</td>
<td>Values</td>
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<td>School governance</td>
<td>Social benefits</td>
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<td>Teaching and learning</td>
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<td>Learning time</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Teaching methods</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Assessment, feedback, incentives</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Class size</td>
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<th>Economic and labour market conditions in the community</th>
<th>Educational knowledge and support infrastructure</th>
<th>Philosophical standpoint of teacher and learner</th>
<th>National standards</th>
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<td>Socio-cultural and religious factors</td>
<td>Public resources for education</td>
<td>Peer effects</td>
<td>Public expectations</td>
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<td>Aid strategies</td>
<td>Competitiveness of the teaching profession on the labour market</td>
<td>Parental support</td>
<td>Labour market demands</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>National governance and management strategies</td>
<td>Time for schooling and homework</td>
<td>Globalization</td>
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Source: Global Monitoring Report 2005, Ch. 1. p. 36
Making pedagogy work in the classroom

John Hattie made a synthesis of over 800 meta-analyses representing 50,000 studies on learning achievement.

He pleaded for “visible teaching” and “visible learning” where learning can be made explicit and common goal for learners, teachers and the learning system.

Hattie identified six factors and assessed their respective contributions to student achievement -- child; home; school; teacher; curriculum and e approaches to teaching. The child brings to school (from preschool, home, and genetics) factors that affect the outcomes of schooling.

What teachers do matters, Hattie notes, when they teach in the most deliberate and visible way.” make good use of feedback from students, and help students create a range of learning strategies for themselves.
Figure 1: Percentage of Achievement by Students Attributable to Various Factors
Interpreting evidence with caution

Evidence-based policy making is the buzz-word today. Research evidence has to be taken seriously, but not forgetting, in human and social development, the unforeseen intervening variables never fail to intervene.

The proportions shown of relative influences of the six factors cannot be taken as mathematical certainty, but they do point broadly to relative significance of the factors.

The message is that students have to be placed at the centre of the teaching-learning process and the teacher has a critical role in doing precisely that.
Cross-cutting challenges beyond theories

Even after 100 years, developing countries lag significantly behind in education levels.

Developed Regions
Developing Regions

MEAN YEARS OF SCHOOLING, ADULT POPULATION
New GEM Report shows the world is 50 years late in meeting education targets

YEAR 2030 2042 2059 2084
Education 2030 deadline Universal primary completion Universal lower secondary completion Universal upper secondary completion

#sdg4all

Read more...
Concern 1. Literacy - the indispensable learning tool

Literacy is the foundation and the first step for lifelong learning. It is a foundational skill for children in formal education. This foundation has to be built in the early grades of primary education. **But this not happening.**

A national sample survey testing levels of literacy of 11+ population showed 51.3% literacy rate (official claim 63%) in Bangladesh.

The test with four elements *(reading, writing, numeracy and application of 3Rs in everyday life)*, found literacy rate **at an initial level was 25.3% and at an advanced level it was 26.0%**. Initial level of literacy meant **skills could be used in a limited way and needed to be sustained with further skills development**. Advanced level indicated **skills could be used in daily functions and could be self-sustaining**.

Also showed of **children completing 5 years of primary education, one-third (32.2%) did not have literacy at the initial level** (semi-literate) Even after eight years of schooling, 8.2% remained semi-literate.

*(Education Watch Bangladesh, 2015 Survey)*
Concern 2 - Teachers

Tagore: "a teacher can never truly teach unless he is still learning himself. A lamp can never light another lamp unless it continues to burn its flame".

Teaching is the largest single occupational category for post-secondary graduates. A quarter of university/college graduates seek employment in it in Bangladesh. But it is also the last occupational choice for higher education graduates.

A comprehensive human resource development and management policy for teaching must make it the top career choice for talented young people.

Four connected steps in Bangladesh context –

Make education part of mainstream undergraduate degree; Attract best students to it with incentives;
Ensure high standard of this course,
Establish a National Teaching Service Corps with high salary and status.

Thus a nucleus of talented young teachers could be placed in every primary and secondary school as catalysts for change.
Concern 3: Educational Leadership

The typical pattern is the principal / headmaster comes to this position by acquiring seniority as a teacher. The result often is a good teacher is lost to teaching and the school gets a mediocre manager or worse.

The school as an enterprise has multiple and complex roles/ functions -- academic planning, managing teaching and other personnel, protecting and promoting wellbeing of students, looking after finances and physical plants and premises, dealing with multiple stakeholders with high stakes in the school, and leading a change process striving for excellence.

How prepared, skilled and motivated is the school leader who is vested with all of these roles and responsibilities?

Wherever a school is known for its good performance, behind this success there is a leader, most likely the school-head who can inspire and get the support of others, such as school managing committee, parents and teachers.

These examples point to what can happen, when the system recognises need for change, identify and support leaders to promote it.
Concern 4: ICT in and for education

Traditional educational technology has not lived up to the hype. **Digital technology, in its scope and reach is qualitatively different, but the potential remains to be harnessed.**

Khan Academy is an illustration of the potential. The non-profit organization has the audacious goal of providing a "free, world-class education for anyone, anywhere" -- has posted 9,000 videos on school curriculum topics. Its website has practice exercises and tools for students and educators available free to anyone around the world.

**Even the new technologies are not substitutes for classroom activities and teachers. But everything that help overcome many limitations of the school system should be fully used.**

Much more needs done in access infrastructure (laptops/tablets, affordable and reliable Internet connection for schools, students and teachers); and many more teachers or specially recruited teaching aides to guide students and other teachers to make use of IT resources. **The rich are already using it, the poor majority are left out.**
Concern 5- Assessment of Students

A forward-looking middle income country has to be globally competitive in skills and capabilities of its human resources.

Assessment of learning provides the metrics to monitor progress in quality and performance of students.

One way is to participate in international assessments such as Programme on International student Assessment (PISA), Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS), and Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS).

Two states of India participated in PISA in 2009–10 and were placed in 72nd position out of 73 countries in mathematics, reading and science performance. Question arose whether it served any useful purpose when it was known that the schools, teachers and the system were at a great disadvantage compared to other countries.

Within framework of SDG 2030/Education 2030, competencies in language, math, science and computer skills of primary and secondary education students need to compare favourably with those of other middle and higher income countries as judged by international assessment.

Home-grown assessment such as Pratham, ASER, Education Watch measure basic competencies of children, in school and outside and help identify the points where the system breaks down. But a culture of denial of problems among decision-makers and a political culture to encourage such denial prevents action to deal with the problems.
Concern 6: Private Profit, Public Loss – Privatising schools

‘Low-fee’ private schools are being advanced as the solution to the failings of public systems, at least as supplement to the public system. The Global Campaign for Education (GCE) finds these claims and evidence in their support seriously flawed. GCE argues; a) “low-fee” provide low quality with substandard and low-paid teachers, b) price families in poverty out of school, c) create barriers for girls’ education, and d) fail to serve children with disabilities.

Private education is growing in the region. A third of the children in Pakistan (40% in Punjab) attend private schools at the primary and secondary levels. India is approaching similar proportions fuelled by a false perception of “better value for money.”

There is a basic contradiction in offering as a product for sale a public good that is basic general education and recognized so by national constitutions, legislation and international treaties.

A mechanism is needed for taking an aggregate view of the total education system that includes public, semi-public and private resources for education with a policy priority to ensue quality of public education.
Concern 7 – SDG4 Target 7

What is the purpose of education? What kind of human beings we would like to see the education system to produce? These questions are on the minds of educationists and citizens. Target 7 of SDG 4 relate to the philosophical questions about the purpose of education and the attributes of the learners coming out of the system. Target 7 puts up a large umbrella with the label “knowledge and skills for sustainable development” and places under it a wide range of activities and objectives, including human rights, peace and non-violence, global citizenship, cultural diversity and contribution of culture to sustainability. These relate to paramount challenges for humankind.

To take two examples – 1. war, conflict and violence are killing and uprooting the largest proportions of humanity ever. 2. Scientists warn of a catastrophe if global warming increase cannot be capped at 2 degree celsius increase over pre-industrial level. But time is fast running out.

Facing the existential challenges cannot be the task of the school alone. Society, community and the educational System have to unite for this task. An effective way of doing this has yet to be figured out. This must be part of the SDG4/Education 2030 agenda.