

Installing the Software of Excellence in India's Teacher Education-The Hidden Dimensions

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ABSTRACT

'A recent survey of five rural schools and five urban schools by the author revealed a startling fact regarding the new challenges for teacher education in India. It was found in the survey that despite the greater flow of funds and availability of better technology, the teachers who bring excellent results are the ones who had the burning desire to help children learn better, which the author calls the software of excellence in teaching learning. The commitment to put in sustained efforts needed for improving the performance of learners at all levels was found missing among a majority of the teachers surveyed, who for one reason or the other were found busy in compiling reports and distributing funds at the expense of the vital teaching learning interactions. This paper discusses the related challenges of public education in India and tries to present an alternative plan of action in order to meet the challenges of global economic exploitation of the masses in the guise of welfare measures. It concludes with asserting the crucial need for reform from within the system of teacher education to rejuvenate the system for making it self-sufficient and self sustained in terms of quality input-output for the educational resurgence of the country. The author is of the opinion that simply by providing funds and recruiting teachers somehow is not going to help achieve the goals of quality education for all; rather a meaningful and alert mechanism of supervision, with active partnership of local bodies is the need of the hour to make the system work. Citing from the work of Dr. James Tooley (2009), the author points out that the way to meet the challenge is a systemic reform, at the centre of which is a paradigm shift in the training of teachers and re-orientation of educational administrators for their new and more complicated roles as sincere facilitators for lifelong learning of their students.'

Keywords: Excellence in teaching-learning, response-potential, non-supervised commitment and integrity towards teaching, character efficiency, software of excellence.

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Quality of life in any contemporary society is directly proportional to the sensitivity and maturity of its citizens which is, in turn, shaped by the quality of education prevailing in that society. Prof. Kothari (1966) said in his famous report on Education, '*the destiny of the nation is being shaped in its classrooms*'. And, truly to the letter of his prophetic words, we have shaped the destiny of our nation so far through our classrooms and this process

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is still continuing. It is a different matter whether the destiny so shaped is desirable or undesirable. India is still a developing country despite strenuous efforts by all the so-called best products of our education system for almost last 70 years. The educational scenario of the country is very complex today, yet it is not uncommon to come across a largely dissatisfied conglomerate of population regarding the quality of education; and more so in the public sector school education. *It is now accepted wisdom that of all the factors contributing to student learning, schools account for roughly half the differences in student achievement. In addition schools themselves are complex systems with many moving parts, such as the richness of the curriculum, the general tone of the school, and the availability of support services and extra-curricular activities of the school* (Danielson, 2014), but if the entire system or the leading team is imbued with a sense of excellence, half the battle in the context of providing quality education would be won easily.

Contemporary Educational Scenario in India: A Case Study

When one undertakes a general survey of educational scenario today, the picture seems to be very grim. Although, the number of schools, colleges and universities has gone up exponentially, the quality of education has gone down much faster. The enrolment in India's elementary schools increased from 168.3 million in 2005-06 to 193.1 million in 2010-11 and further to 197.7 million in 2014-15; the number of schools in 2014 stood at 14,25,564 and there are 26.4 lakh teachers are working in primary schools, 12.86 lakh in secondary and 17.85 lakh in senior secondary schools of the country. But the quality of school education is alarmingly poor as indicated by surveys conducted by PRATHAM and ASER (Annual Status of Education Report), 2014. As per the PRATHAM, 2015 report, 25% of class VIII students were not able to read class II textbooks (prescribed by NCERT) whereas the ASER statistics predicts that even after the substantial enrolment and half of all the children completing eight years of primary education, a majority have not learnt the basic arithmetic skills. This speaks volumes about the quality of school education in the country. Moreover, it is a common statement

even among illiterate or semi literate masses across the country that the government schools have failed to maintain their quality. As the school education is the basic foundation and the feeder for higher as well as professional education, the quality of higher education is suffering a new low despite stringent measures of assessment and accreditation.

This study is limited to the school education in order to look into the factors needed for strengthening teacher education, hence we will be talking here of school education in general. Out of a random survey of ten schools by the author, it was found that actual teaching learning was being carried out more regularly and sincerely in so called small private sector schools rather than the ones owned by the government. Even the quality of teaching learning in some of the public schools was so low that there was no justification of higher qualifications of the teachers and high salary for the teachers employed there.

Background of the study

While going through John Tooley's beautiful book entitled *A Beautiful Tree* (2009), the author thought of undertaking a small-scale study to confirm whether the public sector free schooling has similar pattern of performance with respect to private sector low cost schooling as reported by Tooley. This paper is the result of that small survey out of personal interaction of the author with the schools but it represents the common trend at present to a large extent.

Objectives of the study

The study was undertaken:

- (a) To understand the nature of schooling in private sector as well as public sector for small towns and villages of the country.
- (b) To compare the academic performance of students in the two types of schools.
- (c) To compare the general teaching learning climate in the two types of schools.
- (d) To compare the quality of supervision in the two types of schools.

Hypotheses

The following were the major hypothesis of this study:

1. There is no difference in the nature of schooling in the two types of institutions in small towns and villages.
2. There is no significant difference in the academic performance of students in the two types of schools.
3. There is no significant difference in the teaching learning climate in the two types of schools.
4. There is no significant difference in the process and product of supervision in the two types of schools.

Method and procedure of study

This study is based on random survey as well as qualitative observation (participant as well as non participant) of the ten schools during a period of ten days. The conclusions based further, on the analyses of quantitative as well as qualitative data as reported/provided by parents, teachers and the students.

Findings and Conclusion

It was found that the regularity of academic as well as co-curricular activities was on the much higher side even in small and less equipped (in terms of physical and human infrastructure) private schools as compared to the government schools. The micro-management of academic activities was reported (by parents and students) to be more satisfactory in these private schools as compared to the government schools.

The following table shows the comparative figure regarding average teachers' qualifications:

Table 1

Schools-type	Total No. of Teachers	Average qualification of teachers	Average no. of students in a class/section
Public School	21	Graduation /Post-Graduation	70
Private School	15	+2/Graduation	40

Overall, the average qualification of a government school was higher as compared to that of a private school. Despite this fact, academic management of private schools was reportedly much better and effective. Moreover, a random observation of general climate of teaching learning in these schools revealed that while in privately managed schools the emphasis was on better classroom interaction, in government schools, it was on compilation of reports of various kinds as required by the higher authorities, disbursement of funds and bicycles to students. In one of higher secondary schools, even the classes are held on alternate days for boys and girls, thus making it a three-day week for students. Even in those three days week, the amount and quality of the teaching learning interaction was not satisfactory.

Regarding the periodicity of supervision by the authorities, the following (table 2) is the average weekly monthly report. The table clearly shows how the principals/DEO's and the teachers ensure minimum quality of teaching learning in private and government schools.

Table 2

School-type	Average no. of rounds by the principal	N. of visits by DEO/VEC	Average no. of interactive meetings of the principal with teachers
Private Schools	21 per week	Nil	4 per month
Public Schools	2-3 per week	1	2 (but not for academic purposes)

The following table (Table 3) shows the average scores of students of class VII (in their school based tests) in the two types of schools in Science, Mathematics and languages:

Table 3

Subject	Average Score	Average Score	Difference of mean
Maths	30	50	20
EVS & Science	35	60	25
English	25	65	40
Hindi	40	60	20

Discussion/ Points of Reflection

The following main points emerge from the current study for further discussion regarding the new challenges for teacher education:

- ❑ **Public Sector Institutions:** The public sector schools seem to be responsible to no one. The diffused responsibility in the management and minimal academic audit of these institutions make them under-perform with regard to educational processing and output. Moreover, a large number of reports are prepared by the teachers on the instruction of senior officials just to get the data straightened and make the reports sound good. These days, the umpteen numbers of scholarships, dress distribution, bicycle distribution, mid day meals and funds for which the teachers have to maintain proper records at the cost of their classroom interactions are taking heavy toll on the quality of education. Even, one headmaster in a rural school, on the condition of anonymity, reported that no parents come to enquire about the learning and performance of their wards but 95% of the parents may come every third day to ask whether the scholarship/ fund has come or not despite the fact that now every student gets these scholarships directly deposited in his/ her bank account.
- ❑ **Private sector Institutions:** private sector schools are found more responsible to parents and the teaching learning activities are far more satisfactory than those in public sector. Moreover, the individual responsibility of the teachers and the principal regarding their academic and managerial roles makes them work sincerely towards the better processing and output in academic areas.
- ❑ **A Mismatch of Demand and Supply:** There seems to be a gross mismatch of demand and supply in education sector. Although, government claims to provide large number of schools for education of children, yet the type of schools public wants for their children is not what the government is providing. This is one of the main reasons for private players

coming into picture to fill the gap. To a large extent people demand good schools with better learning environments where teaching learning takes place in a transparent and accountable manner, but what the government is providing is largely an inert system which is not sensitive to the child's learning needs and aspirations; and further this kind of school climate kills the spirit of enquiry and stifles the joy of learning for the students leading to large scale wastage and stagnation even at the elementary school level.

- ❑ **Quality Alternatives:** There have to be quality alternatives in order for the country to nurture the talents in the children. The private schools mushrooming especially in the small towns and villages are providing a better quality alternative to public schooling these days as reported by a majority of parents. Here lies the crux of the problem. We may not be able to stop mushrooming of such schools altogether, but we must put sincere efforts to enhance the learning environment of government schools. At the same time, we also need to enhance the effectiveness of private schools by engaging them in meaningful focused dialogues periodically and enhance their commitment to excellence in teaching learning through various means and methods. One of such means is the periodic guidance by the concerned community members, the other may be the supervision by officials in the education department with a view to point out their strengths and help them build on their strengths in better teaching learning activities. The other may be creating small centres of learning in each village as the common public library for two hours in the evenings and entrusting its responsibility to the elder members of the village in rotation every month. This may be housed in one room of Panchayat Bhavan or community centres and may be provided with two to five sets of NCERT textbooks of classes II to X, two to three monthly magazines like Bal Bharti and Bal-Hans, Vigyan Pragati, and two news papers-one in local language and the other in English. Periodically, deputy commissioners or DEO's

can have meetings with villagers and students inspiring them to learn better and manage their affairs for quality learning in the evenings. Thus each village will become self dependent in managing the quality initiatives in learning in the long run and a culture of excellence may be set in motion thus.

- **Spirit of Excellence:** *The first question which needs to be answered for social development is , "What is the type of human excellence that we want to see in our society, neighbourhood and in India?" It is very necessary to ask this question and sincerely try to find the answer as individuals and collectives. Thus only can individual as well as social energies be helped to develop a purpose and a direction, without which these energies function in self cancelling ways. At present most people, including teachers and students, are living what we may call ad-hoc lives, day to day, hour to hour, without any distant horizon appearing before them, without the lever of a great ideal or purpose; and that is dangerous to any society (Swami Ranganathananda, 1963).* It is the urgent need of the hour to infuse education at all levels with a purpose and what better purpose than that of human excellence. At all levels, teachers (and parents also) must be inspired to believe that they are responsibly shaping excellent human beings day in and day out. This will give a missionary zeal and renewed vigour to the entire teaching learning community. And, this demands excellent educational leadership and sensible administration. Excellence is a habit of dedicating oneself to the cause for which one works. Despite the fact that most of the teachers in these small private schools are underpaid and under-qualified in technical terms but as Tooley (2009) asserts, the commitment of these teachers is something to be appreciated and even their salary is at par with the prevailing market rate in the contemporary situation. To infuse the spirit of excellence, we need to develop a network of such institutions for frequent conferences/ creative interactions of their teachers towards academic and co-curricular excellence. At the same time, open universities and directorates

of distance education of nearby universities may be roped in to motivate the teachers of these small private schools to improve their professional competence through relevant short term courses like certificate in teaching of mathematics, certificate in teaching of English, certificate in guidance etc.

- **Excellence in Teaching Learning:** Excellence in teaching learning means working sincerely for the excellence of students in all spheres of their studies and personality. Although many of the private school engage their students in various types of co curricular activities, there is further scope for improvement. There is another possibility of creating a platform for regular academic and co-curricular interactions of the students (like science fairs, competitions in essay writing, elocution, debate, students' parliament, matches of football, cricket, volleyball etc.) of various private schools for betterment of their students. The co-operation and support of parents, can easily, be obtained for such activities.
- **Taking Care of the Response-Potential: Who Cares?** If one wants to be truly helpful, one must keep nurturing the response potential of his/ her students. This basic ingredient of the teaching effectiveness must be imbibed by all teachers. Every teacher must be willing and capable of discharging his/her duty willingly, enthusiastically and inspiringly and every student must be facilitated to learn in the best possible way as per his/her individual inclination. The teachers and students both must go from strength to greater strength respecting one another as manifestations of one divinity.

Installing the Software of Excellence: Reorienting Teacher Education

What we need today is a program of teacher training wherein the trainee teachers are inspired to excel in their profession-come what may, not just carry on the burden or tradition of conventional teaching tasks as directed by the system. Instead, the need of the hour is of creating teachers who love their students and

their profession from the core of their heart keeping in mind their unwavering commitment to the national resurgence.

- **Education for All-An Achievable Milestone or A Virtual Reality?** For the last about 25 years, India has witnessed an unprecedented emphasis on providing basic facilities for realizing the goal of education for all, but the result of the effort is far from satisfactory. The main reason, to my view, is the piecemeal approach to reforms in teacher education in the country. If we want education for all in its real sense, we must focus on high quality teacher education.

A Practical Alternative

In the present scenario, it seems that the only feasible alternative to this problem is encouraging private initiatives in education with adequate involvement of a group of people, may be identified at a national level network of NGO's and committed individuals from the government sector. Even our guiding lights of yesteryears from leading schools, colleges, universities and administration can be of tremendous help. Those who have played their innings in active academic sphere can provide quality guidance and support in this context. We need to create a national network of willing individuals, who will be guiding and motivating teachers, students and the community in creating conducive inspiring classroom climates in a non hierarchical and non judgmental way leading the movement of quality education at all levels and subsequently infusing the joy of learning in every learner and joy of teaching in every teacher of the country.

- **Can Incorruptibility be instilled? A Million Dollar Question:** We, as a society, are highly troubled by the news reports and consequent investigations, allegations, counter allegations of various kinds of scams and scandals for over 25 years or so and subsequent mockery of the entire structure of public administration in one area or the other. It is high time, we seriously consider the root cause of this cancerous trend in society and help education to produce incorruptible individuals. The

biggest question in the present scenario is whether incorruptibility can be instilled through educational and particularly the teacher education programs? The answer is in the affirmative. All teachers want to teach in the best possible way, but with passage of time and influence of other factors (intervening extraneous variables), who somehow could not retain their capability of enhancing the response potential of their students in the system. The teachers need continuous and loving support to retain their true nature of creating miracles in lives of their students. Teaching is, no doubt the noblest profession. But, its nobility lies in its effective role in creating conducive climate of learning despite all odds. For this purpose, we need to seriously consider creating separate cadre of educational administrators with vision, commitment and farsightedness for the entire country from among the teaching fraternity.

- **Installing the Software of Excellence- A Difficult but the only Way Out:** The only feasible way, out of this mess of low quality education, seems to be the process of installing the software of excellence among the teachers and the trainee teachers . The focus in the colleges of education and education department should be on gearing their students towards sustained efforts for empowering them in order to enhance their capability of inspiring their students in the classrooms and working towards effective manifestation of their true and incorruptible nature as the best representatives and role models for society. We need to learn from Vedanta and Yoga the nuances of righteous living in relation to oneself, one's work-life/professional life, personal life and public image; and thoroughly be grounded in the science of human possibilities (Aldous Huxley). This is not a small scale work but needs tremendous sincerity, which will eventually create *rajarshi* leadership among the teachers and transform the society in unprecedented yet blissful ways. This effort towards installing the *software of excellence* among the prospective teachers is really a new and invisible challenge,

which must be accepted sincerely by the teacher education in the 21st century if we want to transform the society in positive direction. The true role of teacher education seems to be not just the training in pedagogy but also the training in using one's weight in favour of righteousness and excellence in the profession of teaching learning despite seemingly insurmountable obstacles everywhere in the environment.

Conclusion

In the end, we can say that revival of the spirit of educational excellence is one of the most feasible alternatives for providing quality education to all children in the country meaningfully. Unless the teachers are trained for putting in their best efforts continuously every single day in classrooms for ensuring the inward flowering of their students, all campaigns for universalization of education, whether it be SSA or RMSA or any other by whatever lofty name, are bound to produce marginal impacts in the desired

direction. This is all the more necessary in the wake of rapid commercialization of education including teacher education by the so called black sheep in the society, who with the sole intention of money minting and tax evasion, are trying to control the profession of teaching. Each and every prospective teacher must be trained to be the centre of excellence in teaching learning to the best of his/her capability.

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