

Education for Development: A Commentary on Policies, Approaches and Assumptions

Jandhyala B G Tilak

(National University of Educational Planning and Administration, New Delhi)

Education forms an important ingredient of development, and also an important instrument of achieving high levels of sustainable development. The role of education in influencing, social, economic, political and cultural aspects of people's well-being is well known. For example, the role of education in reducing poverty – both at individual and national levels, in improving health and nutritional status of population, in reducing fertility and population growth and thereby contributing to demographic transition, and in strengthening democratic forces and in ensuring civil and political rights of the people is well documented. Literature on human development also highlighted the constitutive role of education, i.e. education as development itself, in addition to the instrumental role of education. Education plays an important role in achieving both rapid and sustainable development including human development.

Sustainable development of the societies requires strong and vibrant education development systems. It is necessary too build the educational edifice which focuses on both human capital and human development aspects, economic growth as well as equity and reduction in poverty, modern techniques of development as well as traditional methods, national, local as well as global concerns, and human and secular values. Only strong and vibrant education systems, based on sound assumptions and approaches, can play the constitutive and instrumental roles in development. In other words, strong and sustainable education system is necessary to serve (a) itself as development, as “freedom”, as a “capability”, as “a human right” and as human development and (b) as a means of individual and national development from economic, social, cultural, and political points of view.

Education in India: A Quick Overview

During the post independence period there has been an educational explosion in terms of number of schools, colleges, universities, number of students, teachers and public expenditures on education. The overall literacy

rate has jumped fourfold during the post-independence period from 16.7 per cent in 1951 to 74 per cent in 2011. The number of students is above 270 million in 2010-11, compare to about 25 million in 1951. India has one of the largest networks of education institutions in the world with more than 600 universities, 32,000 colleges, and about 1.5 million schools. More than four fifths of the children of the eligible age-group are enrolled in primary and upper primary schools. Higher education has also expanded and could produce the third largest reservoir of scientific and technical manpower in the world. It could help in achieving self sufficiency in manpower. All this contributed to social, economic and technological development. Yet the progress is not satisfactory, both in terms of numbers and in the nature of progress. One third of the population are still illiterate; elementary education is still far from being universal, vocationisation of secondary education did not progress at the pace the country wanted; and hardly fifteen per cent of the youth (of the eligible age group to higher education) are in higher education institution. Dropout rates are high in school education. Quality of education at all needs improvement. Efforts are needed to reach the unreached.

Several initiatives are being taken for the progress of education, While some of these measures are likely to produce significant positive results, some may not.

A Critique of Select Policies, Approaches and Assumptions

Rarely the dual function of education, which can be summarized as human capital (Instrumental role) and human development (constitutive) roles are recognized adequately while educational policies, plans, and strategies are developed. For example, while the human development role of education is increasingly realized, education plans and policies are formulated at best keeping the human capital role only in mind. Further, given the national and international socio-political and economic factors, India like many other developing countries tends to ignore the long term needs of education

to contribute significantly to development. As a result, many education policies and strategies are being adopted in recent years that do not necessarily contribute to sustainable education development. Many such policies and strategies are based on not necessarily sound assumptions. In fact, some of the underlying assumptions of the strategies of education development are unsound and/or are mutually contradictory. Some of the policies are adopted by the developing countries either on their own out of conviction, or out of compulsions – domestic and international. Such unsound policies, faulty assumptions and unsustainable strategies of education development might fail to contribute to development.

Unsound Policies, Faulty Assumptions and Questionable Approaches

Some of the very commonly stated important assumptions and the approaches are discussed here under six broad headings, with a brief comment on each:

1. Education in Poor Societies

Assumption Poor People do not value education

The most damaging assumption underlying several education strategies of developing countries lies with the assumption that people are ignorant; they do not value education, and whatever is provided, that's appropriate. The high rate of non-participation in schooling is attributed more to the ignorance of the people than to the inadequacies in supply of education. It is increasingly argued that there exists no demand for education, and people do not value education.

But in recent years awareness of the importance of education has increased. As recent surveys in India (e.g. PROBE, 1999) have revealed, there does exist huge demand for education, even poor illiterate parents living in rural areas, want education for their children, including for their girl children. This is true even with respect to minorities. But what is demanded is not just any education, but reasonable quality education – a functional schooling system and not a 'token' education programme.

Assumption Poor Societies cannot afford good education

A closely related assumption, widely prevalent among many is that economically poor societies cannot afford good education. After all, there is no money. Formal education is costly. It requires huge resources, which

many international organizations and some developing countries themselves feel that it cannot be afforded. World Bank and UNESCO, for example, in the context of Education. For all, have made estimates of resource requirements for universal primary education in developing countries that vary between US\$3.2 to US\$9.4 thousand million for a group of 47 developing countries. Since formal education is costly, these societies can afford only low cost and cheap quality education.

But at the same time it was also shown for example, by UNDP, how small these figures of the World Bank and UNESCO were in comparison with expenditure on defense, expenditures on alcohol and cigarettes that the world spends.

Further, for example, in India it was estimated in 1999 that universal elementary education would additionally require Rs.1370 thousand million for a ten year period. While this figure looked awesome, it is important to note that the meant hardy 0.7 per cent of India's GDP on average.

It is also well known that many economically poor countries (e.g. Sri Lanka and Viet Nam) could provide good quality universal basic education to all their children. Hence it may not be true to say that developing countries cannot afford good quality education.

Development of education, for that matter, of any sector critically depends upon the quantum of funds available. Finances also reflect the priority the Government accords to education. Though finances do not solve all problems they are absolutely necessary for any improvement, even for maintenance of the system. It can be said that though finances are not a sufficient condition to development, they for a crucial necessary condition for development of higher education. Inadequate funding certainly would seriously affect all dimensions of education.

2. Quality of Education

Assumption: Non0formal education is the best option for the poor.

Given the above, the most appropriate forms of education suggested for poor developing countries are least expensive non-formal education, and adult education (e.g. Coombs and Ahmed, 1974).

Development planners accordingly concentrated their attention for a long period rather exclusively on adult

literacy and non-formal education programmes for reduction in poverty in developing countries. These programmes are offered as an alternative to formal education; and they are of short duration of six months to two years. Thus is partly based on a presumption that formal education is not relevant for the poor. Governments in developing countries also favoured non-formal and adult education, primarily because it is 'cheap' relatives to formal education, and they can still claim to be engaged in promoting education for eradication of poverty, as education is defined to include all forms of non-formal and informal education. Since formal education facilities are not available sufficiently, it becomes not the second best option; rather it is the only available option to the poor.

However, short duration non-formal and adult education cannot be a substitute to formal education and that it would not provide a sustainable solution to the problem of poverty. Besides such policies can increase inequalities in society between the rich who can have good quality education and the poor who would be condemned to have poor quality in-formal education.

Assumption: A trained regular qualified teacher is not important even a basic education

This is one of the most dangerous assumptions that is gaining increasing circulation in developing countries. Partly supported by isolated micro level experiments by NGOs – national and international, or others, and mainly lured by the possibility of saving huge public resources on teachers' salaries, and of avoiding the problems of teacher management, Governments began recruiting para teachers or 'barefoot' teachers (e.g. Shiksha Karmis and Gurujis in India), who do not possess required qualifications and training to teach, that too on contractual basis at a very small pay. But since such teachers will have no long term commitment to education profession, such measures will turn out to be counterproductive, affecting the quality of education in the long run.

Assumption: Higher pupil teacher ratios and multi-grade teaching are not a hindrance to quality education

It is also being argued that class size and pupil teacher ratios do not have any effect on quality of education. So is multi-grade teaching by the teachers. These are viewed as the best practices in developing countries.

Unfortunately, class size and pupil teacher ratios are already too high in many developing countries. There are also several single teacher primary schools to teach students of 4-5 grades at the same time. Earlier the operation blackboard, and now the Right to Education Act in India promise to do away with single teacher schools and even to ensure reasonable pupil-teacher ratios.

The adverse effects of such strategies on quality of education could be very severe in the long run, though in the short run, they may form handy, attractive quick solutions to solve the problems of lack of funds and lack of qualified teachers.

Empirical evidence also shows that countries with low pupil teacher ratios (below 20 in primary schools) have not only high participation rates, but also high completion rates.

3. Quality-Quantity-Equity Tradeoffs

Assumption: There is a trade-off between quality and quantity and quality and equity in education. Quantitative expansion can take place only if quality is sacrificed and vice versa and quality can be enhanced only at the cost of equity in education.

Unfortunately we have come to a stage when we have to reputedly remind ourselves that by education we actually mean quality education and not any education. In fact, it is quality education only that can contribute to development and quality encompasses almost every dimension of education. Drawing from the familiar growth versus equity arguments in the theory of economic growth, equity versus efficiency quandary was propounded by many in the area of education. But I firmly believe that access, quantity and equity – all the three dimension of education are very closely related to each other. An education system which is accessible to many and equitable, but of low quality is a weak a system as a high quality system that is inequitable, providing low access to the children of a nation. If a system of education is described as excellent and of high quality, but if its doors are closed to many eligible children, one may find the very definition of excellence and quality problematic. As Amartya Sen remarked, excellence in education must include equity. A properly developed education system that accords due importance to access equity and quality

can be viewed as a right-angled triangle, which J.P.Naik referred to as an "elusive triangle" in Indian case. This still eludes. In the context of sustainable development, a holistic perspective of looking at all the three dimensions of education assume utmost significance.

4. Fragmentation of Education

Assumption: At best, formal primary or basic education is enough to eradicate poverty.

It is assumed that post-primary/elementary, more particularly higher education has neither any role in reducing poverty, nor can it be afforded by the poor developing countries. Further, it is argued that universalisation of elementary education is possible only at the cost of secondary and higher education. Hence emphasis was laid on basic education, and secondary and higher education is ignored to a great extent in the development plans in many developing countries. Global education programmes such as 'Education for All' also led to strengthening these tendencies of according a high priority to basic education and neglect of secondary and higher education.

In fact, basic education and higher education are viewed as two alternatives. For example, if one is speaking about higher education, it has become fashionable to look at him as an opponent of primary or school education, and vice versa. It is being increasingly viewed that higher education in India and in other developing countries prospered at the expense of primary education, and more importantly primary education suffered as higher education progressed, and hence if primary education is to be universalized there is need to arrest, if not to cut down the growth of higher education. Such a view ignores the inter-dependencies of one layer of education on the other. After all, it is higher education that provides the manpower – teachers, planners, and administrators – a critical input into primary and secondary education. On the other hand, the graduates of primary education form inputs into secondary education, and the graduates of secondary education form inputs into higher education. Hence, One has to have, not a fragmented, but an integrated holistic approach to education development, rather than posing one level of education against another. All the three layers of education are three important facets of the educational edifice.

While primary education provides the base, it is after all secondary education that consolidates the gains and

higher education that provides the cutting edge. Historical and contemporary evidence shows that societies that concentrated exclusively on literacy and primary education and ignored higher education (e.g. Lao PDR, Lesotho and Rwanda) could not develop – economically, socially or politically.

The dichotomous view ignores the inter-dependencies between the two layers of education on the one hand, and the role of different levels of education in development and in reducing poverty. Also evidence on many countries shows that it is possible to develop all layers of education simultaneously.

5. Educational Planning and Management

Assumption: Decentralization is the key for education for development.

One of the most fashionable approaches to education development in recent years is 'decentralisation' (together with liberalization and privatization) (Streeten, 2000).

Decentralization per se is desirable; It is also particularly important in large size developing countries, where central Governments may not be able to effectively plan, provide, manage and supervise the education systems in all parts of the country.

While few doubt the importance of decentralized approaches to education development, It is also important to note that some Central Governments find it convenient to use decentralization as a mechanism of abdication of its own responsibilities of educating the people. Secondly, decentralized approach is also viewed in many places as a mechanism of raising resources from the local communities, which will substitute the budgetary resources of Central Government for education. Thirdly, reliance to a great extent of local resources, might contribute to regional inequalities. The dangers involved in decentralization are too serious to ignore.

6.State versus Markets

Assumption: It is no more necessary that the State has to necessarily assume the responsibility of educating its citizens. Privatization of education improves efficiency, quality and equity in education. Privatization and commercialization of education are different, while the latter cannot be encouraged, the former needs to be encouraged.

It is increasingly argued, particularly in the current global wave of privatization and marketization, that the responsibility of education can be left to the private sector and that the State can save its scarce resources and efforts for other activities.

Though education has traditionally been a responsibility of the Governments in most modern civilized societies, Governments in developing countries began looking towards private sector for promotion of education in the recent years. Accordingly, State policies are formulated in such a way that all levels of education, including basic education, get rapidly privatized in many developing countries and simultaneously State can gradually withdraw from education sector, leaving it altogether to the private sector and the NGOs. Scarcity of resources with the Governments on the one hand, and compulsions caused by neo-liberal policies has significantly contributed to this.

Claims on private sector that it can contribute to increase in access, quality and equity in education are unfounded. Further, there is little distinction between privatization and commercialization, as both operate on the principle of profit maximization.

One may, however, question, how will private sector, which is characterized by profit motive, help in the development of education, as a means of reducing poverty and or as measure of welfare and development itself. After all education is widely recognized as a public good and also as a merit good. International evidence also shows that countries characterized with predominant levels of private higher education have not prospered much-economically, socially or politically; and then countries with strong public education systems have progressed well.

Assumption: there is willingness to pay for education.

Along with the above, it is also assumed that there is willingness to pay for education on the part of the people, including the poor. Accordingly, serious attention is being given to policies relating to introduction of an increase in cost recovery rates in education, including in basic education, which is generally expected to be provided free, as per the UN conventions and national constitutions.

Perhaps it is possible to argue that it is not 'willingness to pay', but compulsion to pay' that the poor people feel,

as State does not spend enough on education, that is resulting in high levels of family expenditure on education. Families feel compelled to spend on textbooks, stationary, uniforms, even private coaching, etc. as State does not spend adequately on, say, provision of the textbooks and stationery to children in primary schools, or on libraries, laboratories, etc; in the colleges and universities; State also does not recruit adequate number of good quality trained teachers, and so on.

Assumption: Public expenditure on education has no effects on education attainment of the children.

Based on certain cross country comparisons, it is being stated that anyhow, public expenditure has no significant effect on literacy or on student achievement in schools.

But systematic analyses have shown to the contrary. There is a strong positive relationship between public expenditure on education per student and participation of children in schools in India and in South Asian countries. In fact, the correlation is stronger between public expenditure and participation rates in schools than between private expenditure and participation rates.

What needs to be done?

Education is one such institution that is an ingredient of development as well as an instrument of sustainable development. It is necessary to plan education development in such a way as to contribute significantly to development.

- First, in the present myopic stage where we are unable to look beyond immediate current needs, the criticality of having a long term perspective for development of the societies needs to be underscored. As education is a long term investment, in development, a long-term perspective on the development of education is critically needed, which seems to be missing in countries like India. A long-term perspective vision would form the basis for medium and short-term plans and policy changes.
- It is also important to note that balanced development of all layers/types of education is essential. Emphasis on one level of education cannot be at the cost of another level of education. While literacy and school education provide foundation for development, it is higher education that can provide wherewithal for

sustainable development and help in the construction of knowledge societies. It is clear that knowledge societies cannot be constructed without building strong and dynamic high quality higher education institutions. After all, creation and expansion of frontiers of knowledge and dissemination of knowledge is the main function of universities and other institutions of higher education.

- Quality is one of the most important aspects, for education to contribute significantly to development. Significant allocations have to be made for improvement in the quality of education at all levels, focusing mainly on teachers, quality related inputs like libraries, laboratories, textbooks and other infrastructures.
- Equality of opportunity is one of the most cherished objectives of educational planning. Specific focus has to be laid on improving equity in education – by gender, caste, religion, region and perhaps more importantly economic characteristics.
- The role of the State in providing education cannot be minimized under any circumstance. The state has a vital and irreplaceable role in higher education. Private sector cannot be relied upon for provision of education, which is a public good, and which is also considered nowadays a 'global public good.'
- Further, education develops and nurtures values. It is important that special efforts are made to preserve and promote educational values such as thirst for knowledge, critical thinking and search for truth, and more importantly to inculcate universal human values such as peace, tolerance, non-violence, social welfare (concern for others), love, patriotism, welfare, etc. through education. Such an education will have an everlasting effect on development. This is perhaps more important in the era of globalization, when national and traditional values are fast getting replaced by global, in fact western and market values. This may, in the final analysis, reflect the true quality of our higher education.
- Educational planning needs to be effectively integrated with overall development planning of the country. After all, education has strong linkages with every other sector of the economy. It contributes to other sectors, and in turn receives inputs from other sectors.
- Lastly, 'empowerment of education' is the critical need of the hour. Education needs to be empowered, as it and it alone helps in sustainable social, economic and political development of the societies. The empowerment of education should include (a) provision of a basic minimum level of physical infrastructure facilities to all schools, colleges, universities and other institutions of education, (b) recruitment of good quality teachers in all institutions, and further enhancement of their quality, and above all (c) sound public policies particularly relating to funding and management.

The complexities and political nature of the process have been well stated by Galbraith (1951):

"Unfortunately some of our current discussion of land reform in the underdeveloped countries proceeds as though this reform were something that are Government proclaims on any fine morning-that it gives land to the tenants as it might give pensions to old soldiers or as it might reform the administration of justice. Infact a land reform is a revoulutionary step; it passes power, poverty and status from one group in the community to another. If the government of a country is dominated are strongly influenced by the land holding groups-the one that is losing its prerogatives-no one should expect effective land legislation as an act of grace..... The world is composed of many different kinds of people, but those who own land are not so different-whether they live in China, Pepsia, Mississippi, or Quebec-that they will meet and happily vote themselves out of its possession (PP.695-6).