'Enhancing' Effectiveness of Education System

This paper is an attempt to articulate my understanding of the concept of making the education system effective.

From a systemic perspective, the idea of the system needing 'enhancing' implies that it is not functioning optimally and requires inputs/interventions that will help it to reach the desired level of functioning.

I believe that the effectiveness of the education system cannot be seen in a vacuum. It has to be seen from the perspective of the demands and requirements that a society places on education. The culture of globalization and technological advancement creates new demands and requirements that need to be met by the education system. The issue is not one of enhancing the effectiveness. Instead, it is one of creating systems that are effective.

This paper takes the second line of argument. Let us briefly travel through the Indian Education Scenario to understand this argument.

The system of education in the pre-Colonial era (1820s) consisted of three types of Institutions, namely, Pathshalas, Gurukalas and Madrassahs. According to scholars like Thomas Munro and Leitner, every village had a school (cited in Dharampal 2000). The subjects taught were reading combined with writing and accounts/arithmetic. Teaching was across curriculum. A letter, for instance was learnt by looking at words beginning with that letter followed by a verse where there is a high frequency of using the letter that is being taught. The verse contained a moral or a religious instruction. Group learning and peer learning were widely prevalent. The processes used for learning were so advanced that some of these practices were exported to England (cited in Swarup Online). Girls generally received education at home. Children belonging to other caste groups got their education on the job, as apprentices. Contrary to the popular opinion, Swarup quotes from reports to show that education was open to all during this period. The emphasis of education was to impart traditional knowledge and help the next generation to continue their familial occupations. Education was geared to meeting the needs of the time and the effectiveness of the system was measured on the basis of the extent to which these needs were met.

With the rule of the British, the education system in the country took a turn. Initially, when the British came, they did not pay any attention to the education system. The turmoil that the country was undergoing marked the beginning of the decay of the education system. When the British turned their attention to the system, it was to change the education system in ways that would help education to produce groups of people who would act as bridges between the rulers and the ruled. The pre-colonial system of education, as serving the local, economic, cultural and religious needs of people, gave way to a system that served the needs of the ruling British. In terms of medium of instruction, local languages gave way to English and Urdu bringing about a divide between everyday life and education. The contents of curriculum were also changed, contributing to an increase in the divide. The effectiveness of the education system during this period was judged on the basis of the extent to which it produced students who understood the 'minds of the colonial masters' and helped them rule by taking care of routine matters of administration.

After the British rule, the Indian educational scene was full of problems. The first problem that was addressed was the prevalence of widespread illiteracy. The focus was on making education a fundamental right. This meant bringing the disadvantaged groups into the folds of education. During this period, education was seen as a necessity for all citizens of the country to ensure that they reap the advantages of development. The issue of effectiveness of education was judged on the criteria of access, enrolment and equity.

1990s onwards became the era of liberalization and globalization. Across the globe, the socio-cultural climate enabled not only rapid technological innovations, but also its spread. Within the country, this development impacted the job market by bringing about several shifts. Some of these shifts were that of leadership changing from authoritarian to support, networking replacing vertical management, information flow becoming complex and multileveled,

initiative-taking replacing obedience, independent thinking being valued and fostered, etc. These shifts for successful performance required certain skills like critical and creative thinking, application of knowledge to the world of work, and communicative skills, for which neither students nor their teachers were trained. Education system, in order to become effective, has to meet the challenges of the changed situation. It is in this context that we have to think of the concept of effectiveness of education system. The basis of this thinking is not to enhance, but to create, effective education systems that will appropriately respond to the challenges thrown up by globalization and technological innovations.

Initiative(s) aimed at creation of an effective education system has to explicitly address certain important issues at the planning stage itself. Some of these issues are:

Effectiveness for whom: Create school effectiveness by targeting different sections of society – different caste groups, gender groups and socio-economic strata.

Effectiveness at What Levels: Effectiveness creation has to target structural factors like leadership, community/home-school partnerships, monitoring of academic progress, shared vision and goals of the school for education and social factors consisting of details like values, attitudes and perceptions, personal interrelationships and hidden school climate. It will include staff culture, student culture and school culture. So both macro-level (organizational) and micro-level (social) has to be targeted.

Effectiveness on what Dimensions: Effectiveness has to be created to cover academic, social and affective dimensions of students, teachers and school.

Effectiveness of Process: The process of creating effectiveness should look into the actual process as well. For example, in two schools a climate of discipline may be achieved. But in School A, the process could be achieved through authoritarian behavior while in School B discipline could be achieved by engaging students in a meaningful way.

The planning for initiatives must begin by elucidating factors that help to create an effective education system. There is, however, very little agreement on what constitutes an effective education system. This is because of differences in perception across cultures and countries. India being a multi-cultural country, it is possible to have several models of effective education systems. In a nutshell, enhancing effectiveness of education system has to be seen as creation of effective education systems.

References

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