

SOME CONCERNS IN EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH
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This paper explores some concerns of educational research highlighted in various reports of Commissions on education and suggests a few strategies for ensuring qualitative improvement

The concept and reality of knowledge has never been so important and central in the life of individuals, organizations, and societies in the history of our civilization as it is observed in the contemporary times. Today's societies are living, developing, thriving, competing, improving and surviving on the pivot of knowledge only. It is for this reason that these days we frequently hear about knowledge economy, knowledge society, knowledge explosion, knowledge management, knowledge capital, knowledge sharing, knowledge production, knowledge industry, knowledge workers, knowledge security, knowledge ownership, knowledge rights and what not. This realization of the enhanced significance of knowledge in all domains of human life has created widest interest of people in this powerful phenomenon of the time. Human beings as individuals and as communities always confront with variety of individualistic and societal needs and problems which become more complex with the passage of time. Even though these needs and problems are taken care satisfactorily, instinctively, human beings constantly crave for improvement in their need fulfillment throughout their lives. It is knowledge that forms the basis to satisfy their emerging needs, solve their problems and take them to higher levels of comfort and satisfaction through its application in every sphere of human activity. It is this application of knowledge in any field of human activity that gives birth to a rich array of new technologies which provide means to human beings to cross almost all hurdles coming in the way of their healthy comfortable and peaceful living. The kind of knowledge which is being referred to here is the outcome of a systematic search by people who have been trained and empowered for this task. This search does not yield infallible truths, rather it leads us to discover that knowledge which solves our life related problems and satisfies our needs. This kind of search for knowledge is research which is the most valuable pinnacle of the entire education system operating in any society. This obviously means that an education system without the fine quality of the pinnacle at the top of its tertiary sector has a limited worth in any reckoning of the strength of the education system of that society.

In the democratic world if school education is provided to all children and higher education to a reasonable size of the eligible population, as it is happening in many developed and some developing societies, it is considered a commendable achievement of the State and the people. However, merely making this kind of distributive educational arrangement may not be a sufficient measure for the advancement of the society and for the continued up gradation of quality of life of its people. What would really make the society achieve new heights of development is its ability to reach new frontiers of knowledge and through it acquire newer ways of creating more comfortable, safer and equitable means and living environment. Research in different disciplines of knowledge is the only medium through which this ability is acquired. It is for this reason that today the ability to create new knowledge and the capacity to apply it for development has almost become the 'barometer of affluence'.

It is rightly stressed that the intrinsic strength and the affluence of a nation can be attributed to the strong knowledge base created by independent and original contribution to knowledge (Basa 2003) which, in turn, depends on the strength of the system of higher learning existing in the country. This reality has not only been understood effectively by the developed world which

devotes a sizeable amount of its educational expenditure to research activities, but its worth has also dawned on many developing societies including, for example, China, Brazil, etc. as well. However, India is yet to fall in line, even moderately, with these societies, so far as its original contribution to knowledge and investment on research activities is concerned. There is no denying the fact that India has many state of the art research centres and laboratories and, as observed by Kothari Commission, the standards of research in these institutions and in certain subjects are high and comparable to those abroad. However, it is difficult to say the same for many subjects and for all universities.

Educational research provides fresh knowledge for the solution of problems in the field of education. In the entire education system it occupies a special significance for it helps in improving and strengthening all aspects of the education system including curriculum, its transaction, teacher preparation and performance, development of teaching learning material, learning achievement and evaluation, institutional management, educational access, etc. on the one hand, and on the other, in formulating appropriate policies and plans for educational development, which ultimately have a bearing on the quality as well as equitable distribution of education.

The Education Commission (1964-66) was of the view that educational research in India in 1964-66 was in infancy, its quantity being small and quality mediocre or poor due to the fact that most of this research then was confined to teachers training colleges which had inadequate facilities for research and few competent people to guide it. A couple of decades later, the National Commission on Teachers I (1985) found this situation only somewhat better when it observed that

“Awareness that research in education, as indeed in other disciplines, needs to be promoted with a much greater effort and investment of resources has been growing during last three decades. As a result, the number of institutions and number of research projects all over the country has increased to some extent” (Chattopadhyaya 1985, p. 81)

However, the Commission painfully also placed on record their assessment that both quantitatively and qualitatively, the record of research in education was far from impressive. It is very undeveloped and is quite insufficient to serve as a basis for policy formulation and administrative ‘decision making’. Elaborating it further it observed that ‘during their visits to the States they heard of many changes and new educational programmes in curriculum development, in learning, teacher orientation and so on, but nowhere did they see any evidence that such decisions had been prompted or influenced to some extent at least by any good research or study’. One very important reason of the present malaise in our education system is that the quality of our decision making in education is quite unsatisfactory owing to our apathy to educational research and field study. Though in the educational budgets of the States and the universities, allocation of funds for this component of higher education has improved especially after the implementation of National Policy on Education (1986) and research activities in departments and colleges of education are said to have increased substantially, yet it is mostly confined to quantitative improvement.

UGC has started the Special Assistance Programme under which selected departments are given support at three levels. These include Departmental Research Support (DRS) that can be successively upgraded to give the Departments the status of Departments of Special Assistance and finally to the Centre of Advanced Studies (CAS). Surprisingly, very few departments of education have been able to earn the status of DRS, much less the status of DSA and hardly two or three of CAS. The other scheme to encourage research in departments by giving recognition to chosen ones the status of Departments for Potential of Excellence has hardly been availed by

Departments of Education. UGC also promotes research by way of minor and major research projects in various disciplines including education. Over the decades budgetary allocation for research through stand alone research institutions has also enhanced. However, two important observations of the latest report of the National Knowledge Commission (2008) in connection with the state of research in India merit attention. One, that 'the importance attached to research has eroded steadily over time and two, the volume of research in terms of frequency of publications and the quality of research reflected in the frequency of citations or the place of publication, on balance, is simply not what it used to be'. In fact, NKC was critical of the stand alone research institutions in all disciplines including education which in its view were pampered with resources in the belief that research should be moved out of universities for improving its quality. The Commission rightly observed that in this process 'we forgot the important principle that there are synergies between teaching and research that enrich each other and that it is the universities which are the natural home for research'. In fact for universities research is essential in the pursuit of academic excellence. So it is time to 'reverse what happened in the past and make the universities the hub of research once again'. This of course would need 'change in resource allocation, reward system and mindsets'. It has been observed that not all the existing universities have separate departments of education where research activities can be pursued. Where these departments exist they conduct mostly routinised degree related research. In a recent AIU meet of Vice Chancellors from all over India, it was proposed to establish department of education in every university so that they can work for both advancement of research and quality teacher education. However, many Vice-Chancellors of those universities where no department of education exists forwarded financial reasons that stand in the way of starting a new department. They complained of lack of support from State Departments and the UGC in this regard. While endorsing the recommendations of the Kothari Commission that deliberate efforts should be made to increase the allocations for educational research.

National Commission on Teachers I also suggested that 'at least one percent of each State's budget should be allocated for educational research'. National Knowledge Commission also held similar views and suggested that substantial grants should be allocated for research and provision of these grants should be competitive and the criteria for these grants should be different from the usual criteria for non-plan and plan grants. This obviously would create a better and more autonomous environment for conducting research and encourage those to conduct meaningful research, who are often constrained to initiate it for financial and administrative limitations and bottlenecks. Another issue that merits priority attention relates to dissemination of research. Because of non-existence of a centralized robust clearing house system for this purpose, lot of good work remains in oblivion and hardly reaches the hands of different players and decision makers in the field of education. It is rightly pointed out that 'even the little good research that has been done has largely remained in the archives and the administration has not used its findings for formulation of policies'. Although this role is being played partly by the NCERT, ICSSR, etc., their efforts are still not up to the satisfaction of the end users of these researches.

A complex issue relates to priorities in educational research. As these priorities in educational research at the national level from the standpoint of educational planners and administrators would be very different from similar priorities at lower levels or from the point of view of teachers, a rigid framework of priorities need not be evolved. This should be left to research grant disbursing agencies and the universities to decide about the research priorities at different levels.

Quality of educational research is the ultimate unfinished agenda that still demands a serious attention. It is not merely a question of selection of a relevant theme or problem for investigation rather it relates to the whole environment of research in university departments and colleges and

centres of education. This ambience is generated through interplay of number of factors most important among them being the availability of able faculty members who have the capability and experience of conducting quality research and interest in guiding research with a view to create new knowledge and present new solutions to the educational problems and issues on scientific basis. It demands a conscious effort to attract and retain talented faculty members whose capacity is continuously upgraded by involving them regularly in professional development programmes.

Other factors contributing to this ambience for quality research include easy access to required material for conducting research in electronic and print forms through effective networking of concerned institutions, administrative support and fair degree of autonomy to those engaged in research and access to avenues for sharing their research works and learning from others experiences. The research associations like this one can play an important role in both disseminating the accomplished works and also in providing a platform for capacity building and networking of scholars and research organizations as also in promoting a culture of enquiry among educators and research and study based decision making among educational administrators. The National Knowledge Commission has also suggested that besides other steps, the universities may be conferred with ownership rights, linking this ownership system with patent system. This in its view will make research more attractive and in the process bring about a radical change in the research landscape in India.

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