

EDITORIAL

SCHOOL EFFECTIVENESS AND TEACHER EMPOWERMENT

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Quality education plays an essential part of economic and social development of the nations. “Economic benefits of education flow not only to the individual but also to society through lower social transfers and through the additional taxes individuals pay once they enter the labour market”(OECD 2010, p. 136). School education lays the foundation for lifelong knowledge and skill development of the humanity. School effectiveness refers to the extent to which the goals set by the school management or school boards or school departments of the State governments have been achieved. It is a multi dimensional concept. One of the important measures of school effectiveness is the performance of the students in a public examination. Comparison of performance of students of various schools is no longer limited to national level. International comparative studies of student performance have come out with varied performance indicators. Results of the TIMSS indicated that many Asian countries including Korea performed better than European countries and USA (Chapman & Adams, 2002, p. 4). In case of 3rd Grade, international average was 334 and highest national average was 422 (Korea), followed by 414 (Singapore), 400 (Japan)...344 (USA) and 321 (UK, England). Hence, not only funds, but other factors might have been playing vital role in school effectiveness.

Efforts to have effective schools result in educational innovations in terms of ideas or practices new to a specific educational context that meets unsatisfied needs. The notion that private fee charging schools are more effective than government schools has resulted in efforts among poor parents for education of their children in fee charging private schools. Preference for private schools arise out of the consideration that pupil teacher ratio in these schools is much lower than that of government schools. As per EFA Global Monitoring Report 2010, the world student teacher ratio for pre-primary education was 20. In case of various types of countries, the ratio was: Countries in transition - 8, Developed countries - 15 and Developing countries - 28. In case of regions, it varied from 9 (Central and Eastern Europe) to 40 (South & West Asia). The figure in case of other regions were: Central Asia -11, North America and Western Europe -14, Pacific - 17, Arab States -18, Latin America and the Caribbean - 21, East Asia- 21, East Asia and the Pacific -21, Caribbean - 32, Sub-Saharan Africa - 28. (UNESCO 2010, P.394). In India, the situation is not very bright. For instance, in Orissa State, the general class for higher secondary students (Aged 17 & 18 years) attached to junior college has a class size of 128 students, whereas a private fee charging school will have a class size of 50 students. In such situations, standards of school effectiveness may not be generalised, as the expectations from rural schools may be different than from those in case of urban schools. As the operating systems vary, there may not be standards for school effectiveness. In operational terms, it may not be appropriate to have even nationalised text books.

School effectiveness also depends on the quality of its intake. Many children in poor regions suffer from under nutrition. Hence, there is limited scope for high quality functioning of the brain of a large number of children, which affects school effectiveness in terms of pupil attainment, compared to schools in developed regions. Similarly, there are large numbers of orphan children created by natural catastrophes. They are at higher risk than non-orphans of discrimination, social exclusion, dropping out of school and poor access to basic health care. There are roaming schools, which move along with roaming population. There are also schools in difficult areas such as hilly pockets, islands, and deserts. In spite of efforts of SSA, the school conditions in large number of difficult areas are poor. The school effectiveness expectations are rightly influenced by rural development including roads and transport facilities. Hence the expectations of school effectiveness will vary from one geographical region to another.

Teacher knowledge is an important matter for school improvement. Poor content knowledge of teachers is a serious problem A few years ago, during visit to an in-service training programme for elementary

school teachers being conducted by UNICEF, the editor found that more than 25% participants could not correctly divide 302 by 3. In case of the same State, even today, faculty members of teacher training institutions, in charge of method of teaching Geography, do not have degree level content knowledge in Geography. Lack of qualified and appropriately educated teachers is a huge barrier for excellent level of school effectiveness. Many systems employ contract teachers. Such a practice goes against the principle of equal opportunity in terms of availability of regular teachers. Some systems have a system of supply teachers/ leave reserve teachers/ volunteer teachers, who get themselves, made available when required by schools. High quality institutions and education providers have various strategies to improve level of teacher quality. Ho, Lin, Kuo,T., Kuo-Yen-Ku & Kuo,Yen-Lin (2008) reported about efforts for improving deeper learning capacity of teachers. Such initiatives accelerate the attainment of school effectiveness..

Teacher absenteeism is also a serious matter for school development. In case of pockets having large illiteracy percentage, schools located in difficult areas are not regularly visited by their inspectors. Insincere teachers remain absent from schools for many days without any information to their higher authorities. Parents of such school children, if illiterate, generally do not bother about teacher absence. The chairman of such a school gladly puts his/her thumb impression on the attendance sheet of a teacher, which is required to be submitted by the teacher for getting his/her salary. Student absence also obstructs process of school development. A large number of poor children do not attend schools regularly. For many parents, children have to escape schooling to support family income or to take care of younger brothers/sisters. Quality of interaction between school and community influences level of school effectiveness, especially in case of pockets having low parental education. The 'Community schools' in Denmark, U. K. and in other countries keep their resources open for public. Visit to homes of students is part of duty of teachers. In many areas, the schools have halls that can provide space for organisation of a drama, a magic show, a marriage, etc. Good schools make their physical education instructors, organise of games and physical education programmes for members of the community. Similarly, art education instructors are utilised for training in art. The members of the community get education through exhibitions, film shows, debates, etc. organised by the schools.

Study of school effectiveness is an important factor. Such studies have become part of the school systems of advanced nations. "Paralleling the movement toward developing curriculum standards for students, standards for schools have also been developed for the purpose of school evaluation" (Faubert 2009, p.11). Studies on school effectiveness are carried out at two levels: internal and external. Internal study helps teachers and school authorities in improving learning of the students by improving quality of teaching and management. External study compares effectiveness of schools within a State system and in relation to schools in other countries. Findings from studies on school effectiveness are used by various stakeholders: parents, school heads, school management, school grant providers and policy makers. Findings of school effectiveness studies help to publicise and disseminate experiences and best practices and also suggest follow up measures necessary for improving school effectiveness. Sample study on school effectiveness gives quick feedback to educational planners. Efficient school systems make their school inspectors conduct sample studies to explore the level of school effectiveness achieved by the schools of the concerned system. In order to improve quality of inspectors, certain advanced nations have special tests for their recruitment. Even they go for initial training that includes special courses related to evaluation as well as mentoring process. Certain nations provide compulsory annual in-service training to make their inspectors more effective. High quality school inspection strategies influence school managements including heads of schools to promote teacher empowerment.

Teacher empowerment covers aspects such as freedom to design curricula including reading materials for students and employing innovative teaching and student evaluation strategies. According to Talbert(2003), teacher empowerment is influenced by four factors: voices, tradition, action and unity. Teacher empowerment is an essential component of school effectiveness strategies. It provides adequate opportunity and confidence to teachers to be innovative. It involves having confidence over teachers about their honesty, integrity and appropriate ability in performing their ability in performing their duties independently, without any type of supervision. It encourages teacher participation in the decision making process. “How empowered teachers are depends on their principal’s leadership and the opportunities they offer them to participate in decision making” (Addi-Racah 2009, p.161). Teacher empowerment is facilitated in a school having democratic organisational climate.

Teacher empowerment policies at various levels influence the level of teacher motivation resulting in speedy attainment of the goals of the school effectiveness. Apprehension on integrity of teachers makes the administrators operating at various levels of administration of school education do not allow teacher empowerment . Initial as well as continued professional development of teachers need to provide appropriate knowledge and resources to engage in empowering decision making(Lucey & Hill-Clarke 2008, p. 48). Developing appropriate strategies for teacher empowerment needs immediate attention of the authorities involved in the quality of school education as no curriculum can be transacted effectively without dedicated effort of the teachers. The teachers’ organisations may be activated to suggest administrative strategies that promote teacher empowerment for the consideration of policy makers.

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