

# Quality in School Education: Conceptual Understanding

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## Abstract

Education plays a major role in any individual's life, of all times, and has been dependent on its quality. Everyone has to give importance to quality of education. The National Policy on Education 1986 and the subsequent program of action has recognized that there is a need to rebuild its input, process, and output to make the system quality oriented. There are several internal and external factors that influence the quality of education. However, teacher and teaching learning process play a major role. Some research scholars measure the quality of education of a country by the enrolment ratio in the various stages of education. If a country has a high gross enrolment ratio, net enrolment ratio, completion rate and disparities between girls and boys is less than that particular country has a high quality education (Hartwell et.al, 1998). Feigenbaum (1951) has identified that the quality of education means accumulation of values in education. Whereas developing countries have measured it by proxy of examination results, it shows that student achievement is one of the major indicators of quality education. However, many factors are responsible for shaping the quality in education. Quality lies in meeting the costumer's expectations, but quality of education is more than meeting the expectations of the student. Hence, this paper deals with the quality perspectives in school education by discussing the quality improvement model proposed by UNICEF.

## Key words

Quality, School education, Quality dimensions, Economic development, Quality Standards.

## I. Introduction

Anywhere in the in the world, society or for an individual, quality is a very important aspect in one's life. If a person leads a quality life, he will have a longer life span. Similarly, if a person focuses on quality of education he will definitely be in higher positions. UNESCO (2000) has stated that student achievement and learning are the key inputs which help the countries desired educational, economic and social out comes. On the other hand, education is a key factor to determine whether a country is developed, under-developed or a developing nation. All the parents, irrespective of their economic, educational backgrounds want to provide quality education to their children, as it would enhance the value of their degrees.

Interestingly, in India, 90 per cent of primary schools are managed by government; most of the schools which are situated in rural areas lack the minimum standards for quality of education (Kremer et al 2005). Fuller (1986) has mentioned in his study that increasing interest in the quality of schooling helps in the economic growth of the county. Moreover, a good quality of education will provide learners sufficient capabilities which they require to become economically productive, progress towards substantial livelihoods, and enhance individual wellbeing. India has been focussing on the improvement of quality on education since mid-90s. After implementing the developmental schemes on education, there is a slight improvement in the present education system with respect to access, enrolment, and retention which also shows an improvement in the quality of education. Indian education system needs to have described equality, quality, and quantity as the elusive triangle said by JP Naik.

## Review of Literature

### Quality

The word quality originates from Latin word Quails, which means 'what kind of' with a variety of meanings and references, it has been stated to as a slippery concept (Pfeffer and Coote, 1991). The concept of quality is far reaching, generally demanding the devotion of crops or processes to expectations (Aggarwal,

2001). Quality is a dynamic idea, it's a highly debatable issue in the twentieth Century, the concept of quality has been with us for a millennia and it has recently emerged in education system (Garvin 1988). Naik (1975) has considered the quality as 'most central to education' and 'its very life and soul'. He felt that: "Any education without quality is no education at all: it will not be able to fulfil promises and will also do immense harm." Juran (1988) stated that quality is fitness for use, this comprises design, conformance, availability, safety, and field performance. Quality is also regarded as a relative measure of demand based on outcome. Sudesh (2005) suggested that observance of requirements is the negligible mark of quality, and is not a sufficient achievement for assurance of quality in the rendering of services and production of goods. But, absolute definitions of the word quality can be used for benchmarking and quality assurance proceedings.

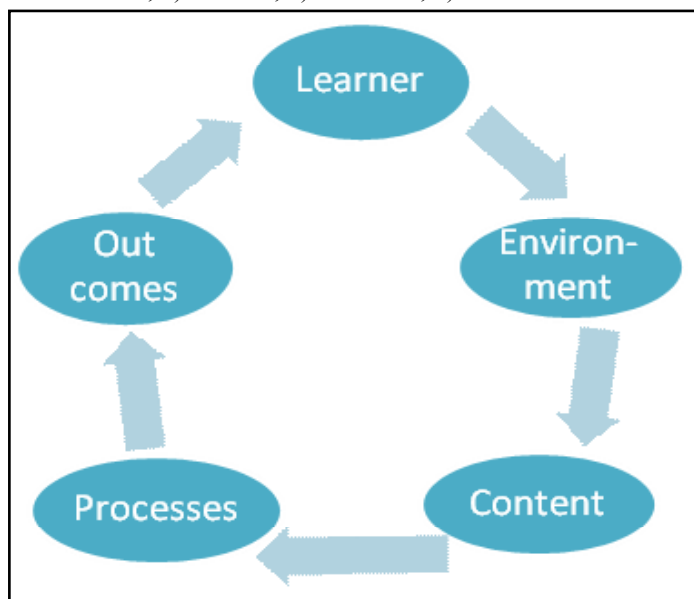
### Quality in Education

Previous educational literature guides the term quality, synonymous to effectiveness, efficiency, and equity (IEQ 1993). According to many educationalists and research scholars, the quality education is, the concept of quality is similar to defining motherhood (Stephen, 2003). Takwala's (2006) study stated that there is no universally accepted definition for quality of education and it purely depends on the perception of individuals. However, according to Mukhopadhyay (2001), quality of education means the performance of the students in examination results, learning, achievements, ability to apply learned knowledge in particular life exhibits the quality of education. In addition, researchers measure the quality of education by the student's performance at work place, such as extra earning or employment of the educated workers (Verwimp, 1999). Moreover, Lockheed and Verspoor (1991) defined quality in school education as being dependent on the level at which students understand the content. The Dakar Framework (2000) also defines quality of education in terms of the desired characteristics of content, processes, learners, and system. Furthermore, EFA Global Monitoring Report (2005) has defined quality in education by two principal characteristics such as learner's cognitive development and role of education

in promoting values, attitudes, social responsibility, nurturing creative and emotional development. This report has identified quality improvement indicators which include student teacher ratios, qualification of teachers, time spent by students in school and test scores, and also major role took place is government spending on education. Within the education structure, student, teacher, non-teaching staff, and management etc. are the inner customer's and the society and government are the outer customers. These both inner and outer customers are called as stake holders, to whom quality is ultimately significant. Quality requirements vary depending on parameters that define specific products and processes.

### Dimensions of School Education Quality

Many factors are responsible for shaping the quality in education. While trying to define and understand the concept of quality in education, we have to know the dimensions that influence the quality. To ensure quality in education several national and international organisations put fourth different new dimensions on education such as focus on infrastructure facilities in schools, providing basic environment and establishment of teacher training institutions etc. UNICEF (2000) has recognised five dimensions to improve the quality in education which are 1) Learners, 2) Environment, 3) Content, 4) Processes, 5) Out comes.



**Source:** UNICEF. 2000. Defining Quality in education. Working Paper Series, Education Section, Programme Division. New York: United Nations.

These dimensions are described as follows.

#### Learners

As we know, human learning mostly takes place in the learning environment, healthy, early childhood experiences through school and home which are the main elements for making quality learners. Children in schools are present with varied abilities of learning, according to UNICEF a good learner has certain characteristics such as Good health and Nutrition, Early childhood psychosocial development experiences, Learner attitude, and Family support for learning are the key elements for quality learners. According to Jayram (1990), if the child is physically and psychologically well then the learning process will be good. Sufficient nutrition is needed for the development of brain in the early childhood. Furthermore, Willms (2000) has conducted a study in 12 Latin

American countries and stated that parental caring influences the quality of learning, early childhood interventions also influence for a better psychological development. The study conducted by Miske, et al., (1998) concluded that the students who had high attendance had a better learning. In addition, large class size effects the student learning abilities that lead to deterioration of quality in education (Mohanthi 1995). Parent's educational background is one of the major determining factor for child's learning abilities and also family backgrounds influence the school performance (Blasco, 2001). Hence, Learning is a dependent variable of education and it is a continuous process.

#### Environment

The environment may be described as a composite of natural conditions, circumstances, influences and socio-culture contexts. There are certain factors that decided the learner's performance for a particular kind of learning environment. The study has focused on three elements such as psychological, physical, and service delivery. Under the psychological aspects, the study has mentioned that the school and class rooms should be a welcoming and non-discriminating, especially for girls. Teacher's behaviour is also a main indicator to improve quality of learning environment. Effective school discipline is a key indicator for providing quality learning environment. Minimising other kinds of discrimination is also important to quality improvement in learning environment. War and group conflicting have also showing lot of impact on quality learning environment (WHO, 1998). Under the physical elements, the report has mentioned an important role is school facilities. Moreover, the quality of school infrastructure facilities seems to have an indirect effect on quality learning. Carron and chau (1996) have found that there is a significant difference between children who are having sufficient infrastructure and who are lacking school facilities on their academic performance. UNICEF (1995) have conducted a survey in 14 very recent developed countries and concluded that larger class size damages the quality education. Hence, class size is also an important key factor for quality improvement in school education. The school service atmosphere can also contribute to learning in significant ways. Schools should provide health services, it will reduce the absenteeism and inattention, and moreover the learning will be improved. Services like Guidance and counselling, extra-curricular activities and the provision of school snacks contribute to improve quality school environment. Those three services, such as psychological, physical and service environments will improve the quality learning among the child.

#### Content

As a part of selection of content, we have to focus on several issues like knowledge, skills, and the portion of plan that actually creates the student's overall development (Bruner 1960). UNICEF (2000) defined the word Content as the planned and skilled curriculum of schools. The report has suggested that curriculum should be structured as student-centric and should have non-discriminative practices. It emphasised that deep coverage of important areas of knowledge, and arithmetic content develops the problem solving skills and acquisition of knowledge to the child. Regarding life skills, the report has mentioned that curriculum should focus to develop attitude and values.

#### Process

The quality process is highly influenced by three elements such

as infrastructure, ratio between student and teacher, and curricular content. Student learning depends on instructional methods used by the teacher. Effective use of school time and working conditions of teacher also affect their ability to provide quality education. For this purpose teacher should always gain knowledge through proper training. Conversations with other teachers, attending workshops, keeping journals are also an effective ways for teachers to improve their knowledge. However, the teacher training institutions are providing both pre and in-service training to the teachers, to develop new skills for teaching methods. Feedback mechanism, leadership, and quality of administrative support are also critical indicators of school process.

### Outcomes

The progress towards providing educational quality requires increased participation of the students. As discussed above, the environment, content, and processes affect the learner and lead to diverse outcomes. The primary purpose of formal education is to read, write and calculate. Summative rather than formative way of assessment has been used to find out the learners academic achievements. However, student achievement depends on two variables one is consequences of family background and second is the quality of teaching received during the school years (PROBE 1999). Parents and community involvement creates more impact on quality outcomes (Rao, 2012).

### Conclusion

This study has emphasized on the understanding of the Dimensions of quality of school education and discussed the conceptual model proposed by UNICEF. A thorough understanding of these dimensions helps in providing quality education. Literally, education is one of the sub-systems of the society. If a student turns up into the education process it leads to individual, family, and societal aspirations. The studies on education are showing that school facilities, quality of teachers, and learning outcome teacher absenteeism, and motivation levels of teachers etc. are the important dimensions of the quality of education.

But, the focus comes into the teachers that are mostly related to the lack of incentives to their performance. While indicators to measure the access, retention and internal efficiency of the educational system in terms of participation rate. That shows education system should increase efforts from improvement of quality evaluation.

### Author's Profile

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