



Social Inclusion/Exclusion and Diversity: Perspectives, Policies and Practices in Indian Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

The present paper shows the Social Inclusion/Exclusion and Diversity: Perspectives, Policies and Practices in Indian Higher Education. The uniqueness of the Indian society is its 'Unity in Diversity', which is visible in its religions, languages and cultures. The Education system of a country does not function in isolation from the society of which it is a part. Hierarchies of castes, economic status, gender relations and cultural diversities as well as uneven economic development also deeply influence issues relating to access and equity in education. Though India was widely acclaimed as a land of knowledge and wisdom during ancient times yet access to education was limited to select strata of the society. Perspectives, Policies and Practices has sought to explore, identify and discuss key issues and challenges, and suggest inputs that need to be addressed by policymakers and practitioners to promote inclusive classrooms, ensure meaningful an successful school participation, and enhance the learning achievements of children from diverse backgrounds. This paper is based on secondary source of data.

Keywords: Social Inclusion, Diversity, Perspectives, Policies, Practices, Higher Education etc.

Introduction

The uniqueness of the Indian society is its 'Unity in Diversity', which is visible in its religions, languages and cultures. The Education system of a country does not function in isolation from the society of which it is a part. Hierarchies of castes, economic status, gender relations and cultural diversities as well as uneven economic development also deeply influence issues relating to access and equity in education. Though India was widely acclaimed as a land of knowledge and wisdom during ancient times yet access to education was limited to select strata of the society. The societal distribution of responsibility and accountability may have been justified in those days but in today's context deeply entrenched social inequalities between various social groups and castes, the centuries- old social prejudices and inequalities, based on caste at birth, continue to propose challenges for national development.

Extending educational opportunities to the marginalized groups has been considered an antidote to this longstanding discrimination by the framers of the Constitution. Several attempts have been made by social reformers and others to make education accessible to the marginal groups with varying degrees of success. A higher education qualification at degree level takes a minimum of three years to complete, more typically four. Shortly, Higher education mainly and generally means university level education. It offers a number of qualifications ranging from Higher National Diplomas and Foundation Degrees to Honors Degrees and as further step, Postgraduate programmes such as Masters Degrees and Doctorates.

These are recognized throughout the world as representing specialist expertise supported by a wide range of skills that employers find very useful. Further education is generally includes those post graduate studies in where you can gain your Master and Doctorate degrees. The amount of time one must study before earning such a degree varies greatly by field, institution

Here are the definitions of most frequently used terms related to Higher Education:

- **Bachelor's Degree:** Usually an undergraduate academic degree awarded for a course or major generally lasts three or four years.
- **Master:** It is an academic degree usually awarded for completion of a postgraduate or graduate course of one to three years in duration.
- **Doctorate:** It is an academic degree of the highest level. Traditionally, the award of a doctorate implies recognition of the candidate as an equal by the university faculty under which he or she has studied.

Objectives

1. To know the Social Inclusion/Exclusion and Diversity: Perspectives, Policies and Practices in Indian Higher education
2. To understanding the Developing of nature and dynamics of discrimination and exclusion.
3. To describe the Conceptualizing and problematizing discrimination, exclusion and inclusion.
4. To Formulating policies for protecting the rights of these groups and eradicating the problem of exclusion and discrimination.

Social Inclusion/Exclusion and Diversity: Perspectives, Policies and Practices in Indian Higher education

Higher education can be used for the social and economic mobility of underprivileged sections. This is achieved usually by providing admission to a set of students from these sections in universities and other institutes of higher education through the reservation or a quota of seats.

India has been using this reservation policy for many decades. It has helped a section of students from the so-called backward communities, scheduled castes and tribes to enter the institutes of higher education and a sub-set of them to get jobs which require such education. Many among them would not have received admission in universities and other such institutes in the absence of such a reservation policy.

Talking about India, its higher education system is the third largest in the world, next to the United States and China. The main governing body at the tertiary level is the University Grants Commission, which enforces its standards, advises the government, and helps coordinate between the center and the state. Accreditation for higher learning is overseen by 12 autonomous institutions established by the University Grants Commission.

Framework of Higher Education

India has one of the largest education systems in the world and also one of the most complexes. The European system of higher education was introduced in India by the British in 1857 with the establishment of universities for European education in three cities and withdrawal of support for indigenous education. At the time of independence, there were 20 universities and 500 colleges in India but the number has increased rapidly since then and the student enrolment has gone up by nearly 36 times. The present-day educational structure in India consists of:

- Central universities
- State universities
- Institutions deemed to be universities
- Institutions established under State Legislature Act 5

Recent Development in Higher Education

Higher education has received a lot of attention in India over the past few years. There are four reasons for this recent focus. Out of which, reservation quotas in higher education institutions, particularly the more reputed ones that provide access to high status and best-paid jobs became a highly divisive issue, central to the policy of inclusive growth and distributive justice, and hence politically very important. The other one is, in the backdrop of the first two developments, it began to be argued that the country would not be able to sustain its growth momentum and maintain competitiveness unless problems with higher education are fixed. Last, demand for higher education continues to outpace the supply due to growing population of young people, gains in school education, the growing middle class and their rising aspirations.

Perspectives, Practices and Policies

Elementary education in India has witnessed a steady growth over the years in enrolment of children from all sections of society, particularly from weaker and disadvantaged sections such as girls, SCs, STs, and linguistic, ethnic and religious minorities. Owing to the increased inflow of children from weaker and disadvantaged sections, classrooms and schools are becoming increasingly diverse. As a result, schools now have to address new issues and challenges and reorient their teaching-learning practices and processes to make classrooms and schools responsive to, and inclusive of, the learning needs and interests of diverse learners. Perspectives, Policies and Practices has sought to explore, identify and discuss key issues and challenges, and suggest inputs that need to be addressed by policymakers and practitioners to promote

inclusive classrooms, ensure meaningful and successful school participation, and enhance the learning achievements of children from diverse backgrounds.

Recognizing the Increasing Diversity of Classrooms

There is first a need to recognize the changing social composition of learners in the classroom resulting from an inflow of children from diverse backgrounds in terms of caste, class, gender, ethnicity, language and religion. This increased diversity presents new issues and challenges in curriculum design, teaching-learning practices and processes, learning materials, and teacher education that meet the different learning needs of these children. These issues and challenges cannot be addressed unless they are first recognized by policymakers and practitioners.

Developing the Profiles of Diverse Learners

Without a clear understanding of the various socio-economic and cultural characteristics of diverse learners, it is difficult to evolve strategies and develop plans at classroom, school and system levels to teach children from diverse backgrounds. It is therefore necessary that relevant data and information on diverse learners is collected, examined and analysed in order to inform and shape policies and practices to make classrooms and schools inclusive and responsive to the learning needs of children from diverse backgrounds. Child profiles can be an important and effective tool to promote inclusive classrooms. Child profiles can be created through school-community mapping by conducting a household survey in the villages of the schools' catchments area to determine how many members each household contains, their ages, and their levels of education.

Developing a Contextualized Understanding of School-based Practices and Processes

A contextualized understanding of teacher beliefs and behaviour as well as the teaching-learning practices and processes, and their impact on the educational experiences and outcomes of children from diverse backgrounds is a crucial prerequisite to develop inclusive classrooms that are responsive to the diverse learning needs and interests of these children. Without this, it will be difficult to assess the professional development needs of teachers, and evolve appropriate training curricula, practices and processes to prepare them to teach diverse classrooms. Therefore, there is a critical need for school-based ethnographic research which can better inform policy and practice.

Developing Inclusive Teaching-Learning Practices and Processes

Classrooms are diverse in terms of the types of children and the ways in which they learn. Children learn in different ways because of experience, environment and socio-economic and cultural backgrounds. Consequently, there is a need to use a variety of teaching methods and activities to meet the different learning needs of such children. We need to know the different ways that children learn, to help us develop teaching-learning practices and processes that are more meaningful for the children, and help them, especially those who have been historically excluded from learning, to learn better. Students from all ethnic, cultural, linguistic and socio-economic backgrounds come to school with already-constructed knowledge, including their home languages and cultural values, acquired in their home and community environments. Such knowledge and skills should serve as the framework to construct new knowledge and understandings. For classrooms to be fully inclusive, the learning materials and curriculum need to be made inclusive and responsive to the diverse cultures and socio-economic backgrounds of children.

Developing a System of Regular Evaluation and Feedback on the Impact of Teaching-Learning Practices

Teaching diverse classrooms requires a tremendous amount of flexibility to respond to the different learning needs and interests of students, and teachers need to constantly update their practices. However, without continuous and proper evaluation, teachers and school administrators cannot receive feedback from which to learn, and thus will lack the indicators of what works well, what does not, and why. While there may be several instances of good practices used by teachers in some schools, the lack of formal documentation, record and evaluation means that potentially good practices are lost. Therefore, there is a need to develop an institutional mechanism for continuous documentation, evaluation, sharing and feedback on the impact of teaching-learning practices on student learning, and its linkage with the teacher support and training system.

A Greater Focus on Diversity Issues in Teacher Education and Training Programmes

Though the social context of the classroom has been changing, teachers appear to have little understanding of issues of diversity, and are ill-prepared to teach increasingly diverse student populations. There is, therefore, a need for systematic efforts to make teaching for diversity an integral component of the curriculum for pre-service as well as in-service teacher training. Teaching children from diverse backgrounds requires a tremendous amount of flexibility in teaching practices and processes as well as in curriculum design and learning materials to respond to their diverse learning needs and interests.

Promoting Diversity in the Elementary Teaching Workforce

Maintaining diversity in the teacher workforce is considered crucial to create inclusive schools. A teaching force that more closely mirrors the student population can benefit both students and teachers. Diverse teachers can serve as powerful role models for diverse students, potentially motivating them to strive further in their achievements. Diverse teachers also bring to the classroom their unique experiences and perspectives, which can help them to better relate to their diverse students. Diverse teachers may also be more inclined to view student diversity in the classroom as a resource. However, data in this regard suggests that while there has been an increasing flow of diverse learners in the classroom, the social composition of teachers has not kept pace with it. The recruitment policy for elementary teachers, therefore, needs to be focussed towards promoting an increased intake of teachers from historically excluded groups such as women, SC/ STs, religious, ethnic and linguistic minorities, etc.

Five years plans contributed to inclusion

The Government has contributed to the development of the sector through its Five Year Plans

SIXTH FIVE YEAR PLAN

- Quality improvement
- Improvement of standards and regulation of admission
- Restructuring of courses for practical orientation and greater relevance

SEVENTH FIVE YEAR PLAN

- Focus on research and academic development
- Creation of research facilities and centers of excellence
- Encouragement of academic mobility and cross-fertilization of ideas
- Restructuring courses offered at first degree level to increase employability

EIGHTH FIVE YEAR PLAN

- Funding for developing new departments/courses
- Strengthening of existing postgraduate departments in terms of laboratories, workshops and library services
- Opening of new specialized courses and departments and doing away with outdated ones

NINTH FIVE YEAR PLAN

- Adapting to social and economic changes
- Encouraging relevant courses with a professional focus to enable career development
- Addressing the education needs of under-represented social groups
- Generating revenue through increased university-industry linkages

TENTH FIVE YEAR PLAN

- Improving quality and relevance of higher education
- Strengthening of research institutions as well as open and distance education system
- Knowledge and use of new information and communication technology
- Focus on quality, evaluation and accreditation of higher education

ELEVENTH FIVE YEAR PLAN

- Inclusive growth of higher education
- Expanding HEIs to eliminate regional imbalances
- Making higher education accessible to all socio-economic strata of the society
- Improving quality of education by promoting research, quality assurance systems and faculty and infrastructure development

CONCLUSION

Inclusion by its very definition is multidimensional and when it has to be created in Higher education in India, which as discussed earlier also is a complex commodity, requires a careful planning and policy framework to make it accessible for all. Mere expansion in institutions and intake capacity shall not necessarily make higher education inclusive. Though the most crucial part is to make dramatic changes at primary and secondary levels and focusing on allocating educational budget to higher education to make the significant developments at in campus phase. Apart from that framing policies benefitting economically weaker sections and some other cumulative factors as the centric point can for sure make inclusion possible in its true sense.

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