Rejuvenating the Concept of Quality of Higher Education in Indian Perspective

Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to provide very important insight towards some lacking in the concept of 'Quality of Education'. The term very often used and discussed in various context but the very important aspects of the concept are always overlooked. In this paper cultural, sociological and philosophical aspects are emphasized to redesign the concept of quality of education. The theoretical review of various references provide necessary base to explain the term critically. It is very necessary intellectual exercise for any nation to make clear in their perspective in relation to education. During the period to pre and post independence in India it became very usual course to accept basic concepts and terminology which are highly advocated by scholars. The theoretical review reveals the lacking of some important dimensions of education in contemporary education in India. On the basis of this discussion the model for qualitative higher education is proposed in Indian perspective. The discussion gives new sight towards quality of higher education in India. It emphasizes the synthesis to modern approach with ancient spiritual life oriented and man making education.

Introduction

The Indian education system is struggling from various challenges. After independence there is drastic change in pattern and direction of Indian education. The emergence of Indian education system is always evaluated with the number of universities and institutions developed after independence. Though this quantitative aspect is necessary for the progress measurement but this is not only criteria. The easy access of education at very reasonable cost is also one of the important aspects of development.

The scholars and academicians are always taking pain to find out the very essence of the term 'Quality of Education'. The task of defining the term quality is very challenging. There are two approaches for the assertion of term. Some scholars agree upon that it is not possible to define or quantified the term 'quality'. The second approach emphasized on the subjective nature of term. This approach gives very important sight in this context and can provide room for nation specific aspect. These approaches lead us towards healthy discussion and make us aware to rethink on this term.

Meaning of Quality

Quality is ever changing thing with products, services, people, processes and the environment. This all depends upon the customer's expectations, needs and desires. (De Jager H. J., Nieuwenhuis F. J., 2005). This can give us an very important characteristic of the term 'quality' that it is depends upon various element connected with this. The customer is in the central point.

The British Standard Institution (BSI) defines quality in more holistic manner. It means that the totality of features and characteristics of the product or service. The ability to satisfy needs of the customer is again salient feature of quality.

Harvey and Green (1993) classified the various approaches in to five categories.

First is uncommon or extraordinary nature of the product. The product which can achieve each and every predetermined standard. The second category is related with consistency. The product with 'zero defect' leads towards quality culture. The third important dimension is appropriateness with the purpose. Appropriateness means the fitness of product or service with its purpose. The purpose may be customer satisfaction or error free production. The fourth category deals with the return of money which one spent for. This is related with the efficiency or effectiveness of the product. The fifth and very crucial category is changing nature of product.

The qualitative change as per the demand from time to time is also criteria for quality. The reflection on above five categories we can understand that it cannot strictly apply to education. Though the above mentioned five categories provide primary understanding but it cannot provide comprehensive overview for education. This classification is given in context of industrial perspective. The Educational process in related with human which has deep connection with sociological and cultural contexts.

Gummesson (1990) gives very important comment on quality that the quality is matter of social consensus. It means that the term quality cannot defined universally but it can be derived from social and cultural domains. Thus Reeves and Bednar (1994) right observed that it is not possible to give strict and universal definition of quality.

The term quality has some ideas within its periphery. There are four dimension of quality. These are Quality as absolute, Quality as relative, Quality as a process and Quality as culture.

Quality as absolute term:

When we consider quality as absolute, it is given and considered as the highest possible standard. For example the Taj Mahal is works of high standards and quality. In product terms, they are attached with high 'brand' values, status and positional advantages. Educational institutions such as Oxford, Cambridge and Stanford in the west have this absolute quality standard, though in the case of education it might still be perceptual.

Quality as relative term:

This dimension suggests that the term quality is relative in nature. It means that the quality of any product or service cannot be measured by any single manner. The each occasion and context has their own criteria to determine the quality.

Quality as a process:

The process is very important element to determine quality. The quality of process laid down for the purpose is necessary for achievement of overall quality.

Quality as a culture:

This dimension gives holistic view for the quality. When each member of organization believe in quality assurance and put their efforts as a process of transformation it becomes quality culture. This quality culture provides consistent synergy for betterment.

Challenges to Defining Quality

As we already discussed that the term quality is very challenging term to define. The obstacles for this are here discussed briefly so it can lead towards the real essence of the quality education in India.

1.   Quality is a slippery elusive term

The term quality is very closely connected with variety of stakeholders. In any organizational structure there are so may sub system and beneficiaries. Each has their own view and perspective regarding quality it makes the term very difficult to define universally. (Bobby, 2014 ; Harvey & Green, 1993; Martin & Stella, 2007)

2.   Quality is a multidimensional concept

The quality is a multidimensional concept (Green, 1994). This multiplicity makes this term more complex and difficult to define in one or two sentences. As a result definition cannot provide holistic view and became general or operational kind of nature.

3.   Quality is not a static but rather a dynamic

The term quality is dynamic and not static. The multiple context of this term itself is dynamic in nature. Rainbow on which the term quality lies is ever- changing this makes the task more complicated. (Bobby, 2014; Harvey, 2005; Singh, 2010).

Concept of Quality in education

The term quality has special context in the field of education. There are so many definitions for the quality of education. Some terms are also used as synonyms of quality like efficiency, effectiveness, equity. However moderate consensus exists on the some common aspects of quality education. (Adams, 1993) This includes:

- Healthy and energetic learners who are eager to participate in learning. The support of families and community should also necessary.
- Learning Environment that is open minded, reflective, safe, inquisitive and gender-sensitive. Adequate facilities and resources should be available.
- Curriculum that is focused on basic skills and life skills as well. „
- Teaching learning Processes is core element for quality. Child centered and learning centered processes are roots for quality of education. Well equipped and modern classrooms are necessary but the soul of whole process if learning.
- Knowledge, skills and attitudes are the primary outcomes of the educational process but wisdom and self awareness are utmost outcome of the process. This can be achieved through quality process between teacher and learner.

The above mentioned points make it clear that the quality of education has multiple dimensions. Moreover the socio-cultural context makes this very unique and specific for each nation. In this connection the concluding comments from Barrow (1991) quoted by Barnett (1992) throw more light on quality in higher education.

> …a high evaluation accorded to an educative process, where it has been demonstrated that, through the process, the students' educational development has been enhanced … not only have they achieved the particular objectives set for the course but, in doing so, they have also fulfilled the general educational aims of autonomy of the ability to participate in reasoned discourse, of critical self-evaluation, and of coming to a proper awareness of the ultimate contingency of all thought and action (p. 61).

This definition encompasses various crucial elements of educational process and justifies the education as complex system. This system include cultural, political, social, economic and geographical context. Further the latent interdependency of these contexts makes the system even more unique. This definition also consider the global and international influences at the same time it also gives importance to national and local context. (Adams, 1993) The stakeholders of the system perceive the quality in different ways. (Beeby, 1966).

The perspectives on quality of each group of stakeholders are different. The discussion on various perspectives gives comprehensive view. This can help to establish the culture of quality at all level of education. (Bobby, 2014).

Thus definitions of quality must be open to change. It should not be static or applicable for all contexts. Each nation has its own vision and philosophy for human development. New knowledge creation through research should also incorporate to redefine the quality. Education systems that welcome upcoming changes through constant evaluation and research can provide quality education to their future generation. (Glasser, 1990) Continuous evaluation, assessment and improvement can focus on any or all dimensions of quality of system. These dimensions include learners, learning environments, content, process and outcomes. Each dimension is inter-related and affect each other.

Rejuvenating the concept of quality of education: Indian Perspective

The literature review on the concept of 'quality' term and its roots make it very clear that all the dimensions of the concept is influenced by the industrial and managerial disciplines. The western concept of quality of education is materialistic where as Indian concept of education is spirit oriented. The main focus of education system is unveiling the truth which lies within. The man making education aims to achieve the eternal truth.

The ancient Indian political system based on relinquishment the violence, struggle and self-enrichment. The basic of this principle was love, empathy, tolerance and good behavior. Apart from the material achievements the knowledge of inner self is the utmost goal of the education. The educational evolution in ancient India was also founded upon this very ideal. Dr. R.K. Mukherjee (2006) said, "Learning in India through the ages had been prized and pursued not for its own sake, if we may so put it, but for the sake, and as a part, of religion. It was sought as the means of self-realization, as the means to the highest end of life viz. Mukti or Emancipation."

The continuation and evolution of culture is aim of any education system. The education connects persons, community and ideas. The eternal happiness is main theme of education other themes are subsidiary. Whatever support or lead to inner happiness can be valid.

The inner happiness of human being is prime object of the education. This happiness inspired creativity in human which is the manifestation of harmony between self and cosmos. The processes which disturb this harmony are to be identified. This is very important aspect of quality improvement. This approach is lacking now a days. The modern approach of quality always look in to development of material aspects of the process but development of inner self is always neglected. The harmony can be achieved only through attending restlessness of the senses. The culture is the main context for our feelings, actions and thoughts. The collective experience from our predecessors forms our culture. So the demand of culture also became very important aspect in education. This provides us crucial goals for educational process i.e., harmony between self and cosmic rhythm, restlessness of senses and satisfaction of our cultural demands.

The Indian theory of knowledge is directly derived from the values and life. The Indian education system is ultimate outcome of this theory of knowledge. The concept of life and death are both important for the whole truth. This inclusion makes Indian thinking wider in the sense that it include physical and spiritual, perishable and eternal at the same time. This is very unique feature of Indian thinking that it puts death at the central fact of life. This provides the great and limitless opportunity to every human to be potential God or to be the Absolute as a spark of the Devine. So the education should provide opportunities for self fulfillment. The acquisition of mere objective knowledge is not sufficient. the Indian Ancient philosophy never deny the significance of physical existence of the world. The doctrine of Action (Karma) is at the central place in Indian system of life and education. This doctrine could provide very useful insight for the quality of education. In the present internationally recognized concept of quality overlook these very valuable aspects of the life.

The ultimate goal of life is devotion towards Brahma and not this world. This material world can provide us very necessary experiences for systematic education for self development. This synthesizes the both kind of knowledge, material and spiritual. This very important aspect of quality concept should be indeed needed to be incorporated.

The Indian thinking provides two kinds of **vidya** or knowledge. the **paravidya** and aparavidya. the paravidya is concerned with the higher knowledge or spiritual wisdom. the aparavidya is concerned with the lower knowledge or physical sciences. Both vidya have their importance of their own. paravidya provides knoledge to live life comfortably whereas former prepared human for hereafter. The balanced combination of both is advocated. The culture and civilization are the medium for this transfer of knowledge from one generation to another. The proper combination of both vidya and paravidya could be the fundamental criterion for the quality of education.

The materialistic education includes various aspects of the knowledge of concrete world. The student engaged in the pursuit of material knowledge through intellectual exercises. Spiritual knowledge leads human towards attainment of final emancipation. For the attainment of final and eternal truth self inquiry through meditation is essential. This could help the person to keep aloof from physical or material objects and engage himself fully in self realization. This is not possible only by intellect because elements constituting divine or spiritual knowledge cannot be understood and achieve through senses or intelligence. It is observed that in modern education system more emphasis is given to intellectual development. The ignorance towards spiritual knowledge is very harmful for mankind. For the specification of quality of education one must consider the importance of spirituality.

Conclusion

The rejuvenating the concept of quality in education is highly needed in this modern era. The various dimensions advocated in the previous part of this paper have so many missing links. The very important link between self and the universe is not covered. It emphasizes on the development of person towards external but internal world of self is not considered in this approach. On the basis of above discussion the need of redefine the concept of quality education is emerged. The following points may useful for the recreation of the concept of quality for Indian education.

1. Education ought to ensure the continuity and evolution of culture

2. Development of harmonious being through conquest over senses

3.   Our thoughts, feelings and actions have relevance within the framework of our culture

4.   Education must help learner for self-fulfillment, and not in the acquisition of mere objective knowledge

5.   The purpose of education is to gain both kinds of knowledge, materialistic and spiritual

The process which caters to both physical and spiritual solitariness has the real essence of education.

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