International Journal of Advanced Research and Development
ISSN: 2455-4030
Impact Factor: RJIF 5.24
www.advancedjournal.com
Volume 3; Issue 2; March 2018; Page No. 665-668

Criteria of quality school education

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Abstract
The study focused on school based factors influence quality of education in elementary schools. The paper focuses on the School quality as a function of inputs and the efficient management of these inputs in relation to desired goals. The specific objectives of the research were to establish school based factors that influence quality of education in primary schools. Besides, lack of technology and lack of parental involvement were found to be factors that might have an effect on the quality of education. There is a need to strengthen teachers on aspects of motivation, pro-children attitudes and creative teaching learning process. Appointment of suitable staff is also recommended in order to lessen the burden on teachers. Inspection mode monitoring affected the school field worker relationship. Good infrastructure and quality education are equally important conditions for overall development of children. Community had failed to contribute towards improving the quality of education. Parents' help is required if children's learning is to be improved. Regular monitoring and follow-up by resource persons is helpful for the overall functioning of schools.

Keywords: quality of education, criteria, school

Introduction

Quality education is not an easy concept to qualify. At a time when we are discussing a quality education for all our learners it is important to take time to understand this concept.

The document Tomorrow's Schools (1995) had asked the following question: "What are considered to be the basic requirements of a quality education - one that is meaningful, worthwhile, responsive to individuals and social needs - and does each and every student, without fail get those requirements, regulated as these are by the principle of entitlement?" (p. 8)

According to the Education For All: Global Monitoring Report 2005 - The Quality Imperative (EFA: GMR), two principles characterise most attempts to define quality in education: the first identifies learners' cognitive development as the major explicit objective of all education systems. The second emphasises education's role in promoting values and attitudes of responsible citizenship and in nurturing creative and emotional development." (p.17)

I aspects of the school and its surrounding education community, the rights of the whole child, and all children, to survival, protection, development and participation are at the centre. This means that the focus is on learning which strengthens the capacities of children to act progressively on their own behalf through the acquisition of relevant knowledge, useful skills and appropriate attitudes; and which creates for children, and helps them create for themselves and others, places of safety, security and healthy interaction. (Bernard, 1999)

What does quality mean in the context of education? Many definitions of quality in education exist, testifying to the complexity and multifaceted nature of the concept. The terms efficiency, effectiveness, equity and quality have often been used synonymously (Adams, 1993). Considerable consensus exists around the basic dimensions of quality education today, however. Quality education includes:

Learners who are healthy, well-nourished and ready to participate and learn, and supported in learning by their families and communities; Environments that are healthy, safe, protective and gender-sensitive, and provide adequate resources and facilities; Content that is reflected in relevant curricula and materials for the acquisition of basic skills, especially in the areas of literacy, numeracy and skills for life, and knowledge in such areas as gender, health, nutrition, HIV/AIDS prevention and peace; Processes through which trained teachers use child-centred teaching approaches in well-managed classrooms and schools and skilful assessment to facilitate learning and reduce disparities; Outcomes that encompass knowledge, skills and attitudes, and are linked to national goals for education and positive participation in society. Management and the Flow of Information

A priority in many initiatives to improve the quality and efficiency of education is the increased use of information in policy formulation and planning. Only as the dimensions of an education system and the problems that beset it are clearly understood can appropriate planning and management of the education system occur. A considerable amount of attention and resources has been devoted to the design and implementation of Education Information Systems as a means of providing decision-makers with more accurate, relevant, and timely information.

However, the increased ability to collect and analyze information has not necessarily led to improved educational practice (directly or indirectly) at the levels where it matters most - in the schools and classrooms where the real process of education occurs. While considerable creative thought has

been put into the design and operation of information systems for central ministry planning, far less has been given to ways in which the resulting information can be used to actually affect practice at the school level. This represents a major challenge in educational planning and is the principal thrust of a research topic completed in 1993 by the International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP).

The research findings identify and synthesize lessons learned from current practice on the use of information systems to improve educational practice, particularly in ways that result in improved educational quality and efficiency. The findings place emphasis on the human factors and non-monetary incentives that operate to encourage and sustain the utilization of information. Agendas for further research and training are proposed as a framework that officials within each country can use to evaluate the needs of their own information systems.

Defining quality of education

Assessment may be defined as 'any method used to understand the current knowledge that a student possesses. The idea of current knowledge implies that what a student knows is always changing and that we can make judgment about student achievement through comparison over a period of time. Good assessment techniques provide accurate estimates of student performance and enables teachers and decision-makers to make appropriate decisions. The current debate about the determinants of student achievement, specifically the contributing effect of teacher variables, has its origin primarily in the findings of the Coleman Report (1966). In developing countries, the examination results are often used as a proxy for the quality of education. However, such a method is fraught with great problems, as the examination system is limited in scope and coverage as far as learning is concerned. The research has established that acquiring both cognitive and non-cognitive competencies are necessaryfor a child's overall development. However, most of the research in learning achievement has focused on the assessment of cognitive skills acquired by the students. An equally reliable measure of quality of education is whether pupils are learning effectively, improving their knowledge, skills and abilities; widening their experience and growing socially and morally or not. Ability to work with others, readiness to accept responsibility and to work for public good are highly praised characteristics among school leavers. But assessment tools do not test for such skills. While there is no consensus among educationists regarding the definition of the quality in education but there are several ways of measuring quality in education. In the context of school effectiveness, the concept of quality is linked to the efficiency of teaching learning processes. Quality is a relative concept and not something that is absolute. One useful approach could be to select a range of educational indicators that are explicit and measurable representing various facets of quality.

The quality of education and its determinants remain a topic of interest since the beginning of formal education. It is possible to develop indicators to measure learning along important dimensions, closely related to the curriculum, both in standardized assessment instruments and in alternative forms of assessment. Non standardized assessment refers to the traditional form of assessment by teachers on regular basis through classroom interaction, questions, assignment of homework and other such techniques. The results of such assessment may be accurate or faulty, depending upon the teachers' skill as a judge of various indicators and their applicability in a given situation. Standardized tests have proved useful in comparing, generalizing and indicating levels of attainment based on pre-defined standards. It is assumed that levels of learners' achievement are assessed at best through standardized achievement tests. Since the beginning of sixties, the measurement of students' academic performance on regular basis has been an ongoing effort in the advanced countries. Based on these results policy level interventions are made so that the deficiencies in learners achievement can be overcome. In India, the large scale achievement studies were conducted only in the recent years for primary education. The methods and tools for assessing learning outcome at other levels of education are yet to be put in place. The country is yet to evolve a policy for periodic collection and analysis of learners achievement data and using it for monitoring the quality of education at various levels. Considerable research is needed to improve the achievement testing methodology, achievement tests and tools of analysis. The analysis and feedback from achievement studies must be used for curriculum reforms and for restructuring of teacher training contents and methodology of training. In the last few years, international organizations like the World Bank, UNICEF, UNESCO and UNDP have produced valuable studies on educational assessment and measurement. The Fourth Survey on Research in Education in India (Buch, 1991) identified many studies, essentially at the M.Phil. and Ph.D. level, addressed to the achievement of primary school children. These researches are more of conceptual nature and their use in policy planning was practically nil.

Current status of school quality

1. Quality criteria regarding the quality of teaching and learning processes

(i) The Academic Skills of Teachers

Students learn more from teachers with strong academic skills (Ballou 1996; Ehrenberg and Brewer 1994; 1995; Ferguson 1991; Ferguson and Ladd 1996; Mosteller and Moynihan 1972),but graduates whose college entrance examination scores are in the top quartile are half as likely as those in the bottom quartile to prepare to teach (9 versus 18 percent) (Henke, Chen, and Geis 2000).Teachers in the top quartile are more than twice as likely than teachers in the bottom quartile to teach in private schools (26 versus 10 percent) and are less than one-third as likely as teachers in the bottom quartile to teach in high-poverty schools (10 versus 31 percent). Furthermore, graduates in the top quartile who teach are twice as likely as those in the bottom quartile to leave the profession within less than four years (32 versus 16 percent) (Henke, Chen, and Geis 2000).

(ii) Teaching Assignment

Middle and high school students learn more from teachers who hold a bachelor's or master's degree in the subject they are teaching (Darling-Hammond 2000; Goldhaber and Brewer 1997; Monk and King 1994), but out-of-field teaching occurs

with regularity (Bobbitt and McMillen 1994; Henke *et al*. 1997; Ingersoll 1999; Lewis *et al*. 1999).

(iii) Teacher Experience

Studies suggest that students learn more from experienced teachers than they do from less experienced teachers (Darling-Hammond 2000; Murnane and Phillips 1981; Rivkin, Hanushek, and Kain 1998).As of 1998,the highest-poverty schools and schools with the highest concentrations of minority students had nearly double the proportion of inexperienced teachers (those with three or fewer years of experience) than schools with the lowest poverty (20 versus 11 percent) and lowest concentration of minority students (21 versus 10 percent).

(iv) Professional Development

Experts agree that high-quality professional development should enhance student learning (Choy and Ross 1998; Mullens *et al*. 1996; U.S. Department of Education 1999a), but data permitting an analysis of the relationship are not yet available. In 1998, 99 percent of the nation's public school teachers had participated in some type of professional development program within the past 12 months (U.S. Department of

(v) Course Content

Research shows that as students take higher-level academic courses they learn more (Raizen and Jones 1985; Sebring 1987). From 1982 to 1998, there was an increase in the percentage of students enrolling in higher-level mathematics and science courses (Wirt *et al*. 2000). High school graduates in 1998 were more likely than their 1982 counterparts to take more advanced mathematics courses, such as algebra II,trigonometry, precalculus, and calculus. In science, the trend is similar. High school graduates in 1998 were more likely to take chemistry II or physics II and physics I and chemistry I (Wirt *et al*. 2000). Despite these encouraging signs, the experience is not reflected equally among racial/ethnic and income groups. In 1998, white and Asian/Pacific Islander high school graduates were usually more likely than black, Hispanic, and American Indian/Alaskan Native students to complete advanced academic-level mathematics and the highest-level science courses (Wirt *et al*. 2000). Students from low-income families were less likely to be enrolled in a college preparatory track through which they would be more likely to take such courses (U.S. Department of Education 1995).

2. Quality criteria in the area of school management

The school makes a regular audit concerning the school's needs in the direction of sustainability, involving students, teachers and staff. •The school decides every year what are the new challenges and what actions to take for a continuous improvement of the school management • The school strives to be an example of careful management of resources and evidence of the result obtained are shown to the internal and external community.

3. Quality criteria in the area of the school climate

The school atmosphere is such that everyone feels that she/he can contribute with innovative ideas and proposals without fear. The school leadership has a particular role in facilitating this. The school is seen as an arena where all the stakeholders exercise democracy and participation, and are involved, at different levels, in the decision-making processes. The whole school community, especially parents, are informed of the relevance of ESD for students' general learning and are involved in the school development.

4. Technology

Research suggests that student learning is enhanced by computers when the computer is used to teach discrete skills (President's Committee of Advisors on Science and Technology Panel on Educational Technology 1997). Computer availability and usage is increasing in the schools (Anderson and Ronnkvist 1999).In 1999,there was an average of 6 students for each computer, up from a 125 to 1 ratio in 1983 (Coley, Cradler, and Engel 1997; U.S. Department of Education 2000b).Internet access existed at 95 percent of public schools in 1999, up from 35 percent in 1994 (U.S. Department of Education 2000b). Internet access will most likely be used most if the computers are in instructional rooms. Over half (63 percent) of all instructional rooms (classrooms, computer or other labs, and library media centers) had access to the Internet in 1999, up from 3 percent five years before (U. S. Department of Education 2000b).For schools with high concentrations of poverty (more than 70 percent eligible for free or reduced-price lunch), 39 percent of all instructional rooms had Internet access compared with 62 to 74 percent for schools with lower concentrations of poverty (U.S. Department of Education 2000b).

5. Class Size

Researchers have found that greater gains in student achievement occur in classes with 13 to 20 students compared with larger classes, especially for disadvantaged and minority students (Krueger 1998; Mosteller, Light, and Sachs 1996; Robinson and Wittebols 1986). In 1998, the average public elementary school class had 23 students (Lewis *et al*. 1999). Large-scale efforts to reduce class size may result in negative consequences if, as was the case recently in California, large numbers of unqualified teachers are hired because there are not enough qualified teachers available to staff the smaller classes (Bohrnstedt and Stecher 1999).

6. Discipline

Researchers have found that a positive disciplinary climate is directly linked to student learning (Barton, Coley, and Wenglinsky 1998; Bryk,Lee,and Holland 1993;Chubb and Moe 1990). Research also suggests that the most effective policies to reduce the incidence of offenses in a school vary according to the targeted behavior. To reduce serious incidents,including drug offenses only a policy of severe punishment seems to be effective (Barton, Coley, and Wenglinsky 1998).Serious violent crime incidents,occurred in 10 percent of all public schools in 1996–97 (Kaufman *et al*. 1999). The level of schoolrelated criminal behavior has changed little between 1976 and 1997, and no differences in victimization rates were found between white and black high school seniors in 1997 (Wirt *et al*.1999).However,the

percentage of middle and high school students who fear attack or other bodily harm while at school has been on the rise. In each year, a larger proportion of black and Hispanic students than white students feared attacks at school, and the percentage of black students who feared for their safety nearly doubled from 1989 through 1995 (Kaufman *et al*. 1999).

7. Academic Organization

Students learn more in schools that emphasize high academic expectations (Bryk, Lee, and Holland 1993; Chubb and Moe 1990), and academic expectations have been on the rise (Wirt *et al*. 1998). The percentage of public school districts with graduation requirements that meet or exceed the National Commission on Excellence in Education (NCEE) recommendations (four years of English, three years of mathematics, three years of science, three years of social studies, and a half year of computer science) increased from 12 to 20 percent between 1987–88 and 1993–94 (Wirt *et al*. 1998). A common criticism of the NCEE recommendations is that they only specify the number of courses to be taken, not their rigor. But there is evidence that increasing numbers of students have been enrolling in more difficult courses. From 1982 to 1998, there was an increase in the percentage of students enrolling in higher-level mathematics and science courses (Wirt *et al*. 2000).

Conclusions

The attributes of concern on educational quality included number of teachers available, pupils-teacher ratios, and the personal characteristics of the individual teachers. The personal characteristics include academic qualification, pedagogical training, content knowledge, ability or aptitude, as well as years of service/experience. The availability and use of instructional facilities were found to impact on quality of education being offered in primary schools. This is because the content of education is critical in determining learning outcomes. The materials that support teaching and learning, their type, quality and quantity impact significantly on the quality of education.

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