

Globalization and Primary Education in India: Challenges & Opportunities

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Abstract

Globalization plays a significant role in changing the fabrics of society and culture. Society is built upon certain values and belief systems which are inculcated from education institutions, family and society right from early childhood. Education institutions, today, face a challenge to maintain a balance between adapting globalization with rapidly changing pace and preserving indigenous culture and values. It also poses new opportunity to educational leaders to overcome problems with the help of continuously advancing instruments of globalization such as technology and body of knowledge. The impact of globalization will have different consequences for rural and urban areas. Primary education institutions in urban areas have different issues and opportunities for globalization than that of education institutions in rural area. The difference in implications and ability to entrap opportunity of globalization between public and private schools will either increase or diminish inequality. First section of article describes notion of 'Globalization' followed by second section on 'Globalization and Primary Education'. Third section discusses the issues and opportunities that primary education would have in India due to globalization. The analysis of those challenges and opportunities in both areas will help to discover tools which can be used to mitigate issues and to entrap opportunities to inculcate education which meets objective of education. Last section concludes article with brief note on globalization and primary education in India.

Keywords: Globalization, Primary education, Implications of Globalization

Introduction

Target date to achieve Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) is just approaching in 2015. One of prime focus of MDGs is 'Achieve Universal Primary Education'. Importance and need of education has been recognized and felt at national and international level for various reasons. Education is very significant and important tool to eradicate poverty, bring equality and protect and nurture the democratic values in post-modern era. Nation-state also sees education for instilling nationalism values and thoughts to make citizens. The role of education in promoting development has been the subject of much discussion in recent decades. In 1948 the Universal Declaration of Human Rights proclaimed free and compulsory education to be a human right. In 1990 the World conference on Education for All, held in Jomtien, Thailand, pledged to provide primary education for all by 2000. World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg highlighted the central role of education in promoting good health, environment protection, and sustainable development. The discourse of primary education has been talked since last few decades which shows that providing primary education to people is just not in interest of sovereign

state but also in interest of large global communities and citizens. International organizations, which are founded after World War-II with objective to maintaining international peace and security, developing friendly relations among nations and promoting social progress, better living standards and human rights started to consider the role of education as a catalyst to meet their aim and to revise and set their agenda.

Process of globalization has begun to intensify the discourse on education which emphasized increased nation-state intervention to provide equal access to education to all. No Child Left Behind (NCLB) in US, Education for All (EFA) and Right to Education (RTE) in India are few examples of state-led policy intervention in primary education. However, neoclassical policies advocated the role of market and guided state to facilitate the market. Non-aided privately owned and managed institutions providing education have been on rise, after Structural Adjustment Policy (SAP), in developing world. India is no exception of that. Private school enrollment continues to rise in almost all states. Since 2009, private school enrollment in rural areas has been rising at an annual rate of about 10%. If this trend continues, by 2018 India will have 50% children in rural areas enrolled in private schools (ASER 2012 (Rural) Findings). Though globalization has created a huge impact in all form of education including primary, secondary and tertiary, the scope of this paper is limited to impact on primary education only.

What is Globalization?

The below given definition of Globalization has been taken into consideration, though other views are also observed, while discussing arguments in this article.

“Globalization = the process whereby market exchange relationships and multimedia telecommunications capabilities spread from the core of economically and technologically developed nations to other regions of the world, facilitating the flow of goods, services, and people across national borders, this process being stimulated by, while in turn reinforcing, an image of the world as a unified whole and humanity, despite its cultural diversity and continuing differentiation, as a single global society, while also generating resistance and violent opposition from those excluded from this imagined global society.” (Waks, 2006, p. 414)

Economics factors are often listed first and as Green (1999, p.56) argues "economic globalization theory is on safest ground." Trade and exchange of goods and services between the nations promote 'unified global economy'(Waks, 2006, p.143). However, it is a mistake to assume that only economic issue, though extremely important, determine the nature of globalization (Giddens 1999). Open and easy communication between nations has created grounds for 'culture homogenization' developing a single global society'(Waks, 2006, p.143). Though number of nation-states increased in past few decades, in globalization era virtual borderless nation-state has been widely recognized than bordered nation-state which follows what Giddens argued “we now all live in one world”(Giddens, 1999, p.7). This interconnected between nations, despite differences, can positively as well as negatively affect cultural and socio-economic spheres of the world.

Globalization is frequently referred to as ‘Westernization’ and Americanization (Giddens, 1999; Papastephanou, 2005; Sahlberg, 2006; Tikly, 2001). Thus globalization is defined as

the dominance of single culture, namely Anglo-Saxon, over other cultures the world over and there is 'a lack of analogous influence of non-western cultures on the western ones' (Papastephanou, 2005, p.541). As Giddens (1999, p.13) claims, "globalization not only pulls upwards, but also pushes downwards, creating new pressures for local autonomy". This has been ensured through neo-liberal policies gaining more and more popularity since 1980s and resulting in deregulation and devolution of power and authority from national to sub-national levels (Harvey, 2005). As a result of more power vested to sub-national levels, the size and scope of institution at sub-nation level gets reduced while aggregate number of such institutions will tend to increase. The evidence from India approves this fact in primary education domain. The proportion of small schools is rising in India (ASER 2012 (Rural) Findings). Neo-liberal discourse determined that many western states developed similar approach to education. Decentralization of education became the main strategy to solve accumulated problems. By devolving the authority to the local bodies, the state sought to meet equality and quality demands. Besides, decisions are taken closer to the context where they are to be realized can prove to be more effective and efficient (Welsh and McGinn, 1999). Elements of neo-liberal educational policy are increased accountability, competition and standardization (Clair and Belzer, 2007).

In many theories of globalization global and local are not viewed as opposing notions, but rather indispensable elements of globalization. The interdependence of these two elements is often described as 'glocalization' (Papastephanou, 2005). The notion of 'glocalization' is very relevant and significant in context of primary education in third world countries where resources are neither in abundance nor used efficiently and there is extant of plethora of cultural diversity and ethnicity. Simply copying or borrowing policy of North and implementing it in South would have backstage firing effect. However, it is unequivocally true that 'lessons learnt' from other country must be carefully observed and incorporated with local context as outcome of any social policy hugely depends on cultural and socio-economic factor of community.

Globalization and Primary Education

A vast literature on philosophy of Education has already been written by great philosophers and thinkers of the world. The most common definition of education, from literature, can be derived out is 'enlightening experience through enlightening mind, soul and self'. No one would question of education's intrinsic values, in addition to its economic return, to oneself and society. Econometrics research and study depicting correlation of no. of years of schooling with income or its monetary return has already identified the years of primary education statistically significant which means increase in those years would yield higher income. The aim of education is inculcating moral values and providing scientific understanding of subjects (Peters, 2009). Children get education, formally and informally, from three social institutions: family, society and schools. During formative years which are very important for children's achievement in letter years, children's education starts informally first from family and then from society followed by formal education in school at the age of 6 years. With pre-school education at early age, children are integrated into formal education with informal ways of instruction and teaching. Globalization influences all three, formal and informal, institutions at some extent which in turn results into change in cultural practices and social norms.

Globalization has changed the way children getting educated by elderly in family. During pre-globalization period children were also educated, in family, through storytelling by their grandmother and grandfather. Children's interaction with their elderly members of family inculcated social and moral values in former. However, there may be very limited literature available on this. With globalization, this form of education in family has been, mostly, replaced by technological entertaining equipment and machines. These machines might help, at some extent, in teaching basic skills of reading, writing and mathematics but they lack inculcation of moral values that binds society together as a fabric. Globalization has changed the preferences of parents for education and medium in which knowledge is transmitted. Emphasize on 'Education in the medium of English language' has become first choice for parents. What can be said is that globalization brings along re-shaping and re-thinking of values, re-modernization of traditions and attitudes. It stages tragicomedy where education has to play the main part (Parjanadze, 2009, p.78). If the major issue is to change the consciousness of people, then education has heavy burden, because people often become what they taught that they are (Papastephanou, 2005, p.548).

Challenges and Opportunities

'Liberal progressives' also support the idea of economic liberalization, but admit the fact that it can be a double-edged sword unless special attention is paid to equality issues (Waks, 2003). The concern about equality is shared by Neo-Marxists who see the salvation in 'trans-national alliances of labor and human rights activists' (Waks, 2003, p.385). On one side we, humans, have been successful in compressing time and space and thus reducing distance between cities, countries and continents but we are yet to use globalization as a tool to reduce inequality in education. Globalization can increase inequality if its benefits are not distributed equally among marginalized and disadvantaged sections of society. In context of primary education, globalization can create inequality in students' learning opportunity and access if private non-aided primary schools which charge fees from students reap more benefits of globalization by employing best available technology, implementing best teaching practices and hiring quality teachers than public or government schools where more students from marginalized and historically disadvantaged groups study if public school don't embark of ship of globalization due to lack of enough resources and political will. The inequality created by this difference will keep increasing when students from both types of schools go into phase of secondary and tertiary education. Moreover, in competitive age of the world, pressure to perform for competing to gain access to opportunity and employment which increase their social welfare is so high for students from public schools that they sometime drop out from further stages of education due to huge gap of learning between them and their counterpart.

Diminishing quality of education in most part of the world has been a major concern for policy makers, practitioners and parents. Assessment and comparison, across the world, of quality of education have been partly an outcome of globalization and a contribution to education. Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development(OECD)'s Programme for International Student assessment (PISA) is an appropriate example of Global assessment system which is common across all participating developed economies. PISA evaluates education systems worldwide by testing the skills and knowledge of 15-year-old students. To date, students representing more than 70 economies have participated in the assessment. Since the year 2000, every three years, fifteen-year-old students from

randomly selected schools worldwide take tests in the key subjects: reading, mathematics and science, with a focus on one subject in each year of assessment. Similarly in developing countries also such assessment system has been started at transnational level. Annual Status of Education Report(ASER), which measures educational outcomes by assessing basic skills, through surveys, of primary and upper primary children in reading and arithmetic in India, is an example of this. ASER was set up, in 2008, as an autonomous unit within an NGO, Pratham, in India which has now expanded its horizon in other third world countries such as Pakistan, Mali, Senegal and countries of East Africa. Globalization has certainly helped in sharing the 'know-how' with other countries to develop their capacity for social development.

Despite state's effort to push for education by increasing resources and expenditures, such quality assessment institutions have found and shown the real state of education which is certainly alarming for any country. State's 'Big push' for education succeeded in increasing enrollment rates in primary schools in India. Enrollment in the 6-14 age-groups continues to be very high. But the proportion of out of school children has increased, especially among girls in the age group of 11 to 14. The other major concern which is unaddressed is 'learning outcomes'. Reading levels continue to be a cause for serious concern. More than half of all children in Std. V are at least three grade levels behind where they should be. 2012 was the year of mathematics. But it has been a bad year for basic arithmetic for children in India. Private inputs into children's education, such as private schooling and private tutoring, are widespread. And their influence on children's learning outcomes is substantial (ASER 2012 (Rural) Findings). This suggests that increase expenditure on education is not translating into learning outcomes effectively. Bureaucratic solutions to problems of practice will always fail because effective teaching is not routine, students are not passive, and questions of practice are not simple, predictable, or standardized. Consequently, instructional decisions cannot be formulated on high then packaged and handed down to teachers (Darling-Hammond, 1997).

Though performance of students in most part of the world, including US which has been ranked 49th out of 148 developed and developing nations in quality of math and science instruction by World Economic Forum, in basic reading and mathematics is degrading, eminent educationalist and scholars of the world raise questions on objectives of education remained unfulfilled. "The fundamental basis of the system is fatally flawed," says Linda Darling-Hammond, a professor of education at Stanford and founding director of the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future. In 1970 the top three skills required by the Fortune 500 were the three Rs: reading, writing, and arithmetic. In 1999 the top three skills in demand were teamwork, problem-solving, and interpersonal skills. We need schools that are developing these skills (Darling-Hammond, 1997).

With increased mobility of capital, goods, labor and ideas in globe, Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) has been seen as a new phenomenon in commercial and business sectors of developing countries. The discourse of FDI which brings technology and 'know-how', in addition to capital, to developing countries, can be certainly thought in third world development sectors such as Education and health with intention of contribution rather than investment and profit making by developed countries. Current notion of foreign aid which often comes with conditions must change to 'Foreign Direct Contribution with

Participation (FDCP)' which will enable contributing countries to actively participate in discourse and come out with solutions. FDCP would bring not only financial resources to support but also technology, knowledge and human capital which is lacking in development sectors. For instance, Finland and other countries that have very innovative education system and have been ranked on top in PISA score since past few years can certainly contribute and participate in improving education system through various means.

The globalization in primary education brings plenty of opportunities to ameliorate learning outcomes and achieve education's aim by providing teachers access to well-performing institutions of country and world through collaboration and exchange, developing teacher's capacity through trainings by experts from across the globe, maintaining a repository of best teaching practices and providing access to teachers without any cost, efficient institute management practices etc.

Technological advancement and globalization, both, subscribed to growth of each other. Technological advancement has made transnational connection easily accessible (Parjanadze, 2009, p.78). The transmission of the first message by electric telegraph in the nineteenth century by Sameual Morse gave start to a new world history (Giddens, 1999). In terms of education, technological aspect of globalization can have positive effect on teaching and learning process. However, there is an assumption that it can also present a threat by making a teaching profession obsolete. But it can be argued that it should not prevent the development of interactive learning software as people will still "have to learn how to learn" (Green, 1997). Technological advancement created a 'multiplier-effect' in education. With the help of technology, benefits of technology can be multiplied to large extent. Communication technology can help to come out of the hindrance of distance in communicating with each-other. Education system, including public schools, in states equipped with effective and appropriate communication technology can deliver instructions and teach students from one place to many locations at the same time. Students studying in remote rural public school can learn and interact with teacher teaching from urban center with subject expertise, if schools have those facilities. It can also conduct teacher training through such mode of communication which reduces overall cost of training in long run and increase efficiency. Technology can bring innovative 'Teaching and Learning Materials (TLM)' which can be more effective and easy to teach and learn concepts.

Yet, India, barring few states, has not taken full advantage of multiplier effect of technology in education. India has to deal with few challenges such as shortage teacher with knowledge of technology and its equipment use, poor infrastructure which is manifested by no-supply or unreliable supply of electricity to remote and rural areas and lack of political vision. The scope for education to act as a socially integrative force in contemporary society is not necessarily diminished or impeded by the forces of globalization and postmodernity. What has diminished perhaps is the political will of governments, at least in the West, to pursue the goals of social cohesion and social solidarity (Green, 1997, p. 186). Globalization "unifies national education policies by integrating them with the broader global trends" (Sahlberg, 2006, p.262).

Conclusion

Notion of Globalization is not limited to only economic growth and trade agreements. Changing dimensions of socio-cultural spheres due to globalization creates a large impact, positively and negatively as well, in the world we live. Primary education can't be remained isolated and untouched in juggernaut of globalization. Education system and institutions, formal and informal, in developing countries tend to face more implications as globalization will try to create a homogenized culture which is common with other countries. The objective of education to inculcate moral values and scientific understanding is still a larger concern when students are struggling with basic reading and arithmetic skill. Concern of rise in inequality due to unequal access and distributions of fruits of globalization must be considered and addressed with advantages of it. Changing notion of foreign aid with conditions, from developed countries, to Foreign Direct Contribution with Participation will bring global expertise, technology and human capital to primary education, and other social sectors, in India. Global collaborations and using instruments to share the best practices would help improve learning outcomes. The multiplier effect of technology in education should be harnessed to achieve equality, equity and efficiency. With a hope that globalization would help in meeting fundamental objective of primary education in India, we must re-emphasize mission of our education institutions. That mission is: "The new mission of schools is to prepare students to work at jobs that do not yet exist, creating ideas and solutions for products and problems that have not yet been identified, using technologies that have not yet been invented" (Darlling-Hammond, 1997, p2).

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