

The right to education of good quality: An imperative to sustainable development

The progressive evolution of what defines good quality education can be traced not only in legal obligations of states, but also its interconnectedness to social, economic, environmental, and political fabrics of society.

Within the legal domain, international human rights law provides the general legal framework guaranteeing quality education through Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and related treaties guaranteeing the right to education which should be “*directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance, and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.*”

These aims shed light on the early vision of what constitutes quality education and has evolved and defined, albeit very slowly, in the succeeding decades to encompass other dimensions of human relationships, economic aspirations, citizens’ political participation, and sustaining the world we live in amidst finite resources.

UNESCO’s EFA Global Monitoring Report (GMR) in 2005 provided a useful account on the conceptual development of what is and what constitutes education of good quality which emerged from two International Commission reports more than two decades apart (1972 and 1996):



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- *Learning to Be: The World of Education Today and Tomorrow*, the report of the International Commission on the Development of Education, chaired by the former French minister Edgar Faure. The commission identified the fundamental goal of social change as the eradication of inequality and the establishment of an equitable democracy. Consequently, it reported, ‘the aim and content of education must be recreated, to allow both for the new features of society and the new features of democracy’ (Faure et al., 1972: xxvi). The notions of ‘lifelong learning’ and ‘relevance’, it noted,

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The Faure and Delors reports urged world leaders to go beyond measuring learning through standardised testing within the limited confines of classrooms and formal education systems.

were particularly important. The Report strongly emphasized science and technology as well. Improving the quality of education, it stated, would require systems in which the principles of scientific development and modernisation could be learnt in ways that respected learners' socio-cultural contexts.

- *Learning: The Treasure Within, Report to UNESCO of the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century*, chaired by another French statesman, Jacques Delors. This commission saw education throughout life as based upon four pillars: (a) *Learning to know* acknowledges that learners build their own knowledge daily, combining indigenous and 'external' elements; (b) *Learning to do* focuses on the practical application of what is learned; (c) *Learning to live together* addresses the critical skills for a life free from discrimination, where all have equal opportunity to develop themselves, their families and their communities; (d) *Learning to be* emphasizes the skills needed for individuals to develop their full potential.

This conceptualisation of education provided an integrated and comprehensive view of learning and, therefore, of what constitutes education quality (Delors et al., 1996).

Quality education from EFA to SDG4 and the SDGs: Beyond a quantitative approach to teaching and learning

The Faure and Delors reports provided important imperatives for world leaders to broaden their understanding and standards of what constitutes education quality, urging them to go beyond the historical emphasis of education systems which, until now, measured learning mostly on quantitative approach such as standardised testing and assessments of students' performance in academic subjects within the limited confines of classrooms and formal education systems.

This approach has been problematic, but only a few governments are slowly realising the detrimental effects of testing and competitions in the learning process.

Singapore, for instance, known for its competitive educational system, has recently announced drastic changes in its approach to education. According to its Education Minister, "*Learning is not a competition*," and the Ministry of Education is planning a series of changes aimed at discouraging comparisons between student performance and encourage individuals to concentrate on their own learning development. Starting in 2019, exams for primary years 1 and 2 students will be abolished. Older primary and secondary students will also study in a less competitive environment.

The Dakar Framework for Action, which enjoined leaders to commit to the six Education for All (EFA) goals, included an expanded definition of quality which set out the "*desirable characteristics of learners (healthy, motivated students), processes (competent teachers using active pedagogies), content (relevant curricula) and systems (good governance and equitable resource allocation).*" (UNESCO GMR 2005)

Unfortunately, as noted in UNESCO's 2005 GMR, while the EFA goal on quality established an agenda for achieving good education quality, it did not ascribe any relative weighting to the various dimensions identified.

Civil society organisations have always been at the forefront of concretising a holistic and transformative definition and understanding of education quality based on legal, social, and sustainable norms that affirm the value, dignity and right to self-determination of persons and communities.

Between 2009 to 2010, ASPBAE held various consultations with its members working in adult education as practitioners and advocates to discuss the ASPBAE Quality Adult Education Framework which basically encompass various dimensions of the right to good quality education – one that is transformative, empowering, pro-poor, gender just, sustainable and integral to the vision of lifelong learning.



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These consultations in ASPBAE also brought together a number of educators from across its region in November 2010 to discuss benchmarking quality adult education for indigenous peoples. For the participants, a good quality adult education program for indigenous peoples carry various characteristics of being effective, efficient, relevant and equitable and inclusive, and 19 benchmarks were developed out of these which were elaborated in a discussion paper published by ASPBAE in 2011 (*available in the ASPBAE website*).

These characteristics affirm core principles that are rooted in indigenous people’s consciousness comprising of collective memory which has been handed down intergenerationally. The adaptation of ancestral knowledge responds to the changing contexts in which indigenous peoples find themselves. It is the desire to revive, restore and recreate traditions within a sustainable development framework which has benefit for the collective.

The Right to Education Initiative, in its briefing paper published in 2013, also asserted that, *“learning targets and assessments should be developed in accordance with human rights standards. States must ensure that learning outcomes, targets, and assessments support a broad and comprehensive range of learning competencies, are*

adapted to the local, national, and cultural specificities, are designed and adapted in a way that does not disproportionately affect vulnerable groups, and form part of holistic approach to address the quality of education.”

These broader conceptual assertions of quality education made by CSOs, along with the earlier conceptual framing from the Faure and Delors reports of UNESCO, remain relevant and have been affirmed and strengthened further when the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG4, were agreed to by governments. SDG 4.7 aims to *“By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture’s contribution to sustainable development.”*

The aspirations set out in the other SDGs will not be possible without attaining the kind of quality education set forth in SDG4, and the burden now rests with governments to transform how they ensure and measure education quality that captures all dimensions of lifelong learning.

EDITORIAL
Preparing learners for the future

By Ram Gaire, NCE Nepal

Quality education is the foundation to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). One of the dominant factors for achieving quality education is through qualified teachers and their quality teaching. Education 2030 framework of Action also envisions *‘equitable, inclusive, quality education and lifelong opportunity for all’*. To achieve this goal, quality teaching and quality learning is necessary not only in the formal education system, but also in adult education and adult training.

Learning is not only limited to formal classroom activities, but it equally applies to the everyday lifestyle of learners. Adult education and learning are an integral part of the right to quality education and lifelong

learning, and comprises all forms of education and learning that aim to ensure that all adults participate in their societies and in the world of work. Learning is not limited to time spent by teachers and learners in the learning process, on teaching methods, in assessments, feedback, and incentives, but is more about the rich life experiences of the learners. In this regard, the SDGs aims to increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills for employment, decent jobs, and entrepreneurship.

One of the important measures of quality teaching and learning is



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the use of conceptual skills by both learners and teachers. We now live in a conceptual age, sophisticated with modern technologies and new inventions, thus, broadening our access to learning and going beyond any specific book, person, or content. Learners need to critically think themselves, understand the scenario, and then resolve the problem. Thus, the modern era requires efficient processing of new information and prompt results. In this scenario, the major question emphasizes how we prepare our students for the future. According to the International Baccalaureate Organization (IBO), teaching and learning that is driven by overarching concepts necessitates



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that students transfer their knowledge between personal experiences, learning from other disciplines, and the broader global community.

Quality teaching, on one hand, is an important process and on the other hand, quality learning is equally important. For the students to have quality learning, the first and foremost important consideration is the environment of homes and schools, or any learning center. The environment needs to be healthy, safe, and gender as well as disability sensitive/friendly. There are numerous other physical factors such as infrastructure of the learning centers, location and distance, accessibility that impacts the learning of a child, youth, and adults. Quality learning is a symposium of all of these physical, emotional, socio-cultural, and economic factors.

Although curriculum, the learning environment, and family support contribute to student achievement, the most important and influential factor are qualified teachers. Effective teaching requires mentors who are sensitive to the distinctive backgrounds, motivation, and goals of individual students who possess and can apply specific instructions, subject-matter, knowledge, and skills (Mishkind, 2016). To guide the learner's thinking, teachers must understand how learner's ideas about a subject develops, and the connections between their ideas to the real world.

A highly qualified teacher certainly is a good starting point, but these factors alone are not sufficient for

generating the teaching effectiveness. An effective teacher is able to envision instructional goals for their students and help them engage in active learning through the use of a variety of teaching strategies, by enforcing clear standards, seeking constant feedback, and ensuring opportunities for revising work (Darling-Hammond, 2010).

Therefore, to enhance effective learning, the major factors that impact the efficiency and effectiveness of teachers are enhancement of skills/training, compensation, morale, and security of tenure which contribute to improving the motivation of teachers and improves the overall quality of the education system (UNESCO, 2018). The compensation provided to the teachers influences the attractiveness of the profession and also motivates qualified and bonafide candidate towards the teaching profession. This also enhances the social prestige towards the teaching profession.

In this modern era of technology



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and digitalisation, efficient teachers and efficient learning is linked to technology and innovation. The focus should be on upgrading the technological skills of teachers. This will enhance the efficiency of teachers, which ultimately enhances the efficiency of learners as teaching and learning are both a simultaneous phenomenon. More specially, youth and adult learning methodologies should focus on technology to link knowledge with life skills and livelihood opportunities.

Learners learn more with dedicated and motivated teachers. Enhancing the skills of teachers, as well as retaining high quality teachers, is vital for improving the quality of education. Quality teachers with professional competence can better facilitate learning for which skills/training is necessary. Teachers can be facilitated through pre-service and in-service trainings. These trainings can be effective measures for improving professional competencies. The pre-service and in-service trainings should be conceptually-based trainings. There should be a favourable environment to transfer those skills and knowledge to students/learners.

Quality teaching and learning in education is correlated to one another. The quality of teachers is related to the effective outcomes of students, be it school education, informal and adult education, or adult training. Teachers have an enormous influence in positively or negatively shaping a student's life. It is therefore vital to motivate teachers towards their profession so that they can positively inspire children and communities.

Proper financing a must for quality teaching and learning

By Noopur, NCE India



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Indian education in the last ten years has achieved significantly in terms of access of education to the most marginalised sections of society. With the enactment of the Right to Free and Compulsory Education Act in 2009, education up to elementary level has been made free for all and also compulsory. However, quality still remains a grave matter of concern with several reasons leading to the current situation. There are issues of inadequate budgetary allocations for quality education, weak teachers’ training institutes, enormous lack of teachers, discrimination against certain castes, communities, and gender, poor health status of children, lack of inputs required as per the RTE Act, etc. Under this pretext, NCE India has been undertaking initiatives to advocate with the government, both at the national and state level, through research-based evidences. Few of the interventions made by NCE are shared in this piece.

As mentioned, improving education significantly depends on the budget that is spent on education in general and more specifically, financing the concrete delivery of public education of good quality. NCE India undertook a comprehensive study of the allocations made by the government on child health and education. It was found that only 1% of the total budget was spent under

‘quality of education’ in schools, which is way below the required amount of allocation. NCE organised a national consultation to discuss the issue of inadequate allocation for improving the quality of education in schools. Similarly, the situation is grim when one talks about the amount that is spent on teacher training and education. While quality teacher training is the pre-requisite for quality teaching and learning, the allocations are extremely inadequate and this has led to the privatisation of teachers’ education in India at more than 90%. Allocation of an adequate budget for teacher education has been one of the major demands that NCE India has been advocating for. A Charter of Demand has been submitted to the Ministry of Education. A detail of the study and the recommendations were shared with Members of Parliament for discussion during the finance session. The campaign has been very well supported by teachers and the union in more than 20 states of India.

NC India believes that inclusive education is quintessential for imparting quality education. In India, discrimination on the basis of caste, gender, religion, and ethnicity has played a significant role in defining a teacher’s behavior and teaching methods, which in turn affects the quality of education. NCE India has intervened with teachers and



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has undertaken workshops on how to make education inclusive. Human Rights Clubs have been formed in several schools by teachers who received training on inclusive education, and several campaigns through these clubs have been undertaken in schools covering thousands of children.

One of the newer initiatives of NCE India is its engagement with youth teachers as advocates for better implementation of SDG4. NCE India has formed a platform of youth teachers with whom several workshops on SDG4 have been organised. Teachers have been capacitated to take up advocacy at the state level for institutionalisation of monitoring mechanisms for SDG4. National indicators for the SDGs are very limited, especially related to quality education. Youth forums have been advocating with the government on broadening the scope of quality education

beyond just access to education in its indicators list. Further, teachers are also involved in advocating with the government to form a monitoring nodal agency for SDG4.

Another important intervention made by NCE India towards quality education was the engagement with parliamentarians regarding the recent RTE Act Amendment bill in the parliament. While the new bill has scrapped the ‘no detention’ policy from the Act and has allowed states to decide about the no detention policy for children, it is seen as a major setback towards the quality of education in schools. Removal of the “no detention” policy will lead to a large number of drop-outs and will further negatively impact the way the teaching and learning process is operationalised in schools. NCE India interacted with more than 40 Member of Parliaments (MP) and discussed with them the repercussions in detail.

The issue was raised by more than 10 MPs in Parliament and the house discussed in detail the impact it will have on education of the marginalised.

Advocacy efforts against the mushrooming of low-cost private schools and untrained teachers in low-cost private schools have also been in the advocacy agenda of NCE.

These are a few interventions that NCE India has made in last few months on the issue of quality education. Teachers and NGO partners at the national and state level have implemented campaigns with most sincerity. However, ‘quality teaching and learning’ is a huge spectrum and only concerted efforts can bring about desired change.



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Learning as the key to empowerment: *Shodhinis* show the way!

By Nitin Paranjape, *Abhiviyakti Media for Development, Nashik, Maharashtra, India*

When you learn, teach. When you get, give.
- Maya Angelou



The focus of the action research was on enabling learning amongst girls from the most disadvantaged and vulnerable sections in the rural community.

This article is based on the experiences of Abhiviyakti Media for Development's action research process carried out by rural girls (now known as *Shodhinis*, or "seekers") in five villages of Nashik and Dhule districts in Maharashtra, India. The action research threw light on the struggles faced by girls and young women to access secondary education in rural Maharashtra. Further, it also highlighted the realities of rural girls, the secondary status with which they lived, and how the process of participating in the action research empowered the girls and young women to gain a new identity and become change-makers in their communities. It attempts to present youth-led action research as a constructive strategy to engage with marginalised youth and deepen advocacy for education provisioning in rural areas.

The focus of the action research was on enabling learning amongst girls from the most disadvantaged and vulnerable sections in the rural community. The majority of the girls in the age group of 14-20 had a low education background. They had either dropped out of formal education or were irregular in attending formal schooling. No one paid any attention to them either. Getting married at an early age was normal, which was always at the expense of their formal education. In such circumstances, agreeing to be part of our action research was as much a risk for the girls as a step in the right direction. It was a risk because of parents' control over their participation and the possibility of their ever-

looming marriage. The selected girls were deprived of exposure as most of their lived experiences were of their village. However, the girls were enthusiastic and eager to learn new things, although they didn't have any clarity of research or what it meant. Due to their cultural norms, speaking in front of elders or strangers was difficult. Our participative methods of the action research workshops were greeted with silence, in the initial days at least.

The action research process included understanding what research meant and its field-level practices which included design of tools, collecting census data and survey of village girls, creating community maps, analysis of data, writing reports, generating action in the village, and advocacy of the recommendations. The originally-shy girls led the research process with remarkable understanding and resolve. They were able to complete all the tasks on time which was a big achievement given the constraints and challenges of their participation. The focus was on inculcating learning which was mainly through the workshops on understanding research, its analysis, gender and leadership, and report writing. The workshops were open, friendly, informal, and progress was based on the learning pace of the girls.



The action research included understanding what research meant and its field-level practices which included design of tools, collecting census data, creating community maps, writing reports, and generating action in the village, amongst others.



Hands-on processes such as organising events, accepting mistakes, encouraging their own decision-making, reflecting on their experiences, travelling on their own, and participating in cultural acts have built the self-esteem and self-worth of the Shodhinis.

Two main tenets of learning were on the process of reflection and participation. The girls were encouraged to reflect on their lived-reality – what it meant to be a girl, about their mothers, experiences in the villages, going to school, working on farms, in households, harassment, etc. There was lot of encouragement on participation through games, songs, and group work. The learning atmosphere was informal and flexible. This enabled the girls to open up in whatever manner they could. Nothing was compulsory. This created an atmosphere of trust and helped them to believe in their own resources. There was lot of hand-holding and dialogue about their many experiences and choices. The initial workshop laid the foundation of the learning process which the girls immediately liked and understood as different from formal education. The trust in the individual to open in a relaxed and gradual manner about their daily lives and issues, the focus on listening patiently, facilitators’ interest in their lives, and not relying on formal lectures paved the way for creating a genuine appreciation of the learning process which valued each girl and their unique way of opening up. The emphasis on reducing the power relationship that exists between the facilitators and learners was another aspect of this learning process that built confidence and gave assurances to the girls to be themselves.

The other learning that we observed was the peer-learning process. In workshops, the emphasis on group work and sharing led to formation of a solid bond amongst the girls. They saw and felt their own contribution was valued and respected. It gave them the confidence to see

each other not as mere victims who were pitied and cared-less about, but as people who were worthwhile and important. They began to understand the value and uniqueness of each other. This further developed when they were doing field work of data collection and other actions. Two actions demonstrate their level of accepting their responsibility towards each other and the research. When the boys of the village, and even some village elders, ridiculed their data collection, they did not back out. Instead, they took the initiative to explain the importance of their work and what it would lead to – better education opportunities for girls in the villages.

The second action was in the village libraries, which were started by Abhivyakti as a response to the girls’ demand for access to books. The library became their space for meeting regularly, sharing their anxieties, aspirations, and hardships, planning activities, and organising events. Today, they confidently traverse different challenges, including speaking to their parents, local leaders, and village council officials about their problems and issues, including delaying their early marriage prospects. The girls have shown, in the little span of two years, that they are keen, experiential learners who learn individually and collectively in their own manner without any formal testing. Hands-on processes such as organising events, accepting mistakes, encouraging their own decision-making, reflecting on their experiences, travelling on their own, and participating in cultural acts have built their self-esteem and self-worth.

The quote that ‘*when you learn, you teach*’ can be seen when they take active interest in narrating their own experiences to the new girls from other villagers. The impact on their cognitive and social skills is immense. The cognitive liberty the girls feel is amply demonstrated in their thinking process about their future - knowing that this reality might not materialise given their domestic pressures of pending marriage. Yet, they know they have the mental abilities to think of their choices, aspirations, and the kind of life they want to live. Their active energy is pushing the boundaries of girls’ lives in a few rural villages where we work.

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