

Perspective Building about transition towards Quality Mandates from Equity and Access with reference to the Current Secondary Education System: Policies and Practices in India

(A Qualitative analysis based paper)

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Abstract:

Aim / purpose of writing the paper: This paper is an introduction and perspective building note about the significance of transition towards Quality Mandates from Equity and Access. It has been written with reference to the Current secondary and senior secondary education in India so as to bring it in light in the eyes of policy makers and highlight its role in the life of the general population of students.

The school final year examination is the linkage of a student's school life and future. Hence making the educators, policy personnel and researchers aware about the evolution history and development of Secondary education in India is the motto of the research paper.

A lot of focus has been given to the elementary and primary education system in India. The focus has always been enrolling children, giving them access to school and increasing equity or decreasing gender based disparity, less attention has been given to what after attaining that elementary education? What about the quality component discussed in the planning commission documents?

The main agenda of this paper is to promote the thoughts and action in the direction of improvising the education system of teaching learning and assessment in India which will complete the circle of access, equity and quality. This paper highlights how access and equity agendas have been achieved but despite achieving that, there is a gap.

The gap is visible by the example of ASER result trends post 2009. The students who will have a weak foundation will grow up and go to the secondary classes. Finally when they have to pass through the grade XII exams they will show poor results. Lack of policies for secondary education and overall quality of education is a concern.

Methodology: A thorough Desk research was conducted utilizing books and internet to review the existing literature and policy documents available. Some study was also done to find out what are the developmental policies meant for primary, upper primary, elementary, secondary and senior secondary education. What are the key areas touched upon in almost all of these policies and which are the areas that have not been much pondered upon.

Structure, content and flow of the paper: The paper begins informing about the school final systems in the country to build in theme of the work. Further it illustrates about all the incidences about the historical development of the current system of secondary education in India. This proceeds with the illustration of the major commission reports and policies drafted by the government planning commissions which have shaped the present secondary education system. The case study of CBSE¹ has been showcased as well as quality is deteriorating after 2009 is shown by ASER data interpretation. Recent advancements as NAS Grade Xth and improvement in ASER results have been indicated as well. Recommendations have been presented on an individual basis.

¹**Disclaimer:** This paper is a pure theoretical research work and it does not intend by any means or ways to promote any particular board. The sole purpose of mentioning the initiatives taken by CBSE is to raise awareness and motivation to other boards in India to begin with similar best practices.

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Introduction

A lot of focus has been given to the elementary and primary education system in India. The policies like RTE, No detention, mid - day meals are a true example. The focus has always been enrolling children, giving them access to school and increasing equity or decreasing gender based disparity, less attention has been given to what after attaining that elementary education? What about the quality component discussed in the planning commission documents?

The Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (R.M.S.A. - 2009) is a central government sponsored scheme for the development of secondary education in public schools throughout India. A lot has been achieved in terms of infrastructure, teacher recruitment and enrollment. But what more needs to be done in terms of enhancing the quality and controlling the drop outs by providing more avenues has been discussed in this paper.

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Meanings of some of the key terminologies that will keep showing up in the paper are:

- a) Greater Access requires an enhancement in the education institutional capacity to provide opportunities to all who deserve and desire higher education.
- b) Equity involves fair access to the poor and the socially disadvantaged groups.
- c) Quality and Excellence involve provision of education by accepted standard so that students receive available knowledge of the highest standard and help them to enhance their human resource capabilities.
- d) Relevance involves promotion of education so as to develop human resources keeping pace with the changing economic, social and cultural development of the country; and
- e) Value Based Education involves inculcating basic moral values among the youth."

In India, the school final equivalent grade is referred to as the "twelfth standard", or "plus 2" or in some regions "second year junior college" (SYJC) or Pre University Course (PUC). Most students who pass out of class 12 are 17-18 years old. The CBSE and ICSE boards conduct twelfth standard courses nationally, while state boards operate at the state-level.

"The National Policy on Higher Education (1986) translated the vision of Radha krishnan Commission and Kothari Commission in five main goals for higher education, as enumerated below; which include Greater Access, Equal Access (or Equity), Quality and Excellence, Relevance and Value Based Education.

The historical perspective and background to the Indian education system: Education has been positioned on a higher pedestal in India. Secondary education in India has always been a focal point of national planning. The background on Indian education as well as the historical perspective will highlight the same as we move towards the British colonial era. The Indian education system historically moves from Vedic period towards the British colonial era. The British period begins from Lord Macaulay era typically underpinning the damage done during the period with a drastic change in the education system. Further the Woods Dispatch began the era of setting up high schools. The Hunter Commission is renowned for recommending vocational education. The University Commission took secondary education for a while under its supervision; A Government Resolution on education policy was issued, enunciating that the standard of existing institutions should be raised in preference to increasing their number, then Sadler Commission for the first time recommended matriculation examination. It was decided to constitute a "Central Advisory Board of Education". The Hartog Committee recommended diversion of more boys to industrial and commercial careers at the end of the middle stage, the Sapru Committee enquired into the causes of unemployment in U.P. and came to the conclusion that the system of education commonly prevalent prepared pupils only for examinations and degrees and not for any vocation. The Abbott Woods Report suggested a complete hierarchy of vocational institutions parallel with the hierarchy of institutions imparting general education. As a result of their recommendations "a new type of technical institution called the Polytechnic has come into existence".

The Zakir Husain Committee suggested scheme of vocational education which is popularly known as the "Wardha Scheme" under the president ship of Mahatma Gandhi and the resolutions were adopted: free and compulsory education to be provided for seven years on a nation-wide scale; throughout this period should centre around some form of skill based training to be given. The Sargent Report, on Educational Development, the visualizing a system of universal, compulsory and free education for all boys and girls between the ages of 6 and 14, recommended that the High School course should be of two main types academic and technical. The University Education Commission introduced of a three-year degree course for the first university degree, The Mudaliar Commission offered a number of suggestions to adjust secondary education with the new goals and needs of independent India for democratic citizenship. The Kothari Commission suggested an urgent reform needed in education is to relate it to the life, needs and aspirations of the people New Higher Secondary course beginning in Class XI and XII to provide specialized subjects; and transfer of the Pre-University Course from the Universities and affiliated colleges to secondary education. As per the NPE 1986 Secondary education begins to expose students to the differentiated roles of science, the humanities, social sciences, vocational streams and computer skills. The Government of India has set up a Planning Commission to examine the entire education system including secondary. Equity, access and quality overall were areas of concern along with teacher education, quality recruitment, accountability, examination reforms, assessment capabilities etc all through the 12 Planning Commission reports. All the policies and planning commissions in India have given due weight age and prime importance to the secondary and senior secondary examination as it is evident by the information provided in the previous section of the chapter. In a developing country like India where there is overwhelming masses of students the government is duly cautious about the number of people getting educated and filtered in due course of education before moving to a further step ahead in terms of higher education. It is worth noting what CBSE has done as recent initiatives to fulfill the goals of access, equity, quality, relevance and value education.

The Central Board of Secondary Education as a case study and example of Best Practices initiative in the country:

2. *Details about all the policies and the Planning commission focus areas have been provided as annexure for those who might be interested to know further in details.*

About the CBSE board

CBSE Council of boards of school education in India recognizes 42 boards in India most of which function at state levels. CBSE Central Board of Secondary education is one of the largest board of its kind that takes care of whole nation in terms of providing education up to plus two level. It is Board of Education for public and private schools, under the Union Government of India. CBSE affiliates all Kendriya Vidyalayas, all Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalayas, private schools, and most of the schools approved by central government of India.

About All India Senior Secondary School Certificate Examination: Grade XII

The board conducts final examinations every spring for All India Senior School Certificate Examination (AISSCE) for Class 10 and 12. The board also conducts and administers various competitive and entrance purpose examinations as CTET, AIPMT, AIEEE etc. There are more than 14,000 schools operating under the huge umbrella of this board. There are schools under CBSE even outside India. Every year more than 10 Lakh students appear for the AISSE Grade XII examination. The board does multi competency mapping in areas of Language, Arts, Science and Commerce in the AISSE Grade XII examination. Since the bulk of students are huge the question papers are constructed in three different sets.

Following the global norms India also follows the pattern of 10 + 2 examination. The student after passing grade tenth or secondary level does a particular stream selection and subject selection in accordance with his or her abilities and interest. The eleventh standard examinations are internal or school based examinations. This is the higher secondary level. It is the first year of a student's life when he or she studies the subjects selected in order to specialize in one particular academic and subject area.

After Higher secondary level comes the school final year examination. This is one of the most important phase in a student's life. It is a high stake examination deciding his or her future by doing competency mapping at the school final level. It is a major deciding factor for any student whether he or she is ready for higher education in the same stream or not. In fact this level of examination is the preliminary stage of subject and career selection for future.

Many students aspire to get good scores in order to prove their mettle in their area of specialization and try to get selected in good colleges and later on universities in desirable fields of specialization. Every year the number of students increases nationwide and the number of seats in premium colleges are limited. With high cut off demands many students have to remain satisfied in private colleges.

The minimum percentage acquired in grade XII examination also opens doors for those students who aspire to clear competitive examinations for streams as medical or engineering. Hence we can conclude that whether the student chooses a normal graduation course or a competitive examination he or she needs to clear the school final examination with decent marks. This examination is a linkage between their school life and beginning of professional life and courses.

All the policies and planning commissions in India have given due weightage and prime importance to the secondary and senior secondary examination as it is evident by the information provided in the previous section of the paper. In a developing country like India where there is over whelming masses of students the government is duly cautious about the number of people getting educated and filtered in due course of education before moving to a further step ahead in terms of higher education.

CBSE has more than 14,000 schools in the country which gives access to students across the nation and even outside the country, it has two kinds of curriculum for national and international students which is CBSE and CBSE- I. The board also has its accreditation wing that takes care of the school infrastructure and quality of facilities and services. CBSE schools are open for both male and female students with equal opportunities for all catering to the equity concern, regarding the quality in education and providing acceptable standard education to the students in India, CBSE had created the first centre for assessment evaluation and research in the country under the MHRD with a public private partnership with Pearson foundation UK. This centre worked consistently towards raising the standard of teaching learning process, capacity building of teachers and school leadership, conducting research on high stakes examination as AISSCE and informing the system about the performance of students as well as the examination tools, recommending best practices for enhancing quality of these assessments, publishing simple and complex literature on enhancing education quality in India and methods for trying to bring the students up to the level of international benchmarks.

It is worth noting that CBSE has taken initiative to conduct a quality check on its items in the board question papers. This is an appreciable initiative. The aim is to make this examination a more reliable and valid tool by quality check and recommendation for improvement. Developing recommendations for feeding back results obtained from examinations to schools in such a way that they can be used by teachers and schools to improve learning. It is also worth noting that CBSE also has a separate course on life skills and value education. The board had also begun with problem solving assessments and open text book assessment as innovative practice in the area of bringing relevance in student's life and connect real life with education. This has been discussed in detail to appreciate the step taken for attempting to follow the goals mentioned in the policy documents and revamping the system in accordance with international best practices to raise the quality of CBSE education system at large.

Expected outcome: This gives an insight about the historical progression and constant policy interventions that have led to the current developed state of secondary education in India. The author's views are in consonance with the policies and prescribed mandates. The case study of CBSE has been added to set an example for motivation for the rest of the secondary education system in country.

✍ Awareness is anticipated to reconsider the fact that secondary and senior secondary education is the sustainability building block in every student's life. It is not only the indicators³ pertaining to Access, Equity and Quality of Infrastructure or Pupil Teachers ratio but it must also encompass the students learning quality enhancement.

✍ Inadensely populated country like India where just as the enrollments grow⁴ at the same time drop outs grow⁵; there must be a provision of courses at the entry level of secondary level to get skill based proficiency as well. Rigorous academic program for Secondary level might

not be the pleasure and cup of tea for thousands of children who are already under the stress to work and start making their own source of livelihood.

✎ Vocational and Industrial learning must be a choice for every student which he could pursue whenever there is an disorientation from the main stream education due to personal or academic reasons.

✎ Apart from focusing on ICT and Digital based learning the shift must also be towards making students more oriented towards reading, self-learning, problem solving and thinking on the higher order of the cognitive levels.

✎ Focus must also be laid on simple facts as the levels of learning and learning outcomes which are measured and highlighted by large scale assessments as ASER, NAS⁶ etc. The end of elementary education is the last opportunity for any student to enhance the learning levels especially in terms of reading and doing basic arithmetic. The ASER data mentions specifically about a particular percentage of population that doesn't understand basics of reading and arithmetic which could be the plausible reason to drop out and discontinue education at all. Evidence with ASER Data to understand the outcome of No Detention policy. We need to understand some data collected and tabulated for the six years (2009 to 2014) clearly shows that there is a large number of students who are still struggling even with the basics of reading texts. However, there seems to be a drop in the proportion of Beginner level children in the years 2016 and 2018. Everyone will agree that the starting points of reading a language would be the skill of recognizing alphabets, and then ability of combining letters to make sounds/words, and then proceed to read sentences or sets of sentences. Similarly the starting points of arithmetic would be the skill of recognizing numbers, and then gaining ability of manipulating them by addition so as to reach the level of subtraction with borrowing, and then proceed to learning of multiplication and tables to solve division problems. The word "beginner" here refers to a level where children have not even acquired the ability to recognize or read alphabets and numbers.

The table shows the break-up of students all over India in the age bracket of 06 to 14 years and studying in classes 1 to 8. The noticeable points are that the lower the class the more percentage of students who are at the 'beginner' level. Also every year the percentage shows an increasing trend barring the recent alternate years as exception.

3. <http://niti.gov.in/content/secondary> - Mentions about the indicators pertaining majorly to Access, Equity and Quality of Infrastructure or Pupil Teachers ratio
4. In the Year 2014-15 The Gross Enrolment Rate of overall Secondary and Senior Secondary Levels is 66% Girls and 65% Boys. In Higher Education it is 25% Boys and 23% Girls.
5. In the Year 2013-14 18% Girls and Boys at Secondary Level and 2% Girls and Boys at Senior Secondary Levels were seen to be drop outs. Also in the Year 2014-15 the Gender Ratio Index (Females per 100 Males) is 90% on an average for Secondary and Senior Secondary Levels and it further drops to 85% in Higher Education. https://mhrd.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/statistics/ESG2016_0.pdf
6. <http://rmsaindia.gov.in/en/11-rmsa/news-updates/32-national-achievement-survey-nas-class-x-first-ever-nas-class-x-underway.html>
<http://www.ncert.nic.in/programmes/NAS/DRCX.html>

NAS has been initiated for Grade Xth (2014-15) as Cycle 1 and in (2018) as Cycle 2. The State and District Reports are available for within State comparisons and information.

Percentage of Children who cannot read even Letters in the ASER Reading Assessment										
Class	2018	2017	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010	2009
1	42.70%	ASER did not happen at Pan-India Level	46.10%	ASER Break Year	48.6%	47.20%	43.30%	38.36%	33.38%	31.24%
2	21.30%		23.50%		25.7%	23.10%	20.30%	16.55%	11.71%	11.20%
3	12.10%		13.60%		14.9%	12.70%	11.90%	8.47%	5.72%	5.31%
4	7.60%		8.50%		8.4%	8%	7%	4.67%	2.95%	2.63%
5	5.90%		6%		5.7%	5%	4.60%	3.45%	2.04%	1.82%
6	3.80%		4%		3.5%	3%	2.90%	1.70%	1.21%	1.04%
7	2.50%		2.80%		2.6%	2%	1.70%	1.22%	0.94%	0.85%
8	1.90%		2%		1.8%	1.40%	1.50%	1.02%	0.70%	0.57%
All India	13.20%		14.50%		15.1%	14.10%	12.80%	10.35%	8%	7.58%

Table 1 Percentage of students who do not know reading (All over India)

Source: ASER Centre Data (2009 to 2018)

Percentage of Children who cannot read even Recognize Single digit number in the ASER Reading Assessment										
Class	2018	2017	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010	2009
1	35.70%	ASER did not happen at Pan-India Level	39.90%	ASER Break Year	42.40%	41.60%	39.60%	36.51%	33.51%	30.73%
2	14.90%		17.70%		19.50%	17.70%	16.30%	15.02%	11.73%	11.31%
3	7.60%		9.30%		10%	8.60%	8.70%	7.54%	5.43%	5.43%
4	4.40%		5.80%		5.30%	5.20%	4.90%	3.83%	2.76%	2.80%
5	3.30%		4%		3.90%	3.30%	3.20%	2.87%	2%	1.94%
6	2.20%		2.50%		2.30%	2%	2%	1.62%	1.16%	1.24%
7	1.60%		2%		1.70%	1.40%	1.30%	1.25%	0.94%	0.88%
8	1.10%		1.20%		1.30%	1%	1.30%	1.07%	0.71%	0.61%
All India	9.60%		11.30%		11.80%	11.20%	10.70%	9.54%	7.92%	7.59%

Table 2 Percentage of students who do not know even recognizing numbers (All over India) Source: ASER Centre Data (2009 to 2013)

The purpose of ASER is not doing a high stakes assessment like JEE or Medical entrance, neither it is grade level assessment like Summative assessment for grade 8 based on age, grade and syllabus, it is not promoting students to higher level classes nor it is entrance examination, the results are not used for decision making. The learning levels that ASER measures are fundamental learning objectives that comes before acquiring other competencies of learning viz. remembering, understanding, applying, analyzing, evaluating and creating, as prescribed by a popular taxonomy of learning, i.e. Bloom's taxonomy. It is just an assessment done on large scale to inform policies and practices about the fact that despite multiple interventions, efforts, policies, practices and investment there are still significant numbers of children who do not know how to read and write

ASER is process of understanding learning levels of children utilizing simple tools, criterion referenced test and the results should be used to inform policies. The purpose of ASER is not grade level testing and it does not follow norms or standards referenced assessment it is rather criterion referenced assessment which informs how many people know and how many don't know.

The RTE or Right to Education act 2009 has a Policy of no detention and of passing every school student till grade viii. The no-detention Policy, under the Right to Education (RTE) Act, states that no student can be held back or expelled from school, irrespective of academic performance, till Class-8. This policy undoubtedly promotes the Right to elementary education to all but it also has received a lot of criticism due to the poor levels of students when they reach class IX and are

still casual in their approach towards education. It reduces the pressure on the student to study and also it makes the teacher less accountable. One can go through the tables and figure out how the trend to not know basic reading and arithmetic is increasing on a yearly basis since 2009 barring a few exceptions.

India is a developing country and if we look at the human development index we find it still on a lower pedestal in all aspects. In another sign that India has much catching up to do, the Human Development Report 2017 released by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), ranked the country at a low 130 among 189 countries on its human development index (HDI) a composite measure of life expectancy, access to education and income levels. When the students of rural India, (who are facing day to day livelihood issues, health transport and sanitation problems, socio economic concerns, pressure to do household chores or earn in seasonal jobs) do not know what to do after opening a text book, how to read out what has been written in those pages, how we expect them to learn things out of the book. Will it be reasonable to assess them on different learning objectives? Certainly not.

✍ Alot of policies and plans have evolved in due course of years which are kept on back burners after a new policy comes in and takes the steering in hand. But it could be worth revisiting all the policies again to pin point those which might benefit the students in longer run.

✍ 21st Century skills⁷ are a very common terminology these days. Students in India also must be given the opportunity to prove their mettle by understanding and developing these skills to stand at par with others in the global village. If we see from the lens of the general and adult education system, soft skills are focused on the development of the whole person, community and citizen. On the other hand, the vocational education system tends to be concentrated on labor-market readiness. (Youthreach soft skill framework⁸). In the UNICEF, UNESCO and WHO framework, Self-awareness, self-esteem, and self-confidence are essential tools for understanding one's strengths and weaknesses⁹. Consequently, the individual can discern available opportunities and prepare to face possible threats, which leads to the development of social awareness of the concerns of an individual's family and society. Afterward, it is likely to identify problems that occur within both the family and society. With life skills, an individual can explore alternatives, weigh the pros and cons and make reasonable decisions in solving each problem or issue as it occurs. It also involves being able to establish productive interpersonal relationships with others. UNICEF, UNESCO and WHO list the core life skill in 1999¹⁰

✍ Psychometric assessment of student's soft skills with career counseling must be a mandate in every secondary student's life. Most of the students and their parents are unaware of success factors as ability, interest and personality. It must be the responsibility of the system to make people aware of their own self so that they opt for the right choice in streams and further career.

✍ The students in secondary stage are in the age of tension and turmoil of adolescence. Regular support from a psychologist or school counselor must be their right in all schools.

✍ Teacher recruitment, competency mapping and training is a must especially for the senior class managers. These teachers must also be groomed to read and develop better teaching skills and materials.

✍ Assessment must be a major area of focus for this group of students. Both formative and summative assessments must be informative and descriptive for the student where is located on the developmental continuum and how can he move further along the line.

✍ There should be a monitoring and evaluation system in place to track the progress of outcomes achieved with the due implementation of any policy as RMSA. More policies are a dire requirement of the situation where in the student is any how studying till grade 8th with the benefits of No Detention policy in elementary education but resulting in either drop outs or poor performing students after grade 8th.

✍ Last but not the least, community and parents must be involved in the process of educating their children as urban areas are much aware of the worth of this threshold period in the student's life but rural areas in India still do not have this flare and knowledge, hence awareness mechanisms must be created.

7. www.21stcenturyskills.org and www.atc21s.org

8. Gordon, M. (n.d.). Youthreach Soft Skills Framework. Retrieved February 12, 2019, from <http://www.youthreach.ie/wp-content/uploads/YOUTHREACH-SOFT-SKILLS-FRAMEWORK-DOCUMENT-Dec-11.pdf>

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✍ <http://www.asccc.org/resources/links>

✍ <http://www.asercentre.org>

✍ http://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1019&context=psy_facpub

✍ http://www.du.ac.in/fileadmin/DU/DUCorner/school_education.pdf

✍ <http://education.qld.gov.au/curriculum/framework/p-12/>

✍ https://mhrd.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/statistics/ESG2016_0.pdf

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