



Fee Waiver Scheme and the Challenges of 21st Century Society

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Abstract: This paper tries to introduce about Fee Waiver Scheme its objective and criteria and challenges of 21st century society. Our era is often said to be a time of rapid technological change, but the social changes occurring in this country and elsewhere are equally dramatic. Society often has sufficient experience and knowledge to make better-informed decisions, but it is not always prepared to use this wisdom from the social and behavioural sciences. As we approach the first quarter of the 21st century, schools, universities, industries and society at large are asking fundamental questions about education. We are in a paradigm-shifting age where technological, demographic, social, environmental, economic and political shifts are forcing us to redefine what our educational structure should be. So, in the pursuit of uplifting socially and economically backward sections, the Government of India has come up with various plans. To pull the marginalized sections of the society from the current predicament, the Government of India has announced: Education loan subsidies, Fee Waivers, Scholarship Schemes. To avail the benefits under the Government schemes, students will have to meet the eligibility criterion. The Government of India has introduced some changes as an effort to increase the number of beneficiaries under the scheme and the eligibility criteria. Due to several historical reasons, the children belonging to SC and ST category find it difficult to reach to the corridors of the institutions of higher and technical education. It shall be the endeavour of the Government to see that no eligible SC/ST students are deprived of higher education for want of resources. The beneficiaries under the scheme shall be entitled to receive full waiver of the fees supposed to have been paid by them in the institutions where they have sought admissions.

Keywords: *Fee Waiver Scheme, Objectives and criteria, and Challenges of modern society.*

I. Introduction

Education is the backbone of every country. A country will not be able to survive in the competitive world, if its education system is not capable of contributing for its development. It is generally hyped that India has a strong educational structure with premier education. The different yardsticks such as new courses, changing curriculum, dynamic methodologies and teacher training facilitate in delivery of quality content. E-learning, student-friendly learning, increased adoption of extra and co-curricular activities, etc. in India. Together with the changes, new expectations have knocked on our doors. The first aim of our education was all round development of a child, Father of nation, Mahatma Gandhi once said “By education I mean all round drawing out of the best in child and body, mind and spirit”. It is quite apparent that all round development is like a day

dream, because the current system is not developing all round ability in the child. Education in every society is concerned with teaching children how to live in the society, whether this is matter of bare survival or a matter of how to have a good life. This study intends to understand about the Fee Waiver Scheme and evaluate the challenges of 21st century society and to provide solutions.

Objectives of the study

- a. To understand the Fee Waiver Scheme and its objectives and criteria.
- b. To evaluate the challenges of modern society.
- c. To ascertain the possible solutions to resolve the challenges.
- d. To provide suggestions for improvement.

Methodology of the study

The study output is the outcome of an overview of studies conducted on the Fee Waiver Scheme and the Challenges of modern society. This is basically a qualitative study and follows secondary data for its analysis.

Scope of the study

The study exhibits the new structure introduce in the Education Sector i.e. the Fee Waiver Scheme, and also it attempts to narrate the challenges of 21st century society. The study is concluded with recommendations for effective implementation considering the democratic nature of modern society.

Limitations of the study

Though the study has a vivid outlook on the Fee Waiver Scheme, challenges of modern society and provide feasible solutions, they should be taken in to consideration keeping in mind the following:

- a. The study covers a wider view of the Fee Waiver Scheme and its objectives and criteria.
- b. The analysis is done based on secondary data available on various sources. It lacks primary data.
- c. The solutions are derived largely based on the public view and conclusion of other researchers.

II. Fee Waiver Scheme and its objective and criteria

As the world of today is one of “VUCA” (volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity). Society would appear unrecognisable (at least technically) to our great-grandparents. And the intuitive response is that the education we are providing for young people should, therefore change radically. So, to cope up with the challenges and to uplift the socially and economically backward sections of society the Government of India has come up with various plans which include Fee Waiver Scheme, which was first introduced in the 2016-17 academic year, does not take caste into consideration – any student is eligible for it if the annual income of his/her parents is less than Rs 2 lakh per annum. In Assam 2.36 lakhs of students were benefited last year from this scheme. The Institute of Company Secretaries of India (ICSI) announces 100% fee waiver for North Eastern students. This scheme includes waiving the fee for all the students registering for the Foundation and Executive Programme stages in CS courses from North East States (Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura, and Sikkim) till March 31, 2018. All students belonging to North Eastern States

who have passed the 10 + 2 Examinations and Bachelor's Degree Examinations/ CPT of ICAI/ Foundation pass of ICAI COST irrespective of the percentage of marks shall be eligible for fee waiver while registering for Foundation Programme and Executive Programme Stage respectively. All such students can take direct admission in Foundation and Executive stage as the case may be without paying any fees. To implement the scheme effectively, the release maintained, it is significant that the top dignitaries of the State join hands with the institute for the social cause. With admission to higher secondary courses having already started and undergraduate and postgraduate admissions around the corner, the Assam government is estimating a 30 to 35 per cent rise in the number of students who will reap the benefits of its admission fee waiver scheme meant for students from a poor financial background.

In the year 2018-19 academic year, when only students whose parents earned less than 1 lakh were eligible, a total of 2.36 lakh students in the state had been admitted free of cost. But now that ceiling has been doubled – from Rs 1 lakh to Rs 2 lakh – from this academic session, officials in the state higher education department say that there are expecting a significant growth in the number of beneficiaries this year.

This Scheme is framed in order to provide free access to every SC/ST student, to the institutions of higher learning. It shall be the endeavour of the Government to see that no eligible SC/ST students are deprived of higher education for want of resources. The scheme will be applicable to the students seeking admission into first year of higher secondary or B.A., B.SC., B.Com. as well as M.A., M.Sc. and M.Com. courses. However, students taking admission in any of the self-financed courses are not eligible for the scheme.

In case of higher secondary and the bachelor degree courses, those students whose fees had been waived off earlier are also eligible to avail the scheme for admission to their second or third year. Similarly, for the notified master degree courses, the final year students whose fees were waived off last year are eligible to apply it again.

All provincialized and government colleges of the state, as well as Gauhati University, Dibrugarh University, Bodoland University, Cotton University, Kumar Bhaskar Varma Sanskrit and Ancient Studies University and Women's University Jorhat, have been brought under the ambit of the scheme, said an office memorandum issued by the state higher education department. However, it clarified that the scheme will not cover private colleges, private universities and central universities situated in Assam.

Though students whose parental income is less than 2 lakh per annum are eligible to avail the scheme, the office memorandum stated that a student will not be eligible for this scheme if either the parents (mother or father) works in the state government, central government, state or central government undertakings or has a semi-governmental role.

III. Challenges of modern society - An Analysis

India has been multi-cultural, multi-religious, and multi-linguistic society. Every state has a different and distinct identity. Dealing with various aspirations of such people in a democratic country is indeed a challenge of modern society. The various issues and challenges are outlined here:

Lack of quality education

In the top 100 universities list by 'Times Higher Education World Reputation Rankings', none of the Indian universities could be found in the list. In the 2017 rankings by the HRD ministry, only 2,995 institutions (6%) participated from around 51,000 strong higher institutions in India. There is severe regional imbalance too. In the overall rankings, of the 100 best institutions, 67 are from just 8 states. Among the best 100 universities, 40 are in 3 states. Among the best 100 colleges, 77 are from just 5 states (Nanda, Prashant K. 2017).

Corruption in education

Corruption in Indian education system has been eroding the quality of education. It is one of the major contributors to domestic black money. Payment to Management at dark rooms and seeking admission is increasing. 'Get full salary in the account, pay back part to Management by blank signed cheques' is also a practice in some private institutions.

No proper value education

Value education is not offered in the schools and colleges. If offered, religion and hatred are spread in the name of value education. Many of the doctors, lawyers, CAs, politicians and Govt servants who are supposed to be the saviours of the society, suffer from serious charges of corruption. Old-age homes are increasing. Suicides are increasing. The meaning of love is eventually changing. The education led technology, inventions and innovations were misused.

Poor Women's education

Women have a much lower literacy rate than men. Conservative attitudes prevent girls from attending schools. Despite Govt's attempts to provide incentives viz. midday meals, free books and uniforms, girls' attendance is poor. Though the minimum age of marriage is 18, many girls get married much earlier. Therefore, at the secondary level, female drop-out rate is high.

Lack of facilities

As per 2016 Annual Survey of Education Report, 3.5% of schools in India had no toilet facility while only 68.7% schools had useable toilet facility. 75.5% of the schools surveyed had library in 2016, a decrease from 78.1% in 2014. Percentage of schools with separate girls' toilet has increased from 32.9% in 2010 to 61.9% in 2016. 74.1% schools had drinking water facility and 64.5% of the schools had playground.

Curriculum issues

There are many different curriculum systems that confuse the students who wish to achieve the same objective such as Engineering, Medical and Business Administration. At the higher education level, there is no uniformity in the syllabuses taught for the same programme. Syllabus revision is done quite often without considering the contemporary requirements of industries. There is lack of diversity in the subjects one can take in colleges. Flexibility to cross over streams is also lacking.

Public school workforce absenteeism

Teacher absenteeism in India is exorbitant. World Bank estimates show the cost in salaries paid to absent teachers is US \$2 billion every year. In a study of Kremer, etc, they found 25% of private sector teachers and 40% of public sector medical workers were absent during the survey. Absence rates among them ranged from 14.6% in Maharashtra to 41.9% in Jharkhand.

Wrong societal outlook

For Governments, more scoring is success. English is becoming the measure of intellect. Hence, parents of today take least interest in vernacular medium of education. Due to the perceived notion of inferior quality, Govt. schools are becoming the last choice for many. Education-seeking migration has become a matter of pride for many families. Most of the schools and college students spend majority of their learning time in preparing for competitive exams. Coaching classes too flourish due to this unwarranted competition, leading to a class-divide.

IV. Solutions: A Way Forward

Give more significance to primary and secondary education

Primary education is the backbone of education system of our country. If the teachers at primary and secondary level are unskilled, not qualified and less-paid, all further studies will be in stake. Hence, more attention is required on primary education rather than higher education. Presently, higher education institutions compete to get quality students. The weaker and less reputed colleges end-up with poor students. This affects consecutively the employability of youth, and creates a class-divide.

Give importance to technology in education

India has to embrace computer and high speed internet technology. Our educational delivery mechanisms should take the wealth of human capital to the masses. The models of brick and mortar schools, colleges and universities will have to be integrated and interlinked with ICT. The Governments should invest more in technological infrastructure that will ease the knowledge accessibility.

Encourage innovation and creativity

The system should reward those who deserves highest academic honour. The crammers should not be rewarded. Our testing and marking systems need to be built to recognize original contributions, creativity, problem solving and innovation. Ranks should be awarded accordingly.

Personalize the education

Indian education system is built on the assumption that if a thing is good for one child, it is good for all. But, one massive education system cannot be suitable to all. Some people are visual learners, others are auditory learners. Some kids learn faster, some do slow. The syllabus should be designed in such a way that every learner's latent ability is identified and motivated. Hasty and fast learning should be discouraged.

Train the trainers continuously

A teacher is an entrepreneur and creator. The performance of a teacher should not be restricted to classroom. It needs to be opened up for the world to see with internet. There has to be leaders in teaching positions, not salaried people holding their mantle. Hence, regular training is a necessity.

Change the aptitude to teach

Teaching jobs are widely regarded as safe, well-paid and risk-free jobs. Most of the teachers do not want to change. As they become experienced, they get septic, and not even think of the nature and need of the students. Understanding the present generation is the necessity. Guidelines should be made in this direction.

Provide quality education with character

Education without character is abortion and will create divisions in the society. A country that lowers the quality of education and allows score competition in exams will collapse. The mystified doctors, less skilled engineers, cowardly judges, money minded accountants, greedy businessmen, inhuman preachers and ignorant teachers cannot serve for the economy's growth. They will soon and surely doom the society with their unethical practices which no one can resist.

Deal with corruption strictly

Corrupt politicians supported by corrupt followers and corrupt police force are increasing. Frauds, burglaries, rape and sexual harassment cases are rising. Govt. recruited bank manager's work against the Govt's development policies. Printing of fake notes, introduction of plastic rice, egg, cabbage, etc. are becoming uncontrollable. Adulteration is everywhere and in everything. Fruits become ripe with chemicals. Even the small kids' products are adulterated. The Govt. should deal with such unscrupulous people severely.

Make education affordable to all

If we have to see our country as a knowledge economy, we need to offer quality education to all and not rationing of education. Admissions in educational institutions should not be on caste or religion basis. Financial support to students based on caste and religion should be immediately stopped. It is seen that people earning good amount of income enjoy Govt. incentives and they become inactive comparatively due to the caste/religion benefits. Baseless reservations create a societal division, and lead to brain drain. Reservation will vanish if the scarcity in education is avoided.

Nationalise education sector

Education in India has been regulated on a not-for profit basis. This encourages corrupt people, money launderers and politicians to use education institutions to hide their black money, and earn heavy income from education business through clever structuring. Govt. cannot regulate them. Hence, it is high time to nationalize private educational institutions in tune with federal structure and compensate the investors sufficiently. Education up to tenth should be made free of cost.

V. Conclusion

Education is a country's lifeline, and it has to be given more importance than defence in any country. There is a dire need for revolutionary changes in the India's education system, not only in the syllabus and pedagogy, but also in the attitude towards the test and marks system. India can use its vast human resources productively if the learning system is made effective. As a child is born, it is painted with religion and caste by the cowardly society and is bombarded with all biased thoughts and unruly philosophies. Every child has unlimited potential and it should be allowed to be free from our ill thoughts. It should be taught to reduce the inequality. We can do a lot. But we are not working with required seriousness.

If the Govt. schools are failing, it is primarily because of non-availability or absence of teachers, no headmasters for governance, lack of initiatives by teachers, lack of guidance to students, lack of infrastructure, increased involvement of politicians and more bureaucratic control. Indifferent parents including Govt. school teachers, MPs, MLAs and ministers send their wards to private schools. It is shameful situation. The government will have to work on it seriously.

The system of education should be learner-centric rather than mark-centric. Children must be allowed to choose subjects according to their interests. They should be encouraged to research on their own from library books and the Internet and share them in the class. This will help them to develop self-confidence, self-dependence and openness to criticism.

Employability is a serious problem in today's modern society. Somehow people get degrees and become unemployed or underemployed. The quality of education is directly linked to the resources available and it is important for the Govt. to improve resource allocation to bring about qualitative changes in the field of education.

Though the number of students and programmes increases every year, India has failed to produce world class universities both in the private sector or the public sector. The scarcity of quality education should be avoided. The central Govt. should allocate enough money to open new schools, colleges and universities, overhaul the entire system and invest in technology and innovation related to the education system. Every child born in this country should have equal opportunity to learn, grow and excel in life with quality education blended with character. A vibrant nation is created by the energetic youth and active media. The youth and media can be positive only if the politicians are honest and responsible.

VI. Recommendations

- Quality seminars, conferences and workshops should be organized to train the trainers to cope up with the changing culture and the changing needs of the students and the society.
- Skill development which the Government is doing now need to be strengthened.
- Proper measures should be taken by the Government to provide quality education to all at affordable prices.
- Unwanted competitions should be avoided among educational institutions.
- Educational schemes should be implemented properly.
- Media should become more responsible. Every news agency should publicise everyday at least one incident on the need of quality education and the change required in people for a healthy society.
- Government schools and colleges should be paid attention by the government to improve the quality of education as to cope up with modern society.

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