

Quality of Education in the Epoch of Decentralization and Privatization

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Abstract: The paper examined the impact of decentralization and privatization on the quality of education. Decentralization and privatization as practiced by some countries in the sub-region were highlighted showing how they interplay with socio-economic and political scenarios, and the resultant impact on provision of quality of education. These policies produced positive effects such as improved workers' welfare, community participation and widening access to education. On the other hand, incapable institutions, while providing wider access to education for student do mortgage the quality and standard of education. A sector-wide approach to resource mobilization and management in the education system, accountability in the areas of leadership, bureaucracies and best work practices would ensure quality control in the education sector.

Index Terms - Quality of Education, Decentralization, Privatization

I. INTRODUCTION

The policy issues that form the basis of educational systems reflect political and economic transactions influenced by the history, culture and traditions. The sub-region, before the era of western (formal) education, had engrained within its social policy, tacit social contracts that formed the bedrock of traditional social life. According to Naidoo (2005), the early educational policies failed to make provision for a national system of education. The increasing need for educational relevance prompted the agitation for a re-evaluation of the old system and a desire for a national policy on education to unify the fragmentation occasioned by the efforts of the state governments at the time. The past four decades, when education was solely under the control of government in India witnessed unprecedented failures. At all levels, the public education system increasingly became less effective and efficient in responding to the needs of the society and those of the individuals. This scenario created the veritable ground for private education to strive.

II. CONCEPT OF DECENTRALIZATION OF EDUCATION

In general, decentralization refers to devolution of the centralized control of power and decision-making from government into private initiatives at state/provincial and local government levels. Decentralization also involves making minimum requirements for private participation in the provision of education (McGinn, N. F. and Welsh, T., 1999). Decentralization is often motivated by political, administrative and fiscal considerations. Other motives include increasing efficiency, community participation, accountability, as well as increasing sensitivity and responsiveness to local needs and mobilizing resources and financial responsibility. Decentralization of education has taken many forms. One of these forms is de-concentration, which refers to a situation where central education authority opens zonal offices in the different parts of the country, which is the apex body in control of basic education. In this case, powers are specifically transferred to sub-national bodies by law.

Decentralization is often regarded as a key component of management structure. Reasons for decentralization are numerous. The most colorful and glowing reason for decentralization is "efficiency in management and governance". This often happens when management and bureaucracy at the centre is slow, ineffective and inefficient. Where purchase of equipment and teacher deployment takes very long to deliver, the very obvious solution to tackle this is to decentralize. Another reason for decentralization is political democratization; this is where people are given the opportunity to make decisions about concerns that arise in the course of their daily lives. Very often, decentralization is embarked upon without due considerations for the socio-cultural, and economic realities. Usually, the call for decentralization of power is more often politically driven or externally inspired by development partners. This development resulted in the gradual loss of access to higher education by the less privileged. The resultant effect of this is made very obvious by the failure the policy suffers at the implementation stage.

III. CONCEPT OF PRIVATIZATION OF EDUCATION

Privatization of education has dominated the education policy issues. The context under which decentralization of education has manifested itself in education policy is largely tied to issues of education access, quality of education, educational equity, provision of infrastructure, etc. The utilization of these policies, aims at a renewal of the educational thrust on the continent to enable India to meet the challenges of the 21st century.

Privatization, as a policy guiding the provision of education, has become a widespread policy in many countries. Privatization is a term that has been associated with the transfer of assets of ownership from the public to the private sector. The policy encompasses the private initiative in education, implying that decentralization involves the "transfer of decision making, authority, responsibility and tasks from higher to lower organizational levels or between organizations" (Hanson, E., 1998). The

concept underlining privatization, especially when viewed in relation to access to education and provision of basic education for a large number of the populace, has gone a long way to provide many students in urban and rural area with some form of education.

The rapid increase in private educational institutions escapes the quality control devices of monitoring organs of the state. The profit orientation of the private institutions, as well as the ineffectiveness of the standard and quality control agencies of the state governments have left questions as to the quality of some of these institutions. Untrained teachers, undefined curriculum or instructional modules, unorthodox and most times unaccepted instructional delivery methods as well as the learning environments characterize these establishments.

IV. BUDGETARY ALLOCATION AND FUNDING

In most countries funding of education is shouldered primarily by the central government. There are instances of private funding and shared funding between the central, regional and local governments, as well as individuals. The regional and the local governments, however, are allowed in some instances to generate funds of their own and introduce tuition while enjoying some autonomy, but are still accountable to the central government. The cost implication of implementing free education can be enormous. The underlying cost of teacher training, professional development, infrastructure and instructional materials can be difficult for the central government to address. Such a scenario usually results in the sharing of financial responsibilities among the central, regional, and local governments and individuals. The pattern of commitment of funds to education usually reflects the government's immediate priority or future expectations in terms of general development of their countries.

V. CONCLUSION

Privatization has made high fee-paying institutions, which are affordable only by the very rich. But, at the same time they provide quality education in terms of curriculum delivery, internal quality control, highly qualified teaching personnel, facility availability and a learning environment (Tooley, J. and Dixon, P., 2006). The other side of the coin is that quite a number of institutions have been registered without proper standards being met. Students who end up in such institutions are taught by unqualified teachers. The necessary conditions for learning are usually not met. Decentralization would further help in the area of simplification of supervision of institutions. Supervisory bodies have multiplied a great deal, with each body monitoring the different areas of institutions for quality control both at the public and private sectors. Decentralization has brought closer partnership between the institution and the community, which has produced synergies driving the quality of education. This has given communities a sense of ownership and participation.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

Finally, it is of paramount importance that provision of quality education to the vast majority of students remains the goal of governments. Improving quality is the responsibility of all stakeholders involved in educational provision. This therefore implies clear identification and acceptance of responsibilities by stakeholders within the education sector while taking into consideration the peculiarities and limitations of each stakeholder. The issue of resource mobilization and management transcend the apex education management body. The place of pride education takes in national development makes a demand on all sectors. This therefore, requires a sector-wide approach to resource mobilization and management in the education system. The issue of accountability in the areas of leadership, bureaucracy, and best work practices ensures good resource management and quality control.

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