

Chapter 2

Quality in Education—Concept, Origin, and Approaches

Abstract Being instrumental in bringing about the economic development of a country, education is one of the basic services offered by government and stakeholders to society. However, as mere quantitative expansion would not generate the desired results unless a particular standard of quality is maintained, it is essential that policies shift their focus from increasing enrolments to quality improvement in all spheres—beginning from making school facilities available to students, developing their learning skills which is not just limited to curriculum knowledge, and initiating efficient teaching practices. The concept of quality in the field of education is not new; therefore, it is even important to understand how the quality debate has evolved over the years and how it has come to be linked with the provision of education. This chapter describes the theoretical aspect of quality concept, its historical origin in the field of education, various related models and approaches. It is being argued that the concept of quality in education is multi-faceted; it does not possess any specific definition; different scholars have interpreted the concept differently. The differences lie not only in the way this concept is defined, but is also reflected in the manner in which quality is measured. Although, worldwide, research initiatives have been undertaken to identify the quality indicators, measuring the educational outcomes, in the Indian context, little evidence is available, particularly in case of secondary education.

Keywords Quality • Concept • Secondary education • Approaches

2.1 Historic Origin of Quality Concept in Education

The available literature asserts that quality debate evolved with the advent of industrialization as the need to ensure that products conformed to specifications escalated and customers began to demand value for money (Sallis 1996). Wadsworth et al. (2002) argued that at this stage the focus was more on products rather than on quality. Slowly industrialization led to mass production and division of work into small repetitive tasks, thus shifting the quality checking responsibility

from workers to processes and systems in organizations. The concept of quality control, which was under inspection till 1940, soon started dominating production lines to detect defective products and stop them from reaching customers. Post World War II, that is, in the 1960s, there was a shift from statistical process control to quality assurance. The thrust was now to avoid producing defective products in the first place. This focus intensified further leading to the emergence of the concept of Total quality management (TQM) in the 1980s.

As social services like education, health, defense expanded and took in high portions of public funds, government and communities started asking for quality improvement in terms of value addition of money. Education was not spared as schools competed with other schools for students. Thus, issues of quality transcended the boundary between the corporate world and public sector and quality and service concepts adapted themselves to meet the specific environments of educational institutions, thereby opening up possibilities of it being reformed in the next century (Linston 1999).

2.2 Defining Quality of Education

In spite of the fact that the debate on quality has been prevailing for a long time, there has been no universally acceptable definition of quality. This section reviews the definitions given in various contexts by different scholars. There are two aspects of quality in education: *Quality* of the education system as a whole (including schools and related bodies, teaching and learning environment, policies etc) and *Quality* of what the system offers to the students/learners (i.e. quality of teaching and learning process, curriculum etc). Terms like efficiency, effectiveness, equity, and quality have often been used synonymously (Adams 1993). It is therefore not easy to define quality in the context of education.

According to Hoy et al. (2000), quality in education is an evaluation process of education, which enhances the need to achieve and develop the talents of the customers and, at the same time, meet the accountability standards set by the clients who pay for the process. Goddard and Leask (1992) highlighted the definition of quality as simply meeting the requirements of customers. They have included different customers for education—parents, government, students, teachers, employers, and institutions—who look for different characteristics of quality.

Education being a service and not a product, its quality cannot lie exclusively in the final output. Its quality should also be manifested in the delivery process. Quality of education should also take into account determinants such as provision of teachers, building, curriculum, equipment, textbooks, and teaching processes (Grisay and Mahlck 1991). For them, quality of education has a three-dimensional approach comprising quality of human and material resources available for teaching (inputs), teaching practices (process), and results (outcomes). Further, according to them, there are some indicators—repetition, dropouts, promotion, and transition rates—which are frequented by planners to arrive at an approximate measurement of quality.

In 1990, the *World Conference on Education for All held at Jomtien*, Thailand, identified that to achieve the fundamental goal of equity, quality of education was instrumental in assuring children's cognitive development. UNESCO's education quality definition emphasized more on 'lifelong learning' and 'relevance' as most important factors (Delors et al. 1996). Accordingly, education is based upon four pillars—learning to know, learning to focus on the practical application of what is learned, learning to live together where all have an equal opportunity to develop, and learning to emphasize the skills needed for individuals to develop their full potential.

In addition to this, UNICEF also strongly emphasized the desirable dimensions of quality, as identified in the Dakar Framework. Its paper 'Defining Quality in Education' recognizes five dimensions of quality: learners, environment, content, processes, and outcomes, founded on 'the rights of the whole child, and all children, to survival, protection, development and participation' (UNICEF 2000). The *Communiqué of the World Conference on Higher Education 2009* states that 'Quality criteria must reflect the aim of cultivating in students critical and independent thought and the capacity of learning throughout life. They should encourage innovation and diversity' (UNESCO 2009). Thus, it is clear that quality is not a unitary concept but involves multiple perspectives.

2.3 Why is Quality of Education Important?

Earlier, greater emphasis was being placed on ensuring free and compulsory primary education for all children. However, with the tremendous growth in school enrolments throughout the world, the need for shifting priority on increasing access to higher quality of schooling was felt. In fact, many international organizations now believe that access and quality are not sequential elements, rather they visualized the role of quality being instrumental in improving access. Due to the current state of education in both developing as well as industrialized countries, this issue of quality has become the focus of concern. The Jomtien Declaration in 1990 and more particularly, the Dakar Framework of Action, 2000, through its sixth goal has also emphasized on quality of education.

UNESCO's Global Monitoring Report UNESCO 2005 highlights the importance of quality of education provided in schools in terms of the teaching–learning processes. It relates quality schooling with higher life-time incomes. According to the report, higher quality of schools enhances students' cognitive skills which directly influence their performance in the labour market in terms of individual earnings, greater productivity, and economic growth. Schools are also instrumental in developing desirable non-cognitive outcomes among students such as honesty, reliability, determination, etc. It affirmed that the achievement of universal participation in education will be fundamentally dependent upon the quality of education available. The instrumental roles of schooling—helping individuals achieve their own socio-economic and cultural objectives and helping society to be better served

and protected by its leaders and more equitable in important ways—will be strengthened if education is of higher quality (UNESCO 2005a, b).

The European Union in its report on the Quality of School Education highlighted that its highest political priority and concern of all member states was quality of education. According to the report ‘High levels of knowledge; competencies and skills are considered to be the very basic condition for active citizenship, employment and social cohesion’ (European Commission 2000). A study by Reddy (2007) shows that world over, school effectiveness or quality has been viewed in terms of cognitive outcomes attained by students i.e., achievement that is easily measured by standardized tests. Though this is indeed the primary concern of schooling, it needs to be stressed that school quality should be defined not only in terms of the cognitive achievement of children, but also by non-cognitive/affective outcomes such as attitudes and values which are so critical for the all-round development of every child.

One of the famous educationists, Erick Hanushek (2002), while pointing out that typical studies relate the number of educated individuals with economic growth rates of a country, considers such a measure of knowledge and cognitive skills of people crude because schooling might not be the actual cause of growth but may reveal other attributes of the economy that are beneficial to growth. According to him, research underscores the importance of student’s achievement and lays more stress on individual productivity and earnings and associates it with faster growth of the nation’s economy. Hence, according to him, an economy’s ability to grow over time is in part related to the quality of its education system.

In the Indian context, there is an increasing concern about the quality of education that the education system is able to provide (NUEPA 2014). The disparity at various levels is proving to be cancerous for the nation. According to Education for All (EFA) 2014 report, one of the key challenges facing the Indian education system is the quality-related deficiencies at each stage of education resulting in unsatisfactory level of student learning. The phenomenon of under-achievement among pupils depicts the quality-related deficiencies of the education system. Various studies show that children do not have school-readiness competencies in cognitive and language domains, thereby revealing the poor quality of the curriculum, deficiencies of the teaching–learning process, and lack of quality teachers. If the basic foundation of children at the school level is weak, there are possibilities that benefits from later educational interventions get reduced, therefore, it is important that appropriate interventions need to be formulated and implemented to remove quality-related deficiencies at school-level education. It is seen that there is wide gap between quality education and quality students. A large cross-section of unresponsive students hailing from the affluent class makes their way into good schools whereas children from poor families cannot avail admission to such good schools. It is important to understand that the facilities for education should be equal for all. Quality Education is the right of every quality student.

2.4 Quality Models

Review of literature identifies eight models for quality of education which are discussed here in detail.

Quality Control: This is a regulatory process through which we measure quality performance, compare it with standards, and act on the difference (Wadsworth et al. 2002). It is basically an after-the-event process concerned with detecting and rejecting defective items. Such a strategy for measuring education quality is inadequate and inherently flawed owing to two reasons: firstly, the checking is done only at the end of the process by inspectors who are not involved in teaching practices and secondly, efforts need to be taken to assure quality rather than merely detecting it.

Quality Assurance: Wadsworth et al. (2002) defined it as a system of activities which assures that the overall quality control is done effectively. It is a before and during-the-event process. Here the focus is prevention of defects rather than just detecting them. Stephens (2003) argues that it is a process of evaluating the extent to which the institution is delivering on its promises. However, quality assistance is a process of preventing defects which is not an end in itself rather a means towards satisfying customers.

JJ Bonsting's Creating Quality Community of Learners by Quality Management: This model draws from TQM thinking and proposes the four pillars of TQM that constitute quality. These four pillars are: Customer–supplier focus, personal dedication by everyone for improvement, process/systems, and management accountability to TQM. The customer–supplier focus believes that each individual is a customer as well as a supplier who has a clear role to play to ensure quality. Team work and collaboration must be emphasized if schools are to create high quality benefits for the maximum.

Malcolm Baldrige Quality Criteria: The Baldrige framework consists of a leader setting values, systems and level of accountability; a system that comprises four building blocks of education and business management processes, human resource development, strategic planning, and information and analysis; measurement of progress which uses quantitative indicators of performance; and the goal, that is, the student's focus. Baldrige holds the view of accelerating improvement efforts by serving as a framework to align institutional activities to achieve ever-improving outcomes.

Philip B. Crosby's Zero Defect Approach: This approach believes in elimination of defects to reduce cost. It makes the work team responsible for quality assurance although inspectors also play a critical role.

Joseph Juran's Project Management: Juran viewed quality as a fitness requisite to achieve a purpose. As per his 85/15 rule, 85% of the organization's quality problems are a direct result of poorly structured processes.

Deming's Total Quality Management: The concept of TQM was propounded by Deming (1986). Deming viewed quality as a continuous improvement of processes and services to keep pace with changing demands of customers. He argued that quality is the ability to meet customers' needs at all times and the urge to excel.

Shewhart Cycle: Shewhart came with a four-phase cyclic approach to quality improvement. The phases include: Plan–Do–Check–Act. From an analysis of the entire process, a single aspect is isolated for improvement. A plan how to improve the aspect is drawn up and once the plan is clarified and accepted, it is implemented on a small scale. The effects of implementing plans are scrutinized closely. Depending on the results, action is taken to implement the plan on a larger scale, refine, or discard it for a new one.

2.5 Approaches to Quality of Education

While defining quality of education, it is useful to distinguish between educational outcomes and the processes leading to them. Several educational approaches have tried to analyse the concept of quality though they differ from each other in ideology, epistemology, and disciplinary composition (EFA Global Monitoring Report 2005).

Quality in Humanist Approach: According to this approach, learning is emphasized as a process of social practice rather than the result of individual intervention. Standardized and controlled curricula are rejected. Educational programmes remain responsive to individual learners' circumstances and needs. Self-assessment and peer assessment are welcomed as ways of developing deeper awareness of learning. The teacher's role is more that of a facilitator than an instructor.

Quality in Behaviourist Approach: According to this approach, standardized and controlled curricula, based on prescribed objectives are endorsed. Assessment is seen as an objective measurement of learned behaviour against preset assessment criteria. Tests and examinations are regarded as the central features of learning. The teacher directs learning, and is considered as the expert who controls stimuli and responses.

Quality in Critical Approach: Sociologists and critical pedagogues tend to equate good quality education as one that prompts social change; includes a curriculum and teaching methods which encourage critical analysis of social power relations and ways in which formal knowledge is produced and transmitted; and involves the active participation by learners in the design of their own learning experience.

Quality in Indigenous Approach: Indigenous approaches reassert the importance of education's relevance to the socio-cultural circumstances of the nation and learner. They believe that all learners have rich sources of prior knowledge, accumulated through a variety of experiences, which educators should draw out and nourish. Learners should play a role in defining their own curriculum. Learning should move beyond the boundaries of the classroom through non-formal and lifelong learning activities.

Quality in Adult Education Approach: In the adult education tradition, experience and critical reflection on learning is an important aspect of quality.

Radical theorists see learners as socially situated with the potential to use their experience and learning as a basis for social action and social change.

To conclude, it may be stated that this chapter provides a conceptual perspective on quality of education by examining the various ways in which it has been understood and addressed in various parts of the world. There is a great deal of diversity in the way quality concept in education originated and its models and approaches have been defined. Though multiple meanings have been ascribed to the term education quality, as it has been viewed in myriad ways by educators, the most practical definition of educational quality would include a combination of inputs, processes and outcomes and their inter-relationships. Therefore, despite viewing quality of education mostly in terms of learning outcomes of students, the quality of inputs and processes to achieve better learning outcomes are equally important.

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Quality of Secondary Education in India
Concepts, Indicators, and Measurement

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2018, XXXVII, 225 p. 51 illus., 4 illus. in color., Hardcover

ISBN: 978-981-10-4928-6