

EMPOWERING TEACHERS: SOME INSIGHTS ON IMPROVING TEACHER EFFICACY

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Abstract: -

The focus of policy makers in India is gradually shifting from improving access to improving the quality of education. There is little debate in literature on the significance and instrumental role of teachers in achieving educational outcomes, improving test score of students or raising their overall wellbeing. However, there is much debate on how to evaluate their effectiveness and what are the various factors that determine their effectiveness. The objective of this paper is to specifically investigate the various factors that determine the efficacy of teachers in improving the quality of education. After classifying these factors into three broad categories termed as systemic factors, school-specific factors and individual specific factors, we bring in the concept of cultural capital given by Bourdieu and apply it specifically for teachers. Parallel to Bourdieu's idea of social reproduction, we introduce the term 'edification reproduction' to explain how beliefs, perceptions and practices about teaching get transmitted across generations creating a divide in the society. Finally, we discuss some of the proposals for teachers made by the National Education Policy, 2020 and connect with how they address the self-efficacy perceptions among teachers in India. We conclude with remarks on how early training for teacher could help develop self-efficacy among teachers.

Keywords: - *Teacher efficacy, teacher effectiveness, cultural capital, edification reproduction, National Education Policy, India*

INTRODUCTION:**Quality of Education**

If education is defined as an activity that is holistic, integrating different aspects leading to the growth of an individual, manifesting itself in personal growth as well as in terms of the individual making meaningful contributions to the society, then there is much to be said and done about its quality and all the factors that determine it. Education and health serve as both the means and end implying that more of them help achieve a better quality of life and reflect a better quality of life. The Human Development Index (HDI) is a measure that includes dimensions of both education and health apart from income used to summarize the overall development of a country. From a multi-disciplinary perspective, there are both the subjective and objective dimensions to the quality of life and Cummins defines it as encompassing seven domains: “material well-being, health, productivity, intimacy, safety, community, and emotional well-being. Objective domains comprise culturally relevant measures of objective well-being. Subjective domains comprise domain satisfaction weighted by their importance to the individual” (Cummins, 1997) .

It is imperative then that better education helps improve the quality of life. Better education is normally understood in terms of enrolment ratio or educational attainment index. However, while these constructs are of significance, it is the quality of education that will have long- term catalytic effect on improving the overall well-being for an individual as well as the society at large. The UNICEF (2000) defines lists the following seven dimensions to indicate the quality of education:

1. Learners who are healthy, well-nourished, and ready to participate and learn, and supported in learning by their families and communities
2. Environments that are healthy, safe, protective and gender-sensitive, and provide adequate resources and facilities
3. Content that is reflected in relevant curricula and materials for the acquisition of basic skills, especially in the areas of literacy, numeracy, and skills for life
4. knowledge in such areas as gender, health, nutrition, HIV/AIDS prevention, and peace
5. Processes through which trained teachers use child-centred teaching approaches in well-managed classrooms and schools
6. skilful assessment to facilitate learning and reduce disparities
7. Outcomes that encompass knowledge, skills and attitudes, and are linked to national goals for education and positive participation in society.

Thus, we may identify a multitude of factors that improve the quality of education in a society including a good infrastructure with safe and secure school premises, effective curricula, relevant teaching methods and efficient teachers as responsible for influencing the quality of education. While it may be hard to come to a consensus as to which of these factors are more important, it will not be wrong to state that in the absence of teachers or ‘good’ teachers all other factors may be redundant in the discussion on raising the standards of education.

The various educational policies previously brought out by the Government of India aimed predominantly at improving access to education and entitling every child of the age six to fourteen years free and compulsory education. The aim to achieve universal education is laudable in a country like ours where access to formal education remained elusive for many sections of the population for a long period in history. While this target remains to be achieved, the focus of policy makers is gradually moving towards the quality of education rather than merely the access. Though providing access to good quality of education was recognized by policy makers as early as in the 1960s, the overwhelming goal of achieving universal access in a country like India has clearly overshadowed all other goals including the quality of education. However, the quality of education at all levels certainly needs a major face lift and, in this context, the latest National Educational Policy (NEP) 2019, brought out by the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) deserves a special attention and a thorough analysis. The NEP 2019 clearly states in its preamble:

In the decades since independence, we have been preoccupied largely with issues of access and equity and have unfortunately dropped the baton about quality of education. Thus, the vision statement of the NEP that states ‘The National Education Policy 2019 envisions an India centred educational system that contributes directly to transforming our nation sustainably into an equitable and vibrant knowledge society, by providing high quality education to all’

is indeed laudable. The NEP (2020) aims at bringing about sweeping changes in education and clearly articulates the role of teachers in bringing about this change when it states, ‘The teacher and the teacher’s condition must and will be at the centre of these changes. The new education policy must help reinstate teachers, at all levels, as the most respected and essential members of our society, because they truly shape our next generation of citizens. It must do everything to empower teachers and help them to do their job as effectively as possible. The new education policy must help recruit the very best and brightest to enter the teaching profession at all levels, by ensuring teachers their livelihood, respect, dignity, and autonomy, while also installing in the system basic methods of quality control and accountability.’

There is little debate in literature on the significance and instrumental role of teachers in achieving educational outcomes, improving test score of students, or raising their overall wellbeing. However, there is much debate on how to evaluate their effectiveness and what are the various factors that determine their effectiveness. In this context the paper highlights

on the concept of self-efficacy of teachers and investigate the various factors that determine it. After discussing the meaning of teacher efficacy as discussed in literature the paper explores how the concept of cultural capital, that was propounded by the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu is related to teacher efficacy. Finally, the paper will also examine certain provisions made by the NEP for teachers and comment on how they may influence the self-efficacy of teachers. We conclude with some policy suggestions that will enable a fruitful implementation of the NEP with regards to teachers.

Teacher Efficacy

The Indian subcontinent has known to revere and idolize teachers as selfless *gurus* imparting knowledge and skills to students who receive the same with humility and gratitude. They accepted the responsibility for the overall holistic development of the student in various spheres. However, over the years the role of teachers has been significantly reduced to classroom instructions and little voice in most educational matters of a school. Burdened with many administrative responsibilities, teachers both in government as well as private schools in India must endure a system that is invidious with teachers lacking sufficient training as well as motivation and schools not providing it. The proportion of teachers in India with minimum required qualification at the primary level was at 73% in 2019 indicating that there are many schools and many students who are stuck with abysmally low standards of schooling. This low standard seeps back in since students who come out of this system are also potential teachers thus making it difficult for the cycle to break. Not all primary schools in India have access to even basic drinking water and only around 65% of them have access to electricity as of 2019. Such working conditions are not highly motivating for teachers and as a result ‘... classroom experiences can scarcely afford opportunities for joyful learning or developing basic competencies for children’ (Rampal, 2000). The imminent rise of the knowledge economy and its entire *raison d’être* is to develop human capital and teachers are both the means and end of this system. Raising the effectiveness of teachers would imply an improvement in the quality of human capital as well as an improvement in the means to raise the quality of human capital.

As mentioned earlier, among the other dimensions that define ‘quality’ in education, UNICEF (2000) highlights the role of teachers in the following dimension: ‘Processes through which trained teachers use child-centred teaching approaches in well-managed classrooms and schools and skilful assessment to facilitate learning and reduce disparities.

Apparently, trained teachers are assumed to substantially raise the educational outcomes of students and improve the overall standard of education in the society. Research in this area, however, indicates that teacher education, training and even experience may not serve as the best proxies to study quality of education owing to weak and uncertain relationship between them and student test scores (Azam & Kingdon, 2014). The effectiveness of teachers is instead measured in terms of their contribution to academic student achievements described as the ‘total value added’ by teachers (Canales & Maldonado, 2018, Azam & Kingdon, 2014). Teacher effectiveness measured this way gives an ex-post perspective on quality of teachers and compels us to initiate the idea of teacher efficacy.

Teacher efficacy, on the other hand, has more to do with a teacher’s own assessment of self in terms of his/her ability to make a difference in the student’s learning. As defined by the Rand researchers as early as in the 1970’s, “efficacy is the extent to which the teacher believes he or she has the capacity to affect student performance” (McLaughlin & Marsh, 1990). Also, Ashton (1985) defines teacher efficacy as “teacher’s belief in their ability to have a positive effect on student learning” Teachers with a high internal locus of control would have a higher belief in their own capabilities thereby bringing about a significant change in student’s learning without depending on external factors whereas those with a high external locus would hold external factors such as the student’s upbringing etc. as factors that are more influential in the student’s learning process thereby undermining their own role as instrumental in the process. The internal factors may have strong positive impact on the perception of teachers regarding their influence on a student’s learning whereas the external factors may tend to negatively influence these perceptions. Carefully constructed then, teacher efficacy can potentially be a crucial construct in determining teacher effectiveness in the student’s learning process since the learning outcomes will largely depend on teachers’ own judgement on how they will perform in given situations (Bandura, 1986). Gusky & Passaro (1994) provided an interesting insight to the analysis of teacher efficacy by suggesting that the internal and external factors may also operate independently of each other indicating that even though the external factors may not be very conducive for the student’s learning, individual teachers (and not teachers in general) may have strong influence on students and vice-versa. To sum it up, what teachers as an entity may or may not be able to influence would differ from individually among teachers. The following figure illustrates this

Figure 1: Efficacy Construct Dimensions

		LOCUS	
		Internal (Positive)	External (Negative)
EFFICACY	Personal	I can (P-I)	I cannot (P-E)
	Teaching	Teachers Can (T-I)	Teachers Cannot (T-E)

Source: (Guskey & Passaro, 1994)

The above figure 1 illustrates that a teacher may be on any one of the elements in the above matrix. So, for instance, a teacher on (P-E) would believe that he/she does not have the ability to influence a certain student due to external circumstances while a teacher on (T-I) would believe that teachers can make a difference in a student’s learning process despite the unfavorable circumstances. Similarly, (P-I) would reflect an individual teacher’s perception about his/her personal ability to make a positive impact on a student’s learning. ‘Teaching Efficacy’ and ‘Personal Efficacy’ were the two terms that Ashton & Webb (1982) gave to capture the above discussed dimensions of efficacy. Personal efficacy indicates performance or effectiveness of teachers beyond institutional arrangements or policies; it gives cognizance to factors that reflect individual attributes of teachers that may or may not be favorable to producing desired educational outcomes.

This paper does not discuss the methods to measure teacher efficacy but attempts to identify and examine the internal and external factors that influence the two dimensions of teachers’ efficacy viz. teaching efficacy and personal efficacy on student learnings. This paper looks closely into the factors that lead to the development of different perceptions among teachers about their efficacy and they may be classified under the following broad heads:

- (a) Systemic factors (National level policies and incentives for teachers)
- (b) School specific factors (Policies and incentives at the school level that would mainly depend on the type of school, government/private etc.)
- (c) Individual specific factors (factors that reflect motivation, exposure and other intrinsic qualities of a person that make him/her an effective teacher)

This paper will look at the systemic factors that may influence teacher efficacy in India considering the New Education Policy and will also look at the individual specific factors considering Bourdieu’s concept of ‘cultural capital’ (1991).

Bourdieu’s Cultural Capital

Bourdieu (1986) defined cultural capital as the "instruments for the appropriation of symbolic wealth socially designated as worthy of being sought and possessed". Bourdieu employed the idea of cultural capital to explain the differences in the learning outcomes among school children. He coined the term ‘Cultural Capital’ that refers to a collection of symbolic elements such as skills, aesthetic tastes, clothing, mannerisms, material belongings, credentials, etc. Bourdieu further identified embodied state, objectified state, and institutionalized state as the three states of cultural capital. Any knowledge that resides within an individual owing to the manner or circumstances in which he/she was brought up will reflect the embodied state of cultural capital that he/she possesses. So, for instance, certain etiquettes, a type of accent, dialect or tastes that are learnt in the family and get ingrained in the person would make up for the embodied state of cultural capital. The objectified state of cultural capital would include all those objects that indicate social status such as the kind of phone, car etc. Finally, cultural capital in the institutionalized state would include the certificates, degrees and any other

excellence awards that are rewarded by institutions recognized in a society. Further, Bourdieu also conceptualized the social world in different domains called as 'Fields' that had their own unique rules and practices as also their challenges and struggles. What skills and practices make for capital in a domain may not be so in another.

According to Bourdieu, the academic performance of students could be explained with the help of their cultural capital. 'The notion of cultural capital initially presented itself to me, in the course of research, as a theoretical hypothesis which made it possible to explain the unequal scholastic achievement of children originating from different social classes by relating academic success, i.e., the specific profits which children from the different classes and class fractions can obtain in the academic market, to the distribution of cultural capital between the classes and class fractions' (Bourdieu,1986).

The concept of cultural capital is expected to have a strong positive relationship with the concept of self-efficacy among teachers since cultural capital itself reflects a special endowment or inheritance among certain individuals relevant to a certain 'field' that distinguishes them from others, providing them with a socio-economic advantage. Given this benefit, in the context of teachers, some of them naturally outperform others given similar circumstances, achieving higher learning outcomes among students. For instance, in the 'field' of education, skills in a dominant language, which is English, would be valued more and reading and writing skills in English will constitute cultural capital. Similarly, knowledge of computers, organization and presentation skills are typically valued highly among teachers.

Bourdieu further argued that there is a cultural reproduction, that is a part of a bigger social reproduction, wherein societies reproduce certain cultural norms. Some of these norms emerge as the dominant ones making cultural reproduction as one of the major tools by which the dominant class retains its power in the society. Cultural capital along with other forms of capital such as economic capital and social capital, according to Bourdieu, explained the success of students from high status backgrounds and the persistent intergenerational inequalities in a society termed as social reproduction. According to Bourdieu, the formal education system perpetuates the socioeconomic inequality as it serves to legitimize the existing social hierarchy by transforming it into an apparent hierarchy of gifts and merits. We propose applying this theory specifically to teachers and the cultural capital that they possess. We term this as 'edification reproduction', indicating the idea that the nature and quality of teaching practices in a society reproduce themselves over generations. Owing to poor cultural capital of teachers there emerges a generation with similar attributes that perpetuates certain teaching beliefs and practices. Beginning with the embodied English language skills, efficacy of teachers, both 'teaching efficacy' and 'personal efficacy' as defined above, also largely depends on their cultural capital in the form of the institutions they have graduated from, the perceptions they have about teaching as a profession. Teaching efficacy that reflects what and how a teacher can influence learning among students depends on their perceptions about teaching as a profession. In a society where individuals choose teaching as a leisure time activity or carry perceptions of teaching being relatively plain sailing profession may seriously pull-down teaching efficacy. Lack of clear goals and purpose to choosing teaching as a career option is a compelling reason that may go a long way in explaining low personal efficacy among teachers. Combined with ambiguous roles and responsibilities that are thrust upon teachers by schools and government, the overall efficacy of teachers may well be expected to plunge further down.

NEP and Teachers

The National Education Policy (2020), in the context of teachers, mentions its objective as 'Ensure that all students at all levels of school education are taught by passionate, motivated, highly qualified, professionally trained, and well-equipped teachers.' It also acknowledges the pivotal role of teachers in 'shaping the futures of our students' and discusses the different aspects to improving the overall status of teachers. Upon establishing ten normative statements or goals about the status of teachers in a society, the policy goes on to discuss the reasons for not achieving them. We may broadly classify these reasons under the following areas: Teacher recruitment, deployment of teachers, teacher education, working conditions of teachers and career and professional development of teachers. Reforms are proposed in each of these areas to improve the overall efficiency of teachers. As discussed, earlier teacher efficacy or the self-assessment of teachers about their own capabilities as a teacher significantly impacts their efficiency. Motivation, drive and eagerness to learn and innovate among teachers reflect their self-efficacy and these factors as we saw earlier have both internal and external loci of control. With reference to Table 1, we may say that systemic changes introduced by educational policies will affect teacher efficacy in a general sense for all teachers. For instance, a safe working environment or removing administrative burden from teachers is expected to have a positive impact on their self-efficacy in general. Yet there are teachers with a very strong internal locus that overpowers any external circumstance resulting in their excellent performance as teachers. Thus, even if the circumstances are such that in general teachers cannot make a change, an individual teacher having a strong internal locus of control may feel that he or she can make an impact, reflecting high self-efficacy. However, these could be treated as exceptions and this paper focuses on those aspects that help improve teaching efficacy through changes in the external environment and personal efficacy through impact on the cultural capital of teachers. Teachers, peers, and parents are factors that affect self-efficacy (Bandura, 1994) of students indicating that the values that these actors possess become critical in the process of social reproduction. In particular, 'edification reproduction' concerns the teachers and the way they enable a certain set of values regarding teaching beliefs and practices to be reproduced across generations. Any policy decisions on teachers taken by the state or the school would be of paramount importance as they would have intergenerational effects.

In the following table we list some of the proposals made by the NEP for teachers and suggest what kind of impact (positive, negative, neutral, or uncertain) it may have on both 'teaching efficacy' and 'personal efficacy' of teachers.

TABLE 1
NEP Proposals for Teachers and Impact on Efficacy of Teachers

Sl No	Policy Reforms	Teaching Efficacy	Personal Efficacy	Remarks
1	Vacancies to be filled up	Positive	Positive	Adequately staffed schools ease the burden on few teachers thus raising teacher efficacy
2	Merit- scholarships with guaranteed employment for teachers especially for rural females	Positive	Positive	Scholarship along with employment guarantee is bound to raise motivation and confidence among teachers
3	Deployment of teachers to rural areas with appropriate incentives	Negative	Negative	Lacking appropriate skills to navigate a different environment may bring down efficacy
4	Better and safe working environment including infrastructure	Positive	Positive	Motivation rises in safer working environments raising self-efficacy
5	Teacher training for caring and inclusive school culture	Positive	Positive	An inclusive school culture acknowledges differences not only among students but also teachers. A multicultural classroom raises the confidence and creativity of teachers as they welcome diverse skills, abilities that come with different cultures.
6	Streamlining the role and duties of teachers	Positive	Positive	Unambiguous guidelines for teachers are sure to encourage innovation among teachers in the classroom
7	Creation of school complexes	Positive	Positive	School complexes aim at increasing collaboration and cooperation. This may be about the perception of increased efficiency among teachers as they share resources and skills among themselves and schools.

8	Incentives to innovative teachers	Neutral	Positive	Monetary incentives to teachers and other incentives such as renewed responsibilities as well as opportunities for taking advanced trainings will certainly motivate teachers and their perception about efficacy.
9	Bilingual approach to teaching	Positive	Positive	When teachers are allowed to teach in local languages along with English, they naturally feel more empowered, increasing their sense of efficacy.
10	Teachers to be trained on new assessment system	Positive	Positive	Any training given to teachers is expected to raise their sense of efficacy.
11	Better screening mechanisms to enter teaching profession	Positive	Uncertain	While screening mechanisms will increase the quality of those entering teaching profession, it may accentuate the divide that already exists and deprive a certain section to make it into the profession.
12	Merit based scholarships to attract students to teaching profession	Positive	Positive	This is a very positive step since it will motivate students desiring to enter the profession to train better.
13	Modular approach to continuous professional development (CPD) of teachers	Positive	Positive	A systematic approach to training and development will improve efficacy.
14	Career management of teachers through appropriate salary raises promotions and recognitions	Positive	Positive	Again, any policy that aims goes towards making teacher conscientious of their growth will improve their self-efficacy.

Source – Author

Concluding Remarks

While most reforms proposed by the NEP for teachers may conjectured to be improving the self-efficacy of teachers, we suggest that policies that aim at raising their cultural capital should be highlighted. Relevant and meaningful trainings that impart practical skills to teachers will obviously raise teacher capacity and improve their perceptions on their self-efficacy and these trainings should be introduced very early. Like the orientation for engineering, medical, law and other professional courses that students receive at early ages in school, teacher training and orientation for the teaching profession should also begin in high school. When a sense of importance is achieved for the profession in early years, it will lead to heightened perceptions of self-efficacy on completion of teacher education. The essential traits required for high self-efficacy beginning with high motivation, good communication skills, openness to learning and innovation and language skills can all be achieved through early training, orientation and relevant exposure. Specialized educators and strategies must be employed to break the edification reproduction cycle and concerted efforts to build a generation of teachers with high self-efficacy alone will achieve this.

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