

Emerging Challenges in the Education System: A Sociological Perspective

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Abstract - Education is an important factor in the development of people and societies, but in today's world, it faces numerous challenges. Technology has advanced very rapidly, access to quality education is unequal, commercialisation has reduced, old-fashioned values have gone down, a shortage of teachers, exam pressure, and discrepancies in digitalisation have significantly affected the educational outcomes globally. In developing nations like India, problems like poor infrastructure, disparity between rural and urban learning, lack of employment opportunities for educated young people and policy implementation challenges persist. COVID-19 has further exacerbated the learning opportunity and the digital access gap, especially with the introduction of online learning. This chapter examines key issues and challenges in the education system through a sociological lens and illustrates this impact on learners, teachers and society. It also reviews the existing education reform, technological innovations and policy interventions which have been designed to improve the quality of education and inclusion. The chapter ends with a focus on the importance of value-based, equitable and technology-driven education to respond to the twenty-first century's needs.

Keywords: Education System, Educational Challenges, Digital Divide, Educational Inequality, Quality Education, Online Learning, Educational Reforms.

I. INTRODUCTION

It is universally believed that education is one of the greatest instruments for social change, human development and national development. It is one of the fundamental pillars in developing an individual, his intellectual aptitude and his moral values, his knowledge of social life and his working skills. Education is a central element of the economy, culture, democracy and social mobility in all societies. It allows people to gain knowledge, to have a better life and to make a positive impact on society. Learning should also help to build responsible citizens, social harmony, reduce inequality and foster innovation and creativity, as well as gain academic

knowledge. So, education is not only restricted to the classroom but has an impact on the growth of society and the nation. (Durkheim, 1922; Dewey, 1916).

In this modernised world with speedy globalisation, technological advancement, industrialisation and the changing socio-economic environment, the significance of education is even more. In today's society, there is an increasing need for people to be skilful, flexible, technologically competent and critical thinkers. Hence, it is expected that educational institutions will educate them not only in the academic field but also in a way that enables them to face the challenges of a highly competitive and dynamic world. Old teaching methods and learning systems are gradually being replaced by modern digital and technology-based teaching methods such as online learning, smart classrooms, online educational platforms, and AI-based learning systems. These changes have opened up new possibilities for increasing access to education and enhancing learning.

However, even with the enormous advances and transformations of the educational system in the world, there are many problems and challenges that have an impact on the accessibility, quality, inclusiveness and effectiveness of education. One of the major problems is the gap between the educational opportunities of different groups in society. The students from the economically weaker section (EWS) and rural areas, as well as from the marginalised regions and social groups, face several barriers to access to quality education, especially due to poor infrastructure, social discrimination, lack of educational resources, and poverty. These inequalities are responsible for significant differences in educational attainment and life chances. These gaps have been widened by the digital divide and particularly by the greater use of online education during the COVID-19 pandemic. The technically advanced learners have an advantage to utilise the

digital learning platform; however, many learners who are not technologically literate and lack access to the internet, smartphones and computers, were not able to participate well in learning. (UNESCO, 2021; World Bank, 2021).

Qualified and trained teachers are also in short supply, and this represents another significant issue for the education system. Although teachers are the centre of all the learning experiences of the students, there are still many teachers in educational institutions who face poor staffing, inadequate teacher training, low teacher motivation and high workload. Teaching quality and learning outcomes are negatively affected by the lack of educational facilities, overcrowding in classrooms, the lack of teaching materials and the lack of technology facilities, all of which are also found in many developing nations. In many parts of the world, the education sector is a market business because of the expansion of commercialism and privatisation of education. With rising fees of private schools and coaching centres, many families who are not well-endowed economically are unable to avail a good education, which adds to social and educational inequalities. (OECD, 2020).

Another problem that has cropped up in the modern education system is the examination system and over-competition in the academic arena. Marks, ranking competitive exams, can put a lot of pressure on the psychological aspect of the students in terms of educational success. An overemphasis on memorisation and good test performance prevents creativity, thinking and understanding. This has resulted in an increase in mental health issues among students, such as stress, anxiety, depression and emotional burnout. Moreover, there is a significant gap between education and employment opportunities. Students leave academic institutions, but not all have the skills, technical competency and employability attributes that are in demand in the current labour markets. The lack of learning and skills requirements in the industry leads to joblessness and underemployment of youths who are educated. (Noddings, 2013).

In India, the massive changes in the education system since independence have been driven by various educational commissions, policies and reforms for increasing access to education and enhancing the quality of education. So far, measures towards

enhancing inclusiveness, flexibility, digital learning and skill development have been taken, including the Right to Education Act and the National Education Policy 2020. However, questions related to educational equity, policy implementation, rural-urban issues, gender issues, infrastructures, and affordability have not been tackled. The COVID-19 pandemic has also revealed structural gaps in the education system and the pressing need to be digitally ready, inclusive in learning practices, and to have robust education systems.

A sociological perspective on education views it as not only a process of knowledge acquisition, but also as a social institution which is related to culture, social stratification, gender, economic and power. The social world is an active agent in the construction of both learners and learning institutions, but these also actively construct it. Therefore, a proper understanding of the problem and the problems it poses in the education system should be built upon the basis of a thorough sociological analysis of all social, economic, political, technological and cultural factors that influence educational experiences and their results. It is important to critically examine those challenges to develop an equitable, inclusive and value-based education system that is responsive to the needs of the modern-day society. (Bourdieu, 1986; Freire, 1970).

II. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK / MEANING

Education is a methodical and systematic approach to the knowledge, skills, values, attitudes, beliefs and behavioural patterns with a view to enhancing the individual and social involvement. It is a process that starts from childhood and lasts through an individual's life. Education is not only useful for improving intellectual development, but it's also useful for the emotional, moral, cultural and social development. Social norms and moral values are transmitted from generation to generation along with collective knowledge in the process of education, as well as cultural inheritance. Educational institutions such as schools, colleges, universities and training centres also have a lot to contribute as it is a process of socialisation that gives people the discipline, responsibility, communication ability and social awareness. Therefore, the role of education in the development of individual personality and society is gigantic.

The education system is a set of interconnected components: its students, teachers, curriculum and teaching methods, educational institutions, education policies, education administration, education infrastructures, assessment mechanisms, and technological resources. These are interrelated and interdependent, and work together to improve learning and teaching and achieve educational objectives. Effective education aims at equal access to education, development of skills, promotion of creativity and innovation and preparing the individuals for learning and effective learning in society. Education is also viewed as an instrument to eliminate poverty, promote the empowerment of girls and women, achieve social mobility and social integration, strengthen democracy and boost economic growth in modern societies.

Current issues and challenges in the education system can be defined as the social, economic, political, cultural and technological issues that impact the accessibility, quality, inclusiveness and effectiveness of the education system. Today's world faces several problems within the education system due to the fast social change, globalisation, technological advancements, increased competition, and changing demands of the job market. One of the biggest challenges in the education field is that the poor and socially marginalised cannot access good education and learning resources in general. Social stratification factors such as class, caste, gender, religion and geographical location are important and have an effect on participation and performance in education. Rural-urban disparities, unequal access to educational facilities and income disparities are additional factors that contribute to educational inequalities within the society.

The digital divide, which refers to inequities in access to digital technologies, to the internet and to technological literacy, is another problem. As more learning platforms have become available online, virtual classrooms, and digital learning tools, this has provided new learning opportunities, but also left many of the students out of the picture as they don't have access to digital learning tools. COVID-19 has definitely accentuated these disparities, and the difference between “access” and “no access” has had a significant impact on the continuity of education and social inequality. Poor infrastructure, such as the lack of classrooms, sanitation facilities, electricity, overcrowding of schools and educational resources,

is also a major concern, especially in developing countries.

Further, commercialisation and privatisation of education have changed the scenario of education in the present-day society. Educational services are becoming a commercial concern, rather than a social responsibility. Costlier private schools, colleges and coaching institutions, which provide quality education to economically privileged groups, have created unequal opportunities to quality education. This is coupled with the low availability of qualified teachers, poor professional training, lack of motivation and high workload, which affect the quality of teaching and learning experiences. The stress of exams, academic competition, and parental expectations has also helped to rise mental health issues with students, such as stress, anxiety, depression and emotional burnout.

Educational qualifications and employment opportunities are another major concern. Many students from formal education fail to acquire the skills, technical competency, communication skills and problem-solving skills required by the industries today. Unemployment and underemployment of the educated youths are therefore still increasing. Moreover, the problem of declining moral values, the role of education in social responsibility and the lack of value education in the current educational systems are more evident. Emphasis on academic performance, competition and material success can often be at the expense of moral growth and character development.

Sociologically, education is intricately linked to various social systems, culture, economy, power dynamics and so on. Educational institutions are not only vehicles for knowledge, but they're a mirror of the social inequalities, cultural expectations and ideological influences in the society. Hence, it is necessary to have a wide perspective on social contexts of education to analyse issues and challenges in the current education system. Sociology illuminates many different issues of class/caste, gender, culture, globalisation, technologies and political policies and their effects on educational opportunities, experiences and outcomes. The conceptual dimensions are vital for creating an inclusive, equitable and effective education system to meet today's social needs and problems.

III. BACKGROUND AND THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

The system of education has made huge developments from the old education system to an organised institutional education system in modern times. Education was well established in ancient India, and it was based on the Gurukul system, that is, a Gurukul was established as a centre of learning, where students would stay at the school with their teacher and learn not only academics, but moral, spiritual and practical aspects as well. This was an era in which discipline, character, social responsibility and cultural values were the major emphasis in education. Learning was thought of as sacred, and knowledge was the overall development of the person. However, caste, sex and social hierarchy, which was an unequal social system at that time, limited access to education.

The purpose of setting up the Western education system in India was to produce administrative workers and staff in the administration of the British government. English teaching, modern schools, university education, and unified school curricula were all part of the education system. Colonial education made significant contributions to the dissemination of modern knowledge, scientific thinking and political awareness, but simultaneously led to social divisions and educational inequalities. Post Independence, the Indian Government also came to know that education plays a pivotal role in the development of the nation, economic growth and social transformation. To enhance access, equity and quality in education, various commissions and policies are implemented, for example, the Kothari Commission, National Policy on Education, Right to Education Act, and National Education Policy 2020. Despite those initiatives, several structural and social issues remain in education.

There are different sociological theories that provide significant clues to the way in which education works and the issues associated with it. This is because the functionalist theory, primarily put forward by Emile Durkheim and Talcott Parsons, states that education is a key social institution which helps to maintain social order, stability and integration. This perspective regards the school as a means of transmitting cultural values, discipline, norms and skills necessary for the functioning of society. Education could provide people with the opportunity

of different jobs, and education could make people feel as belonging to a community and as having a responsibility together. Education should play an important role in the cultivation of a meritocracy, according to functionalists, which is a society in which people are successful according to their talent and effort. But critics have suggested that not all learners have equal opportunities in the education system.

Conflict theory, on the other hand, emphasises the subject of inequality and power relations in education. Education, as thinkers such as Karl Marx and Pierre Bourdieu have pointed out, can help to perpetuate inequalities in society based on class, caste, gender and economic backgrounds. This theory suggests that the privileged are given superior education, they are privileged to access good institutions and have more cultural capital, while the marginalised community are unable to access good quality education. This is exacerbated by the commercialisation and privatisation of education, which makes it possible to provide quality education primarily to the economically more successful groups. Conflict theorists also draw attention to the fact that the educational system sometimes fosters competition instead of cooperation and that the dominant ideologies are reinforced that benefit the powerful segments of society. (Marx; Bourdieu, 1986).

The focus for symbolic interactionists is on classroom and institutional interaction. This perspective is centred on teacher expectations, teacher labelling, peer relations and classroom communication, and how these impact student behaviour and achievement. Positive labelling by the teacher can be beneficial for students' performance, and negative labelling of other students by the teacher can have the effect of low self-esteem and low performance. Symbolic interactionists view social interactions as a significant impact on students' learning experiences, identities and futures. Students may experience discrimination based on caste, gender, language, or socio-economic status that may negatively impact their confidence and participation in an educational setting. (Giroux, 1983).

Another important theoretical point of view is human capital theory, in which the investment in education is associated with higher productivity, higher employment and economic growth. According to this

theory, education provides knowledge and skills that are required in economic participation and national development. Education is a huge investment of governments and societies, and an educated person has innovation, industrial development and social development. However, today's educational youth unemployment, skills mismatch and underemployment are relevant to the quality of current education to cater for the needs of the labour market. Whilst many students have academic qualifications, they are not skilled, technically capable and employable in the modern economy. (Sen, 1999).

All such theoretical perspectives help to elucidate educational problems and issues from structural, social, economic and cultural perspectives. They show that learning is not only a private matter, but has a social aspect which relates to inequality, power, identity and societal change. Hence, an analysis of education problems from a sociological point of view can provide a broader insight into the problems of the education system in modern society.

IV. KEY ASPECTS OF THE TOPIC

Education inequality is one of the education system's biggest issues. Despite all the government programmes and education reforms, access to quality education is far from being a reality in many societies. Several factors keep children from economically weaker sections, rural communities, tribal and marginalised social groups from accessing quality education, including poverty, social discrimination, lack of infrastructure and resources, etc. Inequalities in education are manifested in variations in school infrastructure, teacher quality, learning environment and achievements. Rural schools do not have classrooms, electricity, internet and qualified teachers, etc., and urban schools do not have the same level of infrastructure or digital facilities, libraries, etc. This inequality is one of the drivers of social and economic inequalities and one that suggests that many students are not achieving their full educational potential.

The digital divide is another major issue that has arisen in the present education system. With the introduction of online classes, digital learning platforms, smart classrooms and virtual resources, the way of teaching and learning has changed with the help of technological development. But the

unequal spread of technology has caused major problems for those who are disadvantaged. Inequalities have been seen between students who have digital devices and access to the internet and those who do not during the sudden shift to online learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Socio-economically disadvantaged students and those from villages could not access online classes because of a lack of digital literacy, internet access, computers and smartphones. This has helped to widen the education gap and has resulted in an urgent need for digital inclusion in education. (UNESCO, 2021).

The problems in the past few decades are the commercialisation and privatisation of education. Increasingly, education, which has been seen as a social service and public good, is becoming a market enterprise. In private educational institutions, it has been highly developed with modern teaching techniques, but at a very high cost, which is not affordable by the majority of society. In the process of commercialisation, the inequality in education has increased, with the presence of elite private schools and poorly funded public schools. A lot of the educational institutions have a profit-making objective and not good quality education, moral values and social responsibility. Yet another element that has added to the economic burden of children and families is the fierce competition from private coaching centres and the competitive exams industry. (Apple, 2004).

The issue of teachers still remains a problem in many areas, which adversely impacts the quality of teaching. Teachers are the backbone of the education system, and in many institutions, we don't have trained and motivated teachers. Poor teacher preparation, absence of professional learning opportunities, inadequate compensation, excessive workload and duties, and administration all can negatively impact teachers' effectiveness and satisfaction with their job. The absenteeism of teachers and teacher shortage continues to be a serious issues in rural and remote areas. Furthermore, the learning environment is constantly evolving, and teachers need to constantly update their knowledge and change their teaching strategies, which should include new technologies and learning methods. If teachers are not provided with adequate support and training, they may have difficulties in meeting the demands of the twenty-first century learners.

The examination mechanism, emerging competition in the academic field, has also created serious psychological and social issues among the students. The importance of marks, ranking and competitive exams in the modern educational systems is more than valued, which leads to high pressure on learners for studies. Assessment of the teaching and learning is based on memorised knowledge and delivery at examination and not in terms of creativity, critical thinking and the practical understanding. This pressure results in stress, anxiety, depression and mental health problems in students. Academic burnout, emotional disorders and even suicides among the students are alarming issues to be addressed in many countries. Parental expectations, peer competition and societal pressure add to these mental and emotional pressures.

There is one of the other major issues, which is that there is a disjunction between learning and work. Though the percentage of educated population has increased but lack of practical skills and industry-oriented training has resulted in many of the educated people becoming either jobless or underemployed. Many schools are still rooted in traditional curricula with an emphasis on theoretical knowledge, and with vocational education and technical skills, communication skills and entrepreneurship being neglected. The skills and adaptability that are needed in the labour market are constantly growing, and there is an increasing mismatch between the skills being provided by academic education and the skills required by the labour market. This disparity not only impacts the individual's career prospects but also poses bigger economic and social problems.

The other issue that has emerged in contemporary educational institutions is the lack of moral and value education. As a result, character development, empathy, social responsibility, and moral values have been compromised by the fast rate of modernisation, materialism and high competition in society. In many education systems, the moral and emotional development is less important compared to school academic success and professional accomplishment. Hence, problems of intolerance, unethical behaviour, non-disciplinarian and decreasing social sensitivity are being seen more and more among the young people. The importance of value-based education to develop responsible citizens who can contribute and support democratic and humanistic ideals in society is paramount.

In general, the salient features of the prevailing education problems indicate that the problems of the education systems are complicated and closely interconnected with general social, economic, technological and cultural changes. These challenges require a comprehensive strategy for education and learning, involving the transformation of the education system, inclusive policies, access to technology, empowerment of teachers, mental health, and the harmonisation of learning outcomes and moral and social development.

V. EDUCATIONAL RELEVANCE AND CONTEMPORARY SCENARIO

One of the most important factors that affects social development, economic development, technological development, as well as competitiveness in modern society is education. In addition to being responsible for the transmission of knowledge, education systems today have to be skilled, innovative, adaptable and socially responsible. Education is one of the most important issues related to human capital development and a country's development in the era of globalisation and fast technological development. Countries the world over are now realising the power of education on economic productivity, social stability, democratic participation and cultural development. Thus, the current problems and challenges of the education system are an issue of "burning interest" of the governments, policy makers, academia and society at large.

Technology has greatly helped to revolutionise teaching and learning. Digital learning spaces, online learning, smart classrooms, artificial intelligence, learning apps, and virtual learning environments have set the scene for interactive and flexible learning. Technology has given students opportunities for learning outside the classroom and has provided opportunities for distance learning and self-directed learning. Online education was highlighted as one means to supplement face-to-face education, and the importance of digital technology in the continuity of education was highlighted in the context of COVID-19. However, the pace and speed of digitalisation of education have revealed important gaps in access to technologies. However, in some instances, students from economically weaker sections, rural areas and marginalised groups have faced problems for a variety of reasons such as absence of internet access, lack of technological skills, lack of electricity and

digital devices, etc. However, inequity for joining and using technology persists and translates to inequities in participation in and outcomes of education.

Educational reforms have become a lot important in the recent past in the Indian context. National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 is a big step towards the reform and modernisation of the Indian education system. The policy highlights the importance of multidisciplinary learning, choice of subjects, skill development, learning through vocational, critical thinking and experiential learning. It is intended to make sure that students develop in all areas, minimise the case of rote learning, and stimulate students' creativity and innovation. Digital literacy, mother-tongue instruction at the base levels, teacher education, and inclusive education are also included in the policy. But, even with NEP 2020's grand and visionary goals, challenges are afoot in the effective implementation of any programme, as budgetary constraints, infrastructural limitations, shortage of trained teachers, and administrative challenges are all present. The inadequacy of facilities and lack of technological readiness in many schools, particularly in rural and less developed areas, for effective implementation of such reforms are still there.

The issue of mental health is also one of the crucial problems faced by schools in the present era. Students are exposed to many stress factors, such as a competitive academic environment and competitive exams, parental expectations, comparison in class, cyber-bullying, and career uncertainty, that impact their emotional and psychological well-being. Some of the social issues that impacted students' health at a high level are stress, anxiety, depression and emotional burnout. Students' creativity, confidence and personality development are curtailed in the quest for excellence in academics. In response to these challenges, educational institutions are increasingly introducing counselling services, emotional support programs, stress management programs and mental health awareness initiatives. Establishing a learning environment conducive to students in this era is very important, as it can facilitate students' all-around development and healthy learning experiences. (Noddings, 2013).

Another characteristic of modern education is that of inclusive education. It is hoped that the current education systems will offer equal opportunities to everyone irrespective of status, gender, disability, socio-economic status, caste, ethnicity, religion and

language. The idea of inclusive education is to help end discrimination and provide a quality education in a supportive atmosphere for all students. Special effort is made to include the students with disabilities, gender minorities and socially disadvantaged groups in an active manner. However, the concept of inclusiveness is not limited to a statement in the policy. It needs to be provided with accessible infrastructures, trained teachers, modified learning materials, supportive classrooms, and an enhanced social awareness. Despite the fact that there are several advantages to inclusive education, there are still social prejudices, lack of resources and lack of institutional support that hinder effective implementation of inclusive education in many developing countries, including India.

Moreover, the education competitiveness and international standards are increased by globalisation. In global markets, educational institutions are supposed to generate graduates who will be able to compete and help create innovation and technological development. This has put strain on institutions to excel in their quality of education, research production, employability skills, and technological integration. Meanwhile, issues of cultural identity, values, social responsibility, and educational equity are still pertinent. Therefore, the need for the education systems in the present age is to balance the modernisation and technological advancement with social justice, inclusiveness and human values for sustainable and meaningful development.

VI. EMERGING TRENDS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Education in the future will be more technologically dependent, flexible, learner-centred and connected. Technological development is fast changing the ways of teaching, learning, assessment and administration of education. The use of AI, machine learning, virtual classroom, digital assessment systems, AR and educational data analytics is gradually making its way in the education world. The technological advancement is altering the education landscape, offering new interactive, personal and accessible ways to learn. It is increasingly popular with the development of new blended learning models (a combination of online and offline learning) as it can bring more flexibility and convenience to the

learners, and at the same time maintain the presence of human touch and interaction in classrooms.

One of the most important new learning and education trends is that of "skill and competency-based learning. In the current societies and industry, there is a need to have people with not only the academic knowledge but also practical skills, creativity, communication skills, critical thinking, leadership and problem solving. Thus, the education system is gradually shifting from rote learning and exams towards experience and application in the education system. Employment and readiness to meet changing needs of the labour market are being encouraged through the promotion of Vocational Education, Entrepreneurship Training, Internships, Project-based learning and industry linkages. The emphasis is now shifting to the creation of lifelong learners who are able to continually adjust to technological and social changes.

Another new trend in the present education is individualisation. Data Analytics, Artificial Intelligence, and Adaptive Technologies optimise learning for students' abilities, learning styles, interests and learning rates. Personalised learning can lead to higher student engagement, motivation, self-confidence and performance. There are also improved self-learning and global education opportunities because of the emergence of online learning platforms, OER and digital certification programs. Today, education is more flexible and more international, where students are able to access the contents of education and professional courses from educational institutions around the world.

Including sustainable, equal and gender policies, digital skills, and lifelong learning are priorities in many countries. Governments and education institutions need to invest more in digital infrastructure, teacher building capacity, education research and tech innovation – in their best interests. The significance of emotional intelligence, environmental education, social responsibility and ethical awareness is even more highlighted. The reform of education is directed towards establishing learning spaces that foster creativity, cooperation, innovation and sensitivity to social values, instead of just the competition of education. (UNESCO, 2023).

Another important direction in the future is the continuous enhancement of interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary teaching and training. With a

growing, complex world and changes taking place at a rapid rate, the problems to be addressed require an integrated, collaborative approach, and the traditional disciplinary boundaries are becoming less relevant. Schools and colleges are encouraging students to explore several topics and adopt a broader perspective. This helps to enhance students' creativity, adaptability and intellectual flexibility.

But there are also problems in the future for education. Digital dependence can further inequalities where there are gaps in access to digital resources. Too much technology can lead to decreases in personal interaction, personal emotional connection and a decrease in social learning opportunities. Hence, the education system must make an effort to balance technological developments and human values. Education should not only be understood from the economic productivity and technical point of view, but also from an ethical and well-being, social responsibility, cultural and democratic point of view. In the future, an inclusive and equitable education system will be needed to achieve comprehensive human development and sustainable social development.

VII. CONCLUSION

Education is a potent tool for empowerment of individuals, social change and national development. In changing human behaviour, promoting social integration, developing knowledge and skills, and empowering them to contribute to society is essential. But today's education systems in the global community are confronted with multiple complex challenges that impact upon the quality, accessibility, effectiveness and inclusiveness of education. Equity and meaningful education for all remains a challenge due to issues like educational inequality, digital divide, commercialisation, poor infrastructure, teacher shortage, unemployment among educated youth, examination pressure and mental health issues.

The fast development of technology and globalisation has changed the ways of education and the expectations of schooling significantly. New opportunities to use flexible and innovative methodologies for learning experiences, digital learning, artificial intelligence and modern approaches. These have also resulted in deep social and economic inequalities, particularly at the same

time as the less-privileged populations suffer as a result of limited access to technological resources. In the context of India, the rollout of the National Education Policy 2020 is a positive move towards improving the education system in the country and meeting the needs of the modern world. But the way for the implementation of these reforms remains a long road, with a lack of resources, infrastructure, and logistical and administrative difficulties.

Looking at educational problems from the sociological perspective, education is revealed as part and parcel of the social system, social life, social inequality and power relations. Therefore, there is a need to improve the education system through a comprehensive and collective effort of governments and policy makers, educational institutions, teachers, parents, the community and the students. Focus should be given to academic excellence in the development of educational policies, as well as on ethical values, emotional development, creativity, critical thinking, social justice and inclusiveness. All people, irrespective of class, caste, gender, disability, religion and geographical location, should have access to quality education.

Furthermore, in the future, the education system must be a combination of technology and humanistic and moral values. All education processes should cultivate empathy, tolerance, social responsibility, awareness of the environment and its protection, and democratic citizenship, besides acquiring professional and technical skills. In schools, there should be more focus on mental health care, values, and empowering and building teachers' capacities. An education system without inclusion, equity and a holistic nature would not be able to equip people to face the challenges of the modern world and also contribute towards the sustainable development of society from a social and economic perspective.

To conclude, the current issues and challenges in the education system must be addressed to improve the knowledge and skills of citizens and develop a more ethical and socially responsible society. A strong, inclusive education system can prove to be an invaluable asset for people, for the strengthening of democracy, for social harmony and for the national and global development.

VIII. RECOMMENDATIONS AND POLICY SUGGESTIONS

The governments and educational institutions must have holistic and inclusive reforms to address the challenges faced by the education system. Increased public investment in educational infrastructure, especially in rural and economically weaker areas, should be made to provide equal access to quality education. Good classrooms, libraries, laboratories, sanitation arrangements, electricity, internet connectivity, digital learning tools, etc., are required in the schools.

Empowerment of teachers is one of the important factors of quality in education. Regular training and skill building in technology and professional training, as well as adequate compensation, are needed to motivate teachers. It is also important that teachers are motivated to adopt innovative and student-centred pedagogical practices which would be conducive to creativity, collaboration and critical thinking.

The examination system should be drastically modified in a way to minimise the undue pressure on academic study and advocate learning in the broader sense. Need to include Continuous Assessment, project-based learning, practical assessment and experiential learning in the curriculum. Educational institutions should focus on skill development, emotional intelligence, values and personality development rather than rote memorisation and marks.

The need for digital inclusion must be placed at the centre of the modern education system. The government should provide low-cost Internet, low-cost technological devices and technological literacy classes to students in disadvantaged communities. Through public-private partnerships, it is also possible to enhance the creation of digital infrastructure and facilitate online learning in remote areas.

Enhance the mental health services within educational institutions. Counselling centres, stress management programs, and career guidance and emotional support are available to help students deal with academic stress and other personal issues. It is important to create a positive and inclusive learning environment for the psychological well-being and overall development of students.

IX. ROLE OF SOCIETY AND COMMUNITY IN EDUCATION

The responsibility of education does not only lie on the shoulders of schools and the government, but is also in the hands of the communities and societies, who have an important role in shaping the education situation. Parents, community, NGOs, media, and civil society organisations are important stakeholders in terms of educational awareness, student motivation and social support. Parents are actively involved, and this has a positive impact on pupil achievement, behaviour and wellbeing.

The community's involvement in school management and school activities can increase the accountability and transparency of school management and educational quality. Awareness raising, school aid, volunteer teachers and social actions to combat school dropouts and gender disparities in school education are some of the ways local communities can contribute.

Media and digital platforms also influence the educational awareness and public opinion on educational reforms. Education programmes, documentaries, online courses, and awareness campaigns are all ways in which knowledge and awareness can be shared. Meanwhile, the responsible utilisation of media must be carried out to minimise misinformation and instil good educational values. Social cooperation is a very important condition for developing an inclusive and equitable education system. Governments, institutions, communities, parents and students working together are more effective and sustainable in the implementation of educational reforms. Literacy rates, social inclusion and participation in education can be greatly improved through community-based educational programs.

X. GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE ON EDUCATIONAL CHALLENGES

However, issues around education are not confined to developing countries; there are issues of inequality, technological adaptation, mental health and access to education in developed countries. The process of globalisation has brought competition in education and pressured the educational institutions to provide quality and innovative education at an international level.

Inclusive and equitable quality education is a human right that is consistently highlighted by international

bodies like UNESCO, UNICEF and the World Bank. SDG 4 is about quality education, and the aim is to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. (UNICEF, 2022; UNESCO, 2023).

In order to meet the needs of society and the economy in the future, many countries have made a significant investment in digital learning technologies, vocational education, teacher training and educational research-based reforms. The countries most frequently cited for having good systems of education - Finland, Singapore, Canada and South Korea - highlight the importance of practical, innovative education, delivered by good teachers that leads to improvements in the welfare of learners.

However, issues such as refugee education, climate change effects, economic disparity, cultural diversity and technology dependence remain in the global education system. Overcoming these challenges will take international cooperation, research in education and policy innovation to ensure that education remains accessible, inclusive, and sustainable in the world.

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