



Education in the neo-liberal era- A Case Study

Mohd Liakat

Kashmir University

ABSTRACT

Neoliberal discourses have come to exert a powerful influence on contemporary education policies and practices across the globe, often in the form of such market based reform measures as standardized assessment regimes, charter schools, and voucher programs. There is concern among some scholars that such neoliberal reforms rely heavily on information and communications technologies for their propagation and maintenance under the guise of educational technologies, the purpose of this literature review is to examine educational research on the role that information and communications technologies have played in the neo liberalization of education across the globe. In particular, I describe how researchers have made the concept of neo liberalism intelligible by deploying it as a phenomenon for inquiry in relation to educational technologies. I argue that future inquiry must substantiate the broad claims about the effects of neo liberalized educational technologies by engaging more directly with those most affected: teachers and students.

KEYWORDS:- *Policies Neo- Liberalism Contemporary Education*

Introduction

Educational policies all over the world are being continuously shaped by neo liberalism and its narrow ideological considerations. To put simply, neo-liberalism is a “complex of values, ideologies, and practices that affect the economic, political, and cultural aspects of society” Neo-liberal policies started in developed countries during the 1980s under the guise of reforms and within the last two decades, gained momentum in India with the increasing influence of the corporate sector and international players in education . In this frame, the wider aims of education are seen in economic terms as there is a growing demand for a highly skilled workforce. According to Allais there seems a “convergence between economic and educational discourses, with the former coming to give the latter its substance and content”. An intrinsic link between education and economy established as the new norm of academic success was seen to be vital for producing a skilled work force in order to achieve high economic growth. This ultimately led to define the role of the teacher as a key factor in raising the achievement levels of learners. Theoretical Underpinnings With the advent of globalization and rise in neo-liberal policies, education systems all over the world started adopting a regime of teacher accountability and performative assessment. Viewing education from the lens of efficiency and outcomes has a direct bearing on teachers and their preparation. Two contrasting visions about teacher preparation and professionalism emerged that led to constant debates about how teachers need to be prepared. In Zeichner’s view one perspective sees teachers as autonomous and critical beings who need to be prepared for professional roles and teaching careers; the other views teachers as effective managers to be prepared to implement the dictates of administrators. This latter view emerges from a notion of professionalism characteristic of neo-liberal reforms. Professionalism in this frame is increasingly defined by different ‘agencies’ along dimensions of ‘effective’ teaching, learning and ‘performance’ management systems. Furlong’s (2005), comments on how ‘traditional’ forms of professionalism, characterised by liberal ideas of knowledge and individual autonomy were replaced by neoliberal ideas of standardised testing as the sole outcome of education and learning. This trend put tremendous pressure on teacher preparation programmes to substantiate their contribution in terms of increasing student outcomes in schools This, in turn led to a greater control and monitoring of schools as well as of teacher education throughout the world . The neo-liberal ideology thus shifted the debates within the field of teacher education from “knowledge and content” to “outcomes and performance”. Darling Hammond (2006) argues that the push from the political arena tends to govern the enterprise of teacher education where its improvement and ‘survival’ depends solely on developing strategies to evaluate outcomes of the teacher education programmes. Debates around the “legitimacy” and “utility” of initial teacher education rest on the constructed need to link teacher preparation with teacher effectiveness. In several developed countries, performance based assessment of teachers; particularly evaluating their role in increasing learner performance has been the focus. This compelled many teacher education programmes to devise strategies to test the abilities of their candidates, which it is thought will indicate the efficiency of the programme. Such a narrow view of preparing teachers devalues the intricacies of preparing Theoretical Underpinnings teachers for diversity and complex compositions of learning spaces. It also ignores the intrinsic complexities involved in the process of learning how to teach. Over the last few decades, increasing privatization of teacher education in India has further deepened many challenges of preparing teachers for diversity and social justice. The much needed expansion of institutions for preparing teachers for their professional life has been largely led by private players. The Justice Verma Commission (JVC) report on teacher education noted that majority of teachers in our country are educated through sub-standard private institutes or “teaching shops” that has further undermined their agency to teach in diverse classrooms. The Commission also observed that the privately managed institutes of teacher training remain isolated from Universities, further circumscribing the development of intellectual and academic capacities of prospective teachers. JVC as well as the National Curriculum Framework for

Teacher Education) call for a structural change in the duration of pre-service teacher education programme in order to address issues of quality in teacher preparation. Despite policy frameworks that stressed on the need for developing the capabilities of teachers who can uphold the constitutional goals of social justice and equity in classrooms, the state's abdication from its responsibility of investing in the institutional spaces catering to teacher education has led to the deterioration of the quality of teacher preparation in India. Not only teacher education, neo-liberal reforms have led to the gross neglect of the state school system and the promotion of private schools of all shades and hues. Even though the state school system was actively neglected and left to languish, the 'dismal' performance of government schools as compared to private schools through large scale testing of learning outcomes was publicized as a strategy to justify the promotion of private schools. The effect of such an approach was twofold. First, it led to the construction of an 'anti teacher' policy narrative as commissioned research concluded that teachers were responsible for poor learning outcomes. This opened the way for the corporate and other non-state actors to enter into teacher education with the promise to 'train' teachers and build their 'skills' for improving the quality of education. Second, it led to and justified the gradual withdrawal of the state from investing in the education sector (Batra, 2011). Theoretical Underpinnings 5 The neo-liberal discourse around quality efficiency and accountability created the 'new' teacher who was seen as a 'human resource' requiring 'training' to teach for evaluating learner for a particular skill rather than developing capabilities through an education that develops their agency and the capacity to make professional judgements The larger aims of education where knowledge is seen as development and flourishing of one's self to its true potential are replaced by narrow objectives. In such a reductionist perspective, knowledge becomes "objectified, measurable and transferable" and is governed solely by economic imperatives). When education is reduced to a commodity then it takes "away the joy of learning, the creativity of teaching and the formation of strong public intellectuals" Neo-liberal ideas manifested themselves in the increased use of teacher proof materials by school heads; and reutilized, standardized classroom instruction. The adoption of standardized methods of teaching and assessment disregards the fact that learners come from different histories, embody different experiences, linguistic practices, cultures, and abilities. As a consequence, not only was diversity neglected as a major reality of learning settings such as schools, difference itself became associated with significant disparity in the provisioning of educational access and learning. In this way, the neoliberal ideas have also transformed the relationship between education and social justice). Over the past few decades, neo-liberal reforms in education have also widened inequities in education resulting from the growing diversity of student population. Before proceeding further, it becomes imperative to understand how ideas of diversity, multiculturalism and social justice become critical in these neo-liberal times. In the following section, an attempt is made to distinguish these notions from each other as well as to understand their relevance in educational contexts.

Understanding diversity and multiculturalism Evolution of ideas

Increasing complexities of the modern global world has resulted in multiple identities within and across societies. This multiplicity of identities ranges across dimensions of race, religion, gender, class, caste, language and ethnicity. In this context, the notion of diversity provides a nuanced and multifaceted view of identities that are socially Theoretical Underpinnings constructed. Individuals and/or social groups define themselves in terms of sameness or otherness vis-à-vis others. As argued by scholars, differences with regard to race, ethnicity, gender, religion, age, physical and mental ability, sexual orientation, race and class could be real or perceived; and affect a person's life opportunities understands diversity as lived reality influenced by an amalgamation of different contexts such as cultural, political and economic that manifest through socially constructed identities, images, ideas, and beliefs. Diversity can also be understood as variations in terms of individual difference contrasting with biological and cognitive differences. It can also be conceived as reality; experienced by individuals due to their membership in a particular racial, ethnic or social class group. These variations among people have positive as well as negative connotations in the social world. The phenomena of diversity has significant bearing on the educational systems across the world as large scale immigrations coupled with the spread of mass schooling have led to classrooms becoming increasingly heterogeneous. Nation states have been trying to find out various ways to 'manage' this growing diversity. Governments across much of the north have responded to the growing diversity by creating opportunities to understand a multi-cultural world via formal education. In India, diversity is seen as one of her greatest resources. The idea of diversity is not new for Indian society. India has historically been perceived to be founded on the principles of co-existence and plurality Integral to India, diversity exists across different religious, socio-cultural and economic groups giving Indian society a pluralist character. Beteille observed that diversity in India is also unique because differences in Indian society are arranged in a hierarchical manner. This peculiar conception of Indian diversity stands in contrast with some of the western ideas of diversity where it grew as a complex consequence of forces of globalization and large scale migration across international borders. These factors have changed the population scenario of the western world, from a predominant monotonous to a multicultural one. Joshee and Sihra recognise diversity as a "defining feature of both Indian identity and Indian democracy" While looking at diversity through state Theoretical Underpinnings policy, Joshee and Sihra argue that diversity is the basic tenet of India's Constitution and is based on the principles of secularism and social justice. At the time of Independence, India had the challenge of cultivating a unified society while preserving the diverse identities of its people across regions, languages, religions, ethnicity and socio-cultural groups. This provides a unique feature to India's diversity – with the state recognizing and promoting unique individual identities on the one hand, and cultural pluralism on the other; while fostering a unified national identity that is inclusive of this complex diversity. Committed to the "twin ideals of autonomy and non-discrimination", it is argued that the Indian state protects the rights of minorities and diverse ethnic groups by promoting their individual and cultural identities via a series of constitutional provisions. This includes the provision of prohibiting "discrimination on the basis of race, caste, religion, or language in relation to admission into state-supported educational institutions" The Indian experience of diversity is unique because it is constitutionally guaranteed; making India arguably, not only the most diverse country in the world, but one that ensures that plurality is protected via state legislation. The term diversity gained prominence in most western democracies of the world within the last few decades as they confront increasing ethnic and cultural diversity. Scholars argue that western societies were characterized by the presence of racial, cultural, ethnic, religious, and linguistic diversity when the ethnic revival movements emerged in the 1960s and 1970s . This diversity resulted from several historical developments Several western nations grew more diverse as settlers from different parts of the world moved across the globe due to large scale migration. This resulted in sidelining many of the indigenous population who became

minorities and faced exclusion and economic, political and social marginalization. For all these reasons minority groups led widespread agitations demanding the need to move away from a mono-cultural understanding of society to one founded on ideas of multiculturalism. A rise in the discourse on multiculturalism pushed for “political, economic and cultural equality and structural inclusion of minorities in the mainstream Each nation state had a unique historical trajectory of growing more diverse. Banks provides a detailed account of the conditions that were associated with increase in diverse populations in different countries of the world. Theoretical Underpinnings 8 mono cultural societies” Multicultural movements raised critical questions about people’s rights, equality and social justice. The civil rights movement² also provided a platform to assimilate cultural diversity in the social and political life of the American people. The civil rights movement influenced educational institutions such as schools, demanding them to become equitable regardless of race and ethnicity. Through multicultural education, an attempt was made to acknowledge cultural pluralism of the American society through the educational curricula of school.

REFERENCES

- Adams, A., Bondy, E., & Kuhel, K. (2005). Preservice teacher learning in an unfamiliar setting. *Teacher Education Quarterly*, 32(2), 41-62.
- Allard, A., & Santoro, N. (2006). Troubling identities: Teacher education students' constructions of class and ethnicity. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 36(1), 115-129.
- Banks, J. A. (2004). Multicultural education: Historical development, dimensions, and practice. In J. Banks & C. McGee-Banks (Eds.), *Handbook of Research on Multicultural Teacher Education* (pp. 3–24). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Banks, J. A. (2009). *The Routledge International Companion to Multicultural Education*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Bartolomé, L. I. (1994). Beyond the methods fetish: Towards a humanizing pedagogy. *Harvard Educational Review*, 64(2), 173–194.
- Banaji, M. and A. Greenwald (2013). *Blindspot: Hidden Biases of Good People*. Random House LLC.
- Batra, P. (2005). *Quality of education and the poor: Constraints on learning*. In M. Peters, B. Cowie and I. Mentor (Eds), *A Companion to Research in Teacher Education*, 417-33. Singapore: Springer, 2017
- Batra, P. (2009). Voice and Agency of teachers: Missing link in national Curriculum Framework 2005. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 4347–4356.
- Batra, P. (2011). Teacher empowerment: The education entitlement-social transformation traverse. *Contemporary Education Dialogue* 6(2):121–156.
- Batra, P. (2014). Teacher Education and Classroom Practice in India: A Critique and Propositions. In S. Chunawala & M. Kharatmal (Eds.), *Proceedings of episteme 4 International Conference to Review Research on Science, Technology and Mathematics Education*. India: Macmillan.
- Batra, P. (2015a). Problematising teacher education practice in India: Developing a research agenda, *Education as Change*, 18:sup1, S5-S18.