

Original Article

Evolution of Educational Research in India

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Educational research in India has evolved over the years slowly but not as an organised and systematic process. Some incidental factors and some deliberate efforts helped in reaching the present state of research in the field of education. If one traces history one will find that it all began in India when the Bombay University awarded a Ph.D. degree in Education to Dr. D.V. Chikermane in 1943 for his thesis entitled 'Factor Analysis of Arithmetic Ability'. To this date more than sixty five years have passed and more than eighty thousand theses and project reports have been added to the area of education. Similarly, instead of one university, more than 150 universities have started participating in this venture. Even the grammar of research has evolved to more technique oriented and complex designs of research. One can also witness a change in the documentation process wherein many institutions have come forward to do the task. Similar has been the case with dissemination of research findings. Efforts have been afoot to analyse 'What research says to the practitioners'. Even there has been a change in research practices. All these aspects have been discussed in detail in the paragraphs to follow.

Number of Research Institutions

Calcutta University Commission (1917-19) recommended for establishing Department of Education in the University of Calcutta with an idea to develop a centre for studying the problems of education in a systematic way. Later, Bombay University instituted a postgraduate course (one-year) in education designated as M.Ed. The students in the course were expected to mainly write dissertation to complete the course. In 1943 the Bombay University awarded first Ph.D. degree in Education. However, concerted effort in this direction (conducting educational research) began in 1947 when Central Institute of Education was established by the Government of India to conduct research on educational problems. The process was further strengthened by establishing six institutions in the course of twelve years (from 1947 to 1959) with built in infrastructure to undertake education related research. These included Central Bureau of text book Research, Central Bureau of Educational and Vocational guidance, National Fundamental Education Centre, National Institute of Basic Education and National Institute of Audio-Visual Education. However, these institutions worked in isolation in spite of the expectation that education was to be looked into in a holistic way. In order to get over this fragmentation it was envisioned to create an institution where research, training and extension could be integrated. The resultant was National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) established on 1st September 1961 as an autonomous institution. This organisation soon became the premier institution for educational research in the country in served as a model for the States and Union Territories in the country, which gradually established State Councils of Educational Research and Training (SCERT) and State Institutes of Education (SIE). Besides the NCERT, several other national institutions devoted to educational research came up in the course of time. Important among these were National Institute of Education, Pune and Centre of Advanced Studies in Education (CASE), Baroda. In the mean time, another incident happened in the educational scenario in the country. A good number of scholars came back to the country (in early 60s) after completing their Masters in Education on British Council Scholarship and took over the command of Education Departments in various universities in the country. Being educated in the Cambridge and other such universities these stalwarts were having good research acumen. They guided the university departments to plan research studies in the areas of Education. To mention a few are the Departments of Education of Punjab University, Kurukshetra University, etc.

The Programme of Action of National Policy on Education (NPE-1986) suggested that the programme of Centres of Advanced Study and university departments receiving special assistance be further extended and more funds provided for them. In pursuance this recommendation, some more departments of education in the universities were provided special assistance under three different categories namely, DRS (Department of Research Support), DSA (Department of Special Assistance) and Centre of Advanced Studies. Up to 2010 nearly 22 University Departments in the various universities in India got this benefit of SAP.

In order to promote interdisciplinary research UGC set up a unit on Sociology of Education at Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Bombay; Unit on Economics of Education at School of Economics of Bombay University; Unit on Social Psychology at Allahabad University, etc. The institutional expansion was further supported by ICSSR when it sponsored research programmes at Institute of Social and Economic Change, Bangalore, Madras Institute of Developmental Studies, The Centre of Social Studies, Surat, Sardar Patel Institute of Economic and Social Research Ahmedabad, A.N. Sinha Institute of Social Studies, Patan. These institutes contributed in the field of Education by undertaking research studies on their own in their specialised areas. Even various government and voluntary organisations also undertook research in the area of Education like National Institute of Public Co-operation and Child Development, Indian Space Research Organisation, Tribal Research Institutes in various States.

Research in education was also strengthened by the Open Education Systems. Special mention here may be made of ICNOU and NIOS who promoted research in the area of education for the disadvantaged sections of society. IGNOU introduced Ph.D. course in education through open mode so as to provide more opportunities to persons interested in the field of education. A good number of scholars not having Masters Degree in Education were attracted to carry on research in the field of education.

Documentation Process

Documentation of research in India did not come in one go. It evolved slowly. It started with NCERT publishing titles of M.Ed. dissertations and Ph.D. theses in early sixties and later coming out with Third yearbook of Educational Research in 1968. The yearbook suggested a model of documenting research, preparing trend report in different areas, identifying gaps and indicating directions for foreign research. Taking cue from the NCERT in this direction, many national level agencies like NIEPA, ICSSAR, Indian Institute of Education, etc. took up the work further. However, organised work in the direction was taken up by Centre of Advance Studies in Education, Baroda in early seventies which made an abstract of all Ph.D. theses and Post-doctoral research in India, classified the same and developed trend report of each classified area and come out with a volume entitled 'A Survey of Research in Education'. This was an improvement over the earlier surveys where only titles and not the abstracts were published. It was followed by second and third survey of Research in Education with Prof. M.B. Buch as the Chief Editor. In the third survey of research studies on Indian education completed in foreign universities were added. In the following survey of research classification of research studies was done with respect to areas like Early Childhood Education, Elementary Education, Vocational and Technical Education, Higher Education, Women's Education, Mathematics Education, Science Education and Creative Writing. The success of surveys prompted NCERT to take up the task of documentation of research studies. But typical of government, the bureaucratic system hanged on the whole process and the institutionalisation of this challenging task remained incomplete. The fifth Survey of Research in Education did come after a long gap by separating Abstracts from Trend Reports. The process of documentation got slowed down and volumes and reviews could not come by the desired time. However, some other institutions also paid attention to documentation of research. ICSSR and some University Education Departments also tried their hand on this tremendous task but the projects remained in their infancy. All said and done, the evolution of process of documentation cannot be denied.

Dissemination of Research Findings

In every research thesis, the implication of research findings are usually given as a ritual. The obvious reason has been that the research problems never arose from the needs of consumers i.e. practitioners or stake holders. These were usually thought of by the researchers without understanding field realities. In late eighties, the Navodaya Vidyalay Samiti explored this field when the Samiti wanted to modify class room teaching-learning process on the basis of empirical findings.

It browsed the Surveys of Research for developing specified abilities in the students. Reading material for teachers was developed under the title 'What Research tells to the Classroom Teacher'. The Educational Research and Innovation Committee (ERIC), NCERT also initiated work in this direction. These developments indicated that research findings would start influencing education policies and practices in the education scenario in India.

Stress on Quality Research

Another added dimension in educational research has been the stress on quality research. Most of the Education departments have started venturing for quality research in education. Though parameters of quality could not be identified, many University departments have started working in the direction of quality by following the guidelines given by the UGC or their respective universities. Some University education departments made publication of research papers as one of the precondition for submitting the Ph.D. thesis. Others went for having regular weekly or monthly seminars and peer reviews before or during research being carried out by the researchers. A part from it grammar or research was also stressed by making changes in the course curricula at Masters Level. Till 2000 the educational researchers were only studying Positivist research process and tried to explore the digital data by adding Naturalistic Inquiry, Phenomenology and Ethno methodology in the M.Ed./M.A. course curricula. It affected the research thesis also. The issues related to research grammar like research design, sampling process, hypothesising or statistical designs became streamlined in such a fashion that the researcher's confusion could be well taken care of. The change prompted many researchers to write the research report with Case studies as part of the research at Ph.D. level. The whole process changed the grammar of research. Instead of only stressing the sampling or tools of research, the researchers started adopting tools that measured thinking process of the sample so selected in order to get deep insight into problems of education. It was expected that the change would help in theory building and developing knowledge base in education. Another change came with the advent of statistical packages (available in the market) which made data analysis a very simple task. Because of this handling of digital data became easy and researchers started explaining their findings by grounded theory.

Numerical growth in Research : The research in the field of education has grown numerically over the years. Since 1943 more than ten thousand Ph.D. have been awarded till 2009. Reason lies in the advent of globalization, privatisation and liberalization. Private players entered education market and laid emphasis on production and result oriented priorities. Commitment of Private institutions to business aspect in every field could not be negated. Because of this people started opting for research at Ph.D. level. Obvious reason has been that there are more job opportunities and the chances of promotion in the private sector than the government institutions. Large number of men and women, therefore, started aspiring for doctorate degree in order to get election of being designated as Doctorate holder. Enthusiasm of teacher educators (who in order to be the supervisors) added to the army of researchers. The existing teacher education colleges or the university departments of education in the government aided sector showed their inability to accommodate all the aspirant researchers and enthusiast supervisors. The pressure of numbers toned up and private universities took up the challenges. The resultant has been mass production of Ph.Ds. Many education scientists have been questioning quality due to this mass production. The answer is debatable but evolutionary trend in research cannot be denied.

To sum up it may be said that educational research in India has grown over the years. With all pitfalls and shortcomings in research at Ph.D. and project level consciousness of education scientists about quality improvement in research can not be denied. It may be pointed out here that the present write up is not to paint a rosy picture of research in India but to point change in thinking level of the researchers, grammar of research and multiplicity of research designs. It in no way means that trash in research has stopped but there is need to see the other dimension of whole process. Nobody can deny the fact that problems in educational research have changed and the researchers have started thinking in different directions. This is an evolutionary trend of educational research in India. From simple preparation of achievement tests, the researchers have started taking up complex problems of research so as to solve the existing problems of education as a discipline irrespective of the fact whether the problems belong to classroom or the policy issues of state or centre. Let us hope that some day the researchers in education will be able to put forth solution to existing educational problems in country.

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