



INTERACTIONS: MICROPOLITICS, QUALITY, AND EDUCATIONAL INTERVENTIONS

Pradeep Ramavath. J

Ph.D Scholar, Development Studies, Institute for Social and Economic Change,
Bengaluru, Nagarbhavi, Bangalore, Karnataka

Cite This Article: Pradeep Ramavath. J, "Interactions: Micropolitics, Quality, and Educational Interventions", International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Modern Education, Volume 3, Issue 1, Page Number 463-468, 2017.

Copy Right: © IJMRME, R&D Modern Research Publication, 2017 (All Rights Reserved). This is an Open Access Article distributed under the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

Abstract:

This paper tries to uncover the interactional patterns between 'micropolitics' and 'education quality' in two rural schools. The patterns thus obtained are used to critique existing policies relating to 'quality frameworks' for rural schools as envisaged in The Right to Education Act of 2009 through mission mode program of *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan*. This ethnographical exploration uses micropolitical perspective on schools as descriptive and analytical lens to understand the manifestation of quality parameters at the village level. Micro-political behaviours, patterns in the schooling system are the keys to evaluate the strategies related to enhancing the (e) quality. It seems such quality frameworks are conceived in vacuum, disconnected, unreal to the underprivileged, disadvantaged communities in rural educational settings. Current paper brings out inadequacies in the quality frameworks of RTE act in ensuring effective participation to positively influence the long term growth of the children in the rural society. Further, quality interventions designed based on the narrow definition of community and the assumption of short route accountability designed to operate in the context of limited school autonomy have negative impact on the schooling processes and outcomes. Paper concludes with a note, if school education has to be meaningful and enshrine the values of our constitution and enhance the quality of life of the children, reduce group inequalities, it is important that underprivileged communities, backward castes who have high stakes in rural education also have a substantive say in setting their educational agenda at micro and meso-levels. This is feasible only through understanding of interactional patterns between the micropolitical actions in rural schools and their concurrent manifestations on quality provisions. Current study proposes ten micro and macro policy suggestions in order to fulfill the vision of achieving better quality by keeping micropolitical expressions in designing educational interventions.

Key Words: Micropolitics, Quality, Interactions & Rural Schools

Prologue:

In any system, the discourses and conceptions of 'Education Quality' are essentially the conceptions of 'education' and its aims (Kumar and Sarangapani, 2004). With respect to schools in rural India, these connections between aims of education and conceptions of education are blurred through the constant pressure of local dominating markers of hierarchy such as of Ability, Age, Caste, Class, and Gender. Only at the policy pronouncements by the state, we might see some synergic mirage between educational aims and 'education quality'. This mirage gets uncovered only when one starts exploring the micropolitics behind the implementation part of these top-down quality frameworks.

Micro politics has been explained differently by different social scientists and thinkers. It was Innaccone, who tried to explain micro politics in education in 1975. He said that, micro politics of education is concerned with interaction and political ideologies of social systems of teachers, administrators and pupils within school building. These may be labelled as internal organizational subsystems. It is also concerned with the issues of the interaction between professional and lay subsystems. They may be called external subsystems.

Blasé (1991), states that, "micro politics refers to use of formal and informal powers by individuals and groups to achieve their goal in organizations. In large part political actions result from perceived differences between individuals and groups, coupled with the motivation to use power to influence and or protect. Although such actions are consciously motivated, any action, consciously or unconsciously motivated, may have political 'significance' in a given situation. Both cooperative and conflictive actions and processes are part of the realm of micropolitics."

In schools, intra-organizational politics are a daily occurrence. There are political forces within schools that dictate how things have been done, how things are done, and how things will be done. The Micro Politics of education is about human behavior, how people use power to influence others and to protect themselves, how people compete with each other to get what they want and shape the tone of the organization. Micro Politics encompasses the daily interactions, negotiations, and bargains of any schools. 'Micro political' research has emerged as one of the new trusts in understanding the complexities of organizational life in schools.' Hence, school reformation involves both conflictive (power over) and cooperative (power with) political processes. The

cooperative political processes focus on mutual empowerment ‘through a process characterized by reciprocity, co-agency, negotiation, and sharing to achieve goals. (Kreisberg, 1992). The macro political situation (power over) usually subverts the micro political climate. Study of micro political climate in schools is acquiring importance in recent times. It has attracted many social and political thinkers of education. It is important to study the micro political climate of a school on several grounds.

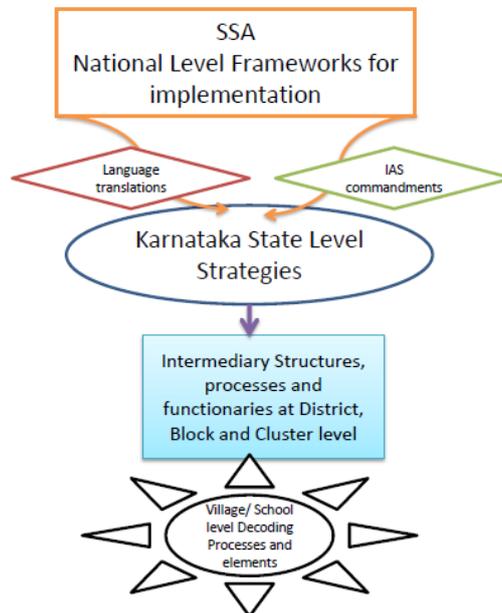
- ✓ The intervention at micro level is much easier than bringing in systemic changes at higher levels.
- ✓ Improving micro level changes would yield quick results than macro level political changes.
- ✓ Micro level political changes will ensure better results and can be monitored easily by local community than any outside agency.
- ✓ It will help in building local level multiple leadership and create opportunities for everyone to participate effectively.

Top Down Educational Interventions: Boon or Bane?

A number of studies in India have been carried out to understand the issues of universalization and majorly attempted to measure education quality through proxy indicators for large sample sizes. These studies essentially attempted economic rationale to schooling processes and generally use the indicators such as access, enrolment, retention, transition etc., to measure the universalization trends and measure the facilities in schools. They conduct the standardized achievement tests to understand the learning levels of the children. These one-time annual measurement exercises were carried out with an assumption that, all government schools have same traits, which could be measured and consolidated at different levels to arrive at comparable indices.

Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) and allied forces such as state education department, local NGOs, INGOs use such frameworks to measure quality in government schools. SSA provides its understanding about quality in its different *Avatars* (versions) through its yearly series of ‘*framework for implementation*’ guidelines in order to provide a monitoring and supervision framework for quality in government schools. These exercises are majorly carried out at the national level essentially through bureaucratic frameworks and participation of selected line functionaries of education department. Thus giving very little scope for representative consultations of teachers, students, and parent community in the whole process. At the state level, this process is merely a translation of national assumptions into regional languages with tinkering of commandments from Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officers serving the education departments (Figure-1).

Figure 1: Top-Down SSA Implementation Strategies



Soon after the consolidation of schemes and programmes of school education under SSA during 2001 maximum emphasis was given to expanding access through providing schooling facilities. Thus high priority was given to enhancing the infrastructure facilities; employ more teachers and provision for community involvement in schooling processes. Thus, the articulation of notion of quality was highly instrumental and started focusing on infrastructure, community participation, teacher trainings, introduction of new methods of teaching etc., (refer- Figure-2) from a top-down approach with giving space for local contingencies. This instrumental, mechanical approach went to a peak when state authorities started providing greater opportunities and priorities to measuring learning levels of the student community than understanding the reasons and remedies for underperformance. Soon after RTE became a fundamental right; SSA suddenly started pretending

to enlighten itself on the issues of ‘quality’ and ‘equity’ in a holistic manner and attempted to vision its strategies with larger aims of education, schooling processes etc., (refer- Table-1)

Figure 2: SSA Quality Dimension (2010)

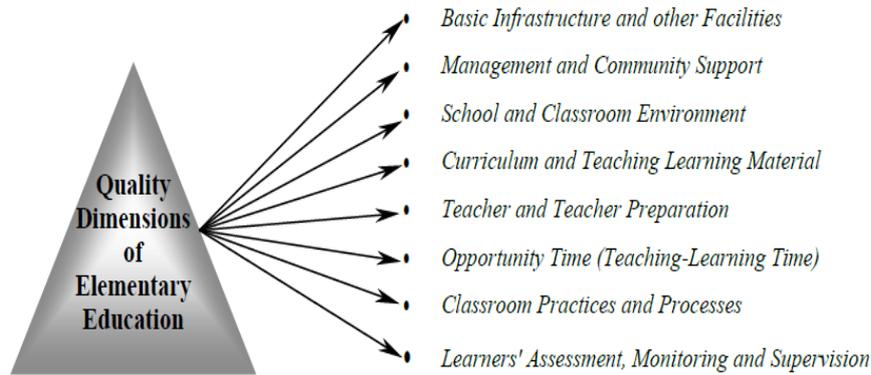


Table 1: Quality framework as defined in SSA 2011

SSA 2011 framework for implementation defines its core of quality education incorporating, <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appropriate aims of education • Key role of curriculum and syllabus • Learning in age appropriate classes • Subject balance and age appropriate syllabi • Learning materials • Pedagogy • Good use of time • Language policy <p>Other Essential Components: No corporal punishment and mental harassment, No detention, No expulsion</p>	Enabling components of Quality education 2011(SSA) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ECCE • Teachers • Teacher redeployment • Teacher qualifications • Training of untrained teachers • Pre-service & In-service training • Academic support and supervision • Training of academic and administrative support • Research • Assessment for learning- CCE
---	---

Thus, idea of (definition) education quality for rural schools in policy documents conceived in a vacuum disconnected from reality and is conceived in a way, which should qualify to be abstract, broad based and unreal. Most of the time these articulations are embodied in the broader educational ideologies, which are spelt on our national aspirations, Meta policy documents. But these lofty aspirations when comes to decoding and reconstructing into a measurable variable the bureaucratic setup (particularly IAS) delegates the it to the educational technocrats who take the liberty to isolate each variable and compartmentalise them into certain fashion on the basis of required measurement standards. What gets measured in the name of educational quality is ‘reading levels’, literacy levels of the children in th form of learning levels and standards. This combined with teacher related variables regarding their qualification, few access related indicators and over all they try to measure the outcomes in the form of retention of the children in the system. What gets missed out in the daily lived life of the children in their class room, in the school and their interface between school and community during their schooling processes. What they learn in and out of schools, what interactions these children are having as part of their interactions as part of the schools environment.

The indicators of quality are defined as standardised thinking that educational administration as an essentially rational and technocratic process. Contingency theorists () agree and recognise the fact that effective patterns of administration are relative to the contexts in which they are to operate, there remain the fundamental assumption that if plans are well conceived, clearly set out and adequately communicated then system can be improved. But most often these systems are drawn by “every day pathology” incorporating idiosyncratic, unpredictable, adventitious and intractable nature. These uncertainties are crafted at the highest levels of policy making processes i.e at the level of ‘abstract nature of policy invention, thus bringing a friction with real life ‘empirical realities’ of the school site micropolitical interaction.

The codification of idea of quality of education for schools are carried out by educational practitioners who need to satisfy the ‘measurability framework’ defined by the educational bureaucracy at top levels. Thus state authorities codify the quality notions into quantifiable variable, easily measurable indicators. This has inherent ‘unconscious biased’ thinking about measurability of educational quality. The ‘unconscious bias’ may be teachers and students are rational human beings who reproduce (practice, memorise, re-write and read) what is coded in the textbooks and SSA frameworks for implementation. But during the process of decoding the ‘common biases’ of the educational bureaucracy teachers, students act simultaneously resulting in frictions which are not made to synchronise and aligned to each other.

Design:

This study used the theoretical frameworks of ‘symbolic interactionism’ as research design and thus the findings are majorly dependent on the interpretations derived from the interactions between ‘micropolitical climate’(established by the actors, institutions, networks, and objects) with the concomitant processes associated with ‘education quality’ derived through a process of ‘social constructivism’. Theoretical and empirical construction of ‘micropolitics’ and ‘education quality’ as distinct but interrelated, dependent phenomenon were achieved through emergent, flexible research design embedded in interactionist, constructivist traditions. Two villages *Kannesara* and *Mailalli* were chosen to study the interactional patterns between micropolitics and education quality in a comparative manner. The schools *GHPS Kannesara* and *GHPS Mailalli* were selected as they performed better and achieved higher rankings during the assessments of children with respect to their achievements in Maths and Kannada language.

Interactions:

In *Kannesara* teachers have this common bias that Dalit children cannot learn maths as quickly as a student from upper caste do. Students in *Mailalli* blame teachers do not give chance to read lessons in classrooms. Rather they say most of the time they made to listen whatever teachers read from the text books. During the field interaction, it was noticed that an empowered and well aware community consisting of different stakeholders could definitely bring in positive changes in the micro political climate of the schools. The all-inclusive approach is found effective in solving many political issues in a non- conflicting, cooperative mode. In *these situations* the sustainability of this positive relationship has two important implications.

- ✓ It strategized the micro-political environment to bring the change and re-culture the school leadership processes; both are highly prone to politicization.
- ✓ It helps the stakeholders to re-design of local school environment according to the aspirations of new Right to Education (RTE) act of 2009.

Hence, nurturing of positive micro- political climate was deeply rooted in community empowerment process. Community accepts and supports teachers and teachers reciprocate to the demands of the community at large. The community is normally willing to share its responsibility in the non-academic tasks of teachers; teachers must capitalize on this, as it will give them more time to deliver their academic responsibilities. Such a concept of symbiotic process, which emerges in the school, suggests a shared responsibility for a shared purpose of school development. When shared responsibility in school process is “embedded in the school community as a whole,” there is a much greater potential for long-term social- sustainability.

Through the above field experiences it has been observed that micro-political frameworks help one to see the overt (intrinsic) and covert (extrinsic) processes through individuals (parent, teacher, head master, student, bureaucrat) and groups(teacher unions, panchayat members, departmental officials, caste groups) in the schools immediate environment acquire and exercise power to promote and protect their interests. Field insights in two rural school settings (*Kannesara and Mailalli*) did not show much positive influence of such overt and covert political activities on quality processes and outcomes.

The ‘official’ and ‘unofficial’ transactions only help to strengthen the bureaucracy, hegemonic brahminical social order through school sites in the name of imparting ‘equitable quality education’. For the sake of negotiation of resources (monetary and human) based on standard departmental norms- ignorant parents, voiceless teachers, local educational administration, top-down policy intentions interfere and retard the future prospects of rural children. These children are used as ‘laboratory animals’ to validate the assumptions set at the higher educational bureaucracy. The school systems in both these settings (*Kannesara and Mailalli*) show a constant decline in student enrolment and quality of schooling.

Decline in birth rates, changing socio-economic conditions illustrate some demographic reasons for this decline in ‘quantity’ and ‘quality’. ‘Overt’ and ‘covert’ micro political processes surrounding availability of school choices, neglect of classroom transactions, fear towards the bureaucratic procedures, neglect of core activities in school environment provided significant insights on degradation of school quality in teaching.

Thus, Quality has different meaning to different groups; it’s about the completion of physical and financial targets in time for head teacher, cluster resource person and educational bureaucracy, completion of syllabus for school, teachers. But when it comes to issues of quality for their own children it is about the higher order critical thinking, English knowledge, computer awareness etc. The basic question need to be explored further with respect to this aspect is on “*how can the education system deliver quality education to rural masses; the quality on which it is not at all confident/ sure of and feels that the present education quality is of substandard/ suboptimal levels ?.*”

Thus schools are ‘*intrinsically political and must find directions among people with potentially diverse and conflicting interests.*’ Teachers seem to have interest to perform their duties as prescribed by educational bureaucracy, they have over the time have become people who perform only rituals at school sites. Most of the time teachers do not understand the rationality of some of the programmes and their intentions. Why should they need to think ?, as the prescribed semesters in the school are so heavy and they need to complete the syllabus and need to complete the activities such as teaching, evaluation(continuous comprehensive evaluation)

conducting sports, cultural programs, distribution of the incentives(uniforms, text books, scholarships, meals) and writing records with in a short duration of three months.

Recommendations:

Through the learnings from the field exploration following are the possible recommendations for the education system to consider with respect to enhancing the quality of service delivery in government schools considering different micropolitical manifestations.

- ✓ Teachers need be capacitated to work and teach in the highly politicized world of school, village, and classroom, keeping all the positive and negative micropolitical behaviors into consideration. Thus timely in-depth orientation on micropolitical behaviors need to provided. This has to start on an immediate basis in order to realize the constitutional vision of education being a social change agent. The emancipatory power of education is embedded in such micro-initiations.
- ✓ Teachers should empathize with all the stakeholder like- teachers, students, community members, SDMC members to understand the micropolitical strategies, which will help them to enhance the quality of services in their school on a sustainable manner.
- ✓ Teacher should also be made aware on how their micropolitical actions at the school site and village have bearing on the student behaviors. This will help teachers to introspect about their own actions and long-term implications for the quality improvement processes keeping 'social justice' dimension in to perspective.
- ✓ Teachers in order to become reflective practitioners they need to be made aware of all the micro-political strategies exhibited in the school and classroom sites. Thus, timely friendly monitoring strategies need be designed than the present top-down bureaucratic strategies.
- ✓ Teachers need to understand the processes of appreciate enquiries and CRPs should be trained to carry out appreciate enquiries to enhance the quality inside and out-side the schools.
- ✓ Head teachers should be made aware of the micropolitical processes, which have significant impact on the quality improvements processes. They need to be provided with actions, which might have negative effects and degrade the quality at the school sites. Thus, they need to be provided with micropolitical and quality diagnostic tools to improve the standards of services at the school sites.
- ✓ HTs need to be educated about how their political affiliations at the local level, in teacher associations etc. have influence on the quality discourse at the local level. They need to be conscientised about the implication of their political affiliation and its impact different levels.
- ✓ Head teachers need to meet as community of practitioners in order to reflect their practices at the school sites. This process can be facilitated at the CRC centers.
- ✓ HTs can help teachers, students, community members to reflect on their positive and negative influence on the school quality processes in order to expand the zones of positive quality spheres at the village and school level. This will help the HTs to expand their circle of influence on the quality improvement processes.
- ✓ Teacher training institutes should provide opportunities for the teachers and HTs, both in-service and preserve to develop their insights on interaction on micropolitics and education quality.

Conclusion:

Denying of interference of politics in educational decision making deliberately ignores and suppress the realities of educational change processes at micro level affecting quality and makes it very complex to understand the processes, which contributes for enhancing quality. From a school management committee at village level to advisory bodies' education is 'Politics'. Politics, power, and policy changes determine the educational outcomes at the local level. If school education has to be meaningful and enshrine the values of our constitution and enhance the quality of life of the children, reduce inequality, it is important that underprivileged communities, backward castes who have high stakes in rural education also have a substantive say in setting their educational agenda at micro and meso-levels. This is feasible only through an understanding of interactional patterns between the micropolitical actions in rural schools and their concurrent manifestations on quality provisions.

References:

1. Blasé J (1991). The politics of life in schools: Power, conflict and cooperation. Newbury Park, CA:Corwin.
2. Innaccone L (1991). Micropolitics of education: What and why. Education and Urban Society, 23(4), 465-471.
3. Innaccone, L (1975).Education policy systems: A study guide for educational administrators. Fort Lauderdale, FL:Nova University.
4. Kreisberg S (1992). Transforming power: Domination, empowerment and Education. Albany: State University of New York Press.
5. Kumar, K., & Sarangapani, P. (2004). History of the quality debate. Contemporary Education Dialogue, 2(1), 30-52.

6. NCERT (2004). Modules on Quality Dimensions of Elementary Education under SSA. New Delhi: NCERT.
7. Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (2008, 2010, 2011). Framework for implementation. New Delhi, MHRD