

Strategic Analysis of Educational Interventions for Advancing Rural Development: A Multifaceted Approach to Diverse Knowledge Modalities

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Abstract

The educational system in West Bengal is characterised by a well-organized and targeted approach aimed at augmenting pupils' cognitive understanding. Although policy papers in West Bengal emphasize education as a catalyst for growth and social change, the tangible incorporation of pioneering initiatives into official policies and practices has not yet occurred. Drawing upon several research studies and field observations, this study attempts to elucidate the aforementioned phenomenon. Moreover, drawing on the experience in West Bengal, this study contends that it is imperative to recognise local practises of knowledge and education as legitimate forms of knowledge and education. This acknowledgement would enhance the understanding of knowledge outside the confines of formal and non-formal educational systems. This observation would enable us to see that knowledge exists in several forms, rather than being singular. In the contemporary era characterised by globalisation, it is essential for individuals to possess information that facilitates their connection with the broader global community, beyond their own spheres of existence. Simultaneously, it is essential to place significance on individuals' knowing and educating practises, acknowledge the significance of all types of knowledge, and cease the dichotomous and demeaning practise of categorising individuals as illiterate, a term that has been assigned to a substantial portion of the population.

Keywords: Policy, Formal Education, Non-formal Education, Globalisation, Cognitive Understanding, Social Change, Education System.

Introduction

The state of West Bengal has continually prioritised education as a crucial tool for fostering growth. Commencing in 1956, the nation has successfully executed a series of 12 periodic plans, varying in duration between five and three years, and is now transitioning towards the implementation of the 13th plan. Education was emphasised as a crucial factor in growth throughout the majority of these strategies. However, the majority of these programmes failed to prioritise the establishment and execution of initiatives aimed at enhancing the connection between education and development, with just a limited number of exceptions. The notion of a direct correlation between education and development pertains to the explicit influence of education, educational institutions, or educational endeavours on local and national processes of development. This impact manifests in the form of tangible and beneficial changes or transformations in individuals' quality of life, as well as broader social transformations. Furthermore, these changes are sustainable in nature, ensuring long-term positive outcomes. Undoubtedly, education is a fundamental element of development. However, the present research aims to examine the interplay between education and development within the context of West Bengal.

The primary aim of this study is to elucidate the disparity that exists between officially declared policy goals and the practical implementation thereof in regards to the interplay between education and development. Based on the case of West Bengal, which exemplifies the limited correlation between education and development, I suggest that recognising the significance of local and internal processes in knowledge acquisition and education is crucial. It is essential to acknowledge the existence of many types of knowledge and recognise that individuals possess their own unique methods of acquiring information and engaging in educational practises. The recognition of this reality is acknowledging that categorising someone as illiterate solely based on their lack of standardised reading and numeracy abilities is not only superfluous but also demeaning. Prior to delving into these matters, I will start by

providing a brief overview of the historical development of the contemporary education system in West Bengal.

The present state of education in West Bengal

West Bengal, with its significant socio-cultural and physical heterogeneity, spans approximately 147 thousand square kilometres and houses around 26.5 million individuals. Within this diverse region, there are over 100 distinct castes or social groupings. This region characterised by a low per capita income of US\$ 706, has shown a stagnant development trajectory in recent times, with an annual growth rate ranging from three to five percent (Ministry of Finance [MOF], 2013). According to the National Planning Commission (NPC, 2013), over 25% of the population is reported to fall below the officially established poverty threshold. Furthermore, the nation continues to grapple with the persistent issue of socioeconomic and political disparities, which remains a significant problem yet to be effectively tackled.

Throughout history, the presence of hilly terrain inside the nation has presented challenges in terms of mobility, resulting in the development of distinct Aesthetic paradigms and morals among the inhabitants residing in various regions. As a result of challenges pertaining to mobility and communication, individuals developed a distinct aesthetic and economic framework that first relied on basic survival but has now evolved into a self-sufficient system that coexists harmoniously with the natural environment. Individuals have cultivated their own understanding, abilities, frameworks, and methodologies to effectively utilise and oversee the resources provided by nature, navigate their daily circumstances and interactions, and engage in their preferred modes of communication. The procedures mentioned were subject to little governmental intervention, with the exception of tax collection and law enforcement, as noted by Stiller and Yadav (1979). Despite the occurrence of intermittent development initiatives initiated by the state, no deliberate interventions were implemented until the year 1951.

The political transformation that occurred in the nation in 1951 resulted in a shift in state policy, hence initiating the commencement of deliberate development interventions inside the country. This marked the beginning of international development aid practises. Consequently, West Bengal was able to garner foreign assistance, facilitating the beginning of its developmental endeavours. The first education development plan was initiated by the government in 1956, as an integral component of its initial five-year development plan. The plan had a high level of clarity on its purpose to establish a centralised education system inside the nation. This effort was undertaken with the aim of fostering Unity on a national scale (Pandey, K. C., & Wood, 1956). An additional aim of the strategy was to establish a connection between education and development. Education was seen as a mechanism for fostering progress and advancement. According to Pandey et al. (1956), the first education plan said that the nation was characterised by a condition of complete barbarism and ignorance (p. 74). Based on the proposed strategy, the primary factor contributing to this outcome was primarily attributed to a deficiency in educational attainment within the nation. The plan explicitly underscored the indispensability of technological and scientific education, emphasising that the absence thereof would impede developmental progress, particularly in comparison to other nations. The plan placed significant importance on the goals of national unity and development, and established a connection between these objectives and the field of education. Nevertheless, due to the prevailing political instability at that period, the implementation of several measures included in the plan aimed at enhancing the education system was hindered (Aryal, 1970). However, as a result of a significant rise in government funding for education and the growing interest in pursuing education, several educational institutions were created across the nation (Wood, 1965, p. 10).

In the year 1960, the state of West Bengal saw a significant political transformation. The monarch at that time abolished the system of parliamentary democracy and implemented a single-party political structure called Panchayat, characterised by authoritarian governance and extensive control over political and social affairs. In the wake of a particular political regime, the National Education System Plan was implemented by the government in 1971, signifying a comprehensive restructuring of the educational framework inside the nation. The National Education Standardisation Programme included the nationalisation and centralization of all educational institutions inside the country. Consequently,

a unified management structure, standardised curriculum and texts, and uniform practises were implemented nationwide. Like the first education plan implemented in 1956, the National Education Strategic Plan similarly prioritised the connection between education, development, and national unity. However, it operated within the constraints imposed by the prevailing political structure at that time. The Ministry of Education (MOE, 1971) clearly stated the purpose of (i) National Education System Plan, (ii) National Education Standardisation Programme and (iii) National Education Strategic Plan, as the production of citizens who would adhere to the principles of the panchayat system. One of the goals of the strategy was to establish a connection between education and development. The Ministry of Education (MOE, 1971) even embraced the motto "education for development."

West Bengal had significant political transitions in both 1990 and 2006. In the year 1990, a widely supported movement successfully deposed the panchayat system, leading to the reinstatement of a parliamentary and constitutional monarchy as the prevailing political structure inside the nation. Nevertheless, this particular political structure proved to be unsustainable in the long run. The commencement of an armed insurgency against the prevailing political system may be attributed to the perceived incompetence, corruption, and discriminatory practises of the political parties and their leaders, as well as the enduring issues of exclusion and poverty. This insurgency was spearheaded by a communist group known as the Maoists. The Maoist movement effectively capitalised on public discontent with the prevailing socio-political order, therefore proliferating and consolidating their violent and disruptive insurgency throughout the nation. The culmination of the crisis occurred in 2006 when a Comprehensive Peace Agreement was reached between the government and the Maoists. This agreement resulted in the erosion of the long-standing monarchy in West Bengal and subsequently led to the establishment of a republic in the country.

The aforementioned political events have had a significant impact on the educational processes inside the nation. The course of education in West Bengal has consistently undergone modifications in response to political shifts. However, these adjustments have had little success in addressing crucial concerns such as quality, fairness, relevance, and efficiency within the education system. While the nation has made significant strides in increasing primary school enrolment rates, concerns over the quality of education have consistently arisen, with issues such as grade repetition and student dropout rates persisting. Numerous studies on learning attainment have continuously shown that the average academic performance of children in major subject areas such as social studies, science, and mathematics has been persistently below or around 50%. Following a concise examination of the educational landscape in West Bengal and its contextual factors, the focus now shifts towards a comprehensive analysis of the region's educational policies and practises. This evaluation will be conducted with the aim of assessing their impact on the overall development of West Bengal.

West Bengal education policy and practise are the topic of this debate

The initiation of development practises in West Bengal during the 1950s was primarily characterised by a shift from the traditional agrarian and rural lifestyle towards a more modernised, mechanised, and urbanised way of life. This transformation was evident in various aspects such as the construction of infrastructure including roads and buildings, the adoption of mechanised and commercialised farming methods, the establishment of educational institutions and training centres, as well as the development of healthcare facilities and industrial units, among others. According to the Government of West Bengal (GON, 1956), the initial development plan introduced in 1956 articulated its primary objective as the enhancement of production, employment, living standards, and overall welfare nationwide. This was intended to provide the populace with increased prospects for a more prosperous and fulfilling existence (p. 1). This perspective aligns with the dominant development philosophy worldwide, which advocates for the implementation of development policies and practises in developing nations that are presently lagging behind, with the aim of bridging the gap and attaining a level of development comparable to that of Western countries. The contention posited was that by using such an approach, emerging nations will eventually achieve parity with established nations, so shedding their impoverished, undeveloped, and lagging status. According to Pandey et al. (1956), the rejection of the conventional life pattern and knowledge base was deemed unsuitable for growth and development. Individuals were encouraged to emerge from a state of 'darkness' (p. 83). According to

Carmen (1996), the concept of development has been strategically presented in a manner that fosters a sense of mystery. This deliberate approach enables those who are already developed to persist in a perilous state of self-deception, while simultaneously causing the undeveloped to internalise the belief that they are inherently unable, lacking competence, and the root of the issue (p. 1).

According to the first educational strategy introduced in 1956, it was acknowledged that technological advancements and education are crucial for enhancing the economic circumstances of the nation (p. 83, OECD (2016), *Innovating Education and Educating for Innovation: The Power of Digital Technologies and Skills*, OECD Publishing, Paris., ISBN: ISBN 978-92-64-26508-0). The message conveyed by the paper was unambiguous, emphasising the significance of the system, knowledge base, and practises that had been cultivated through several generations. The state of West Bengal is characterised by a perceived lack of civilization and knowledge. In order to progress and move away from this state of ignorance, it is suggested that the region should abandon its existing institutions and practises, and instead embrace contemporary technology and education originating from Western societies. Carmen (1996) said that a deliberate cultivation of mystification was instilling in the people of West Bengal a perception of their own incapability, incompetence, and responsibility for societal issues. This elucidates the start of West Bengal's development efforts and the depiction of the interplay between contemporary education, namely formal schooling, and the process of development. The aforementioned concept emerged as a consequence of the prevalent development philosophy at that time, which saw education as a vehicle for fostering growth. The significance of education in addressing poverty, enhancing income levels, promoting health and nutrition, and decreasing family size was extensively emphasised in the World Development Report of 1980 (World Bank, 1980). The unquestioning endorsement of the connection between education and development has under scrutiny, with scholars such as Chabbot and Ramirez (2006) and Takala (2010) arguing that this link is fraught with issues.

As previously mentioned, the educational policies implemented in West Bengal between 1956 and 1971 put significant importance on the interconnection between education and development. The aforementioned focus was seen in the successive implementation of periodic development programmes inside the nation. According to the National Planning Commission (NPC, 2003, p. 382), the introductory statement in the education chapter of the Tenth Plan (2002-07) asserts that education serves as the means for fostering comprehensive development within a nation. Similarly, the Twelfth Plan (2010-2012) has delineated education as a mechanism for fostering the economic and social metamorphosis of the nation (NPC, 2011, p. 177). Despite the considerable attention given to the correlation between education and development, there is a notable absence of initiatives or interventions within the education sector that directly contribute to the advancement of national and local development processes. The policymakers and planners of West Bengal saw the connection between education and development, although in an indirect manner. The premise posits that the expansion of educational possibilities, the inclusion of both genders in the educational sphere, and the acquisition of skills and information via schooling are factors that undoubtedly foster growth. Hence, the connection between education and development has mostly been shown in a theoretical manner. There was a lack of effort to establish a practical connection between these two significant social processes.

The primary objectives of the education policy of West Bengal are centred on key areas such as ensuring access, promoting retention, improving quality, and boosting outcomes within the education system. Additionally, there is a strong emphasis on bolstering capacity development and improving the overall management efficiency of the system. Similarly, the promotion of inclusion and equality has been seen as fundamental components of educational intervention. Numerous initiatives have been implemented to enhance these facets, mostly with the assistance of donors. Since the 1980s, a multitude of initiatives and endeavours have been undertaken with the aim of enhancing the educational landscape in the nation, specifically focusing on the primary and secondary school levels. Several projects or programmes that prioritised elementary or basic education may be identified. For instance, during the 1980s, there was the Education for Rural Development initiative, often referred to as the Seti Project. Similarly, in the 1990s, the Basic and elementary Education Project was implemented. Furthermore, in the 2000s, the Education for All programme spanning from 2004 to 2009 was launched. The most recent addition to this series is the

School Sector Reform Plan (SSRP) 2009-2013, which is supported by many donors (MOE, 2009). With the exception of the Seti project, the other initiatives or programmes lacked elements that would facilitate the establishment of a direct correlation between education and development in West Bengal.

The link between learning and progress has been repeatedly emphasised in regular schemes, but no specific measures or actions have been taken to address this issue. Plans for the education sector, for example BPEP, EFA 2004-09, and SSRP, on the other hand, have ignored this factor in favour of others, such as those connected to thinking and teaching. The aforementioned plans have placed emphasis on various facets, including but not limited to: augmenting student enrolments; affording educational opportunities to individuals unable to attend formal schooling through non-formal programmes; enhancing the proficiency of educators, curricula, and instructional materials; constructing superior infrastructure and amenities; and advancing the quality of education and academic achievements. Their attention was thus limited to the confines of the educational institution, resulting in a disregard for the need of situating education within a wider socio-cultural, political, and economic framework. The external perception of education in West Bengal is often criticised for its perceived limited involvement and relevance in the local and internal dynamics of the community in which it operates (Bhatta, 2009; Shields & Rappleye, 2008). When given the chance to engage with individuals from various regions of the country, it becomes evident that there is a consensus regarding the significance of education in enabling individuals. However, it is also observed that contemporary schooling has made limited contributions towards fostering favourable societal transformations within the local context. This is primarily attributed to the fact that educational programmes have insufficient alignment with the aesthetic norms, financial circumstances, and states of affairs of those areas. While the current education strategy in West Bengal has been criticized for not establishing a direct connection between education and development, there have been notable efforts within the education system, particularly in the context of rural development. These practises have been implemented in the state of West Bengal, including within the government sector. Similarly, several non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have also directed their efforts towards this particular objective. Regrettably, they are not enough capable of doing the assigned duty. In the present discourse, I want to examine this particular facet as an illustrative instance of endeavours undertaken in West Bengal with the objective of establishing a direct correlation between education and rural development.

This research explores West Bengal's methods of integrating education with rural development

Prior to 1950, West Bengal lacked systematic practises of education beyond the conventional methods of teaching and learning that were mostly focused on skills development within the family or community setting. One practise that was implemented by the government in 1947 was referred to as basic education. The primary objective of this initiative was to provide students with craft-based educational opportunities. However, it had a very short lifespan and ultimately failed within a few years of its inception owing to a lack of government support (Sharma, 2003). Another unsuccessful initiative was the attempt to introduce vocationalisation into secondary school in 1971. As part of this initiative, it was mandatory for all secondary school students to engage in skills-based coursework. The duration of this endeavour was limited due to inherent inefficiencies inside the system and suboptimal design choices.

In the mid-1970s, two significant endeavours were implemented with the assistance of donors to enhance the pertinence and significance of education in rural regions and among rural populations (Shrestha, 1977). The two programmes, located in Dandapakhar in the Sindhupalchok district and Lahachok in the Kaski district, primarily focused on literacy initiatives. These programmes aimed to establish connections between literacy and self-determination, relationships between women and men, wage production, physical well-being, and sewerage are just a few of the many indices related to agrarian change. Through the integration of learning with the practical experiences of both male and female participants, these programmes have shown that education has the potential to significantly contribute to substantial rural development, provided that it is well planned and effectively executed. To enhance the scope of these efforts, namely the Lahachok projects, the government introduced a novel endeavour called Education for Rural Development, often referred to

as the Seti Project, during the 1980s. This initiative was targeted at the very isolated and underdeveloped far western regions of the nation. This project has the potential to demonstrate how education may serve as a catalyst for rural development and change in geographically isolated rural regions, provided that it is developed and executed with an innovative methodology (UNESCO/UNDP, 1985). Both traditional and non-traditional forms of education were considered while planning the project's pursuits. Operational the ability to read and native content-driven literacy resources, village reading centres, females' learning, training for teachers, and teacher/school resource offices were all included into the project. Health and sanitation, farming, revenue generation, and reforestation were all given high priority as part of the development process. The program's goals were successfully met, and considerable improvements were made to learning across the endeavour areas.

However, the Seti initiative did not achieve consolidation or expansion in other regions of the nation. The primary reason for this may be attributed to the nature of education in West Bengal, which has been characterised by a strong emphasis on compartmentalization and a narrow focus on pedagogical and instructional methods. This situation has mostly been influenced by external donors' interventions in the education sector in West Bengal. The contributions made in the field of education were mostly limited to educational institutions and institutes. In spite of the discourse around education for development as outlined in periodic plans, projects and programmes within the education sector have mostly disregarded the objectives of education for development. Furthermore, these initiatives have seldom been conceptualised as comprehensive programmes, particularly within the formal education sector. This observation highlights the existence of deficiencies in the connection between long-term objectives for growth and short-term strategies for the education system. With the exception of a limited number of experiments and initiatives, the formal education system in West Bengal exhibits a significant disconnect from the requirements of local communities and the day-to-day realities of individuals.

One innovation that persisted and underwent expansion within the Seti initiative was the introduction and development of community learning centres (CLCs). The Community Learning Centre (CLC) initiative was initiated in West Bengal during the 1990s with the primary goals of enhancing educational accessibility for all individuals and fostering growth, empowerment, and change (UNESCO, n.d.). Community Learning Centres (CLCs) primarily emphasise alternative educational settings and are primarily oriented towards empowering individuals to choose their own future, leading to a life characterised by high quality, autonomy, and competence (UNESCO, 2011). Over the course of two decades, the establishment of over 1000 Community Learning Centres (CLCs) has been seen in West Bengal, including both rural and urban regions throughout the nation. The activities conducted by these centres exhibit a range of diversity, with a primary focus on facilitating literacy lessons for both women and men, as well as out-of-school children. Additionally, these centres engage in skills training, revenue creation initiatives, and many other undertakings. Similarly, these institutes have also been facilitating diverse gatherings for socialising with other members of the group and the community at large. These activities have significantly contributed to the empowerment of individuals via the enhancement of their awareness, income, quality of life, and communication abilities. Moreover, these institutes have also made significant contributions to the implementation of developmental initiatives. Indeed, it is accurate to assert that there exists variation in the levels of success across different centres. A significant portion of individuals lack the ability to engage in activities that have substantial significance. Nevertheless, it has been widely recognised that Community Learning Centres (CLCs) has significant potential for facilitating rural development (UNESCO, 2011).

It is important to acknowledge that educational policies and programmes have placed significant focus on factors such as equality and inclusion. Various initiatives have been launched to address these objectives. Various policy initiatives and projects have been implemented to promote equality and inclusion in education for disadvantaged and marginalised groups, including women, those living in poverty, and social groups like as Dalits, as well as those based on religion and language (MOE, 2009). These efforts have made significant contributions towards the transformation of West Bengal society. In contemporary West Bengal society, the concepts of awareness and empowerment have emerged as prominent themes. Individuals who were formerly disadvantaged and marginalised have had a significant increase in their awareness of their rights and have also gained empowerment in several

aspects (Central Bureau of Statistics [CBS], 2006; Aasland & Haug, 2011). Many artistic, commercial, and political advances have contributed to these transformations; yet, the significance of education remains noteworthy. The ability to read and write, sometimes referred to as literacy, has had a significant impact on the lives of several individuals, particularly women (UNDP, 2004). The acquisition of literacy skills has the potential to elevate a woman's social standing and sense of self within her familial and communal contexts, while also positively impacting her own well-being (Robinson-Pant, 2000). The connection between literacy in West Bengal and development discourse has been established, with scholars such as Robinson-Pant (2010) seeing it as a significant contribution to the overall development of the region. Government-supported projects, as well as international and non-governmental organisations (I/NGOs), often implement literacy initiatives in conjunction with other activities such as group development, income production, savings and credit, and awareness building. This method establishes a direct correlation between literacy or education and the process of growth. In addition to conventional educational endeavours, there exist supplementary educational initiatives that have played a significant role in facilitating rural change. The practises of e-villages (Thapa, 2009), community radio, and mobile learning have significant relevance. The concept of e-villages involves the electronic interconnection of a group of villages, enabling them to access various services in areas such as education, healthcare, sanitation, and commerce. Following the late 1990s, there was a notable proliferation of FM stations and community radios throughout the terrain of West Bengal. This development has provided a significant avenue for education, raising awareness, and facilitating social and political reform. Mobile learning is a relatively recent phenomenon in West Bengal, with little efforts undertaken to harness the educational potential of this technology. Given the widespread availability of mobile coverage throughout the nation and the increasing growth of mobile users, even in distant rural regions, the use of mobile learning has the potential to be a formidable instrument for educational purposes and the advancement of rural communities.

In West Bengal, sidewalk or outdoor plays and artistic endeavours frequently function as a method of public education and the dissemination of certain ideas. A diverse range of academic information related to farming, medical care, food security, hygiene, business management, small-scale lending, earning a living, capabilities, civic alertness, rights, group formation (including mothers' sections, child groups, funds groups, etc.), as well as the preservation and advancement of lifestyle and biodiversity are being communicated through the implementation of these strategies. Numerous non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and other entities are actively engaged in several domains. NGOs and cooperatives are implementing periodic initiatives that use local schools as hubs for providing various services to the surrounding communities. These services include areas such as education, information technology. The areas of focus include dietary habits and wellness, raising knowing and promoting self-reliance, creating money, and fostering innovation.

The preceding discourse highlights the inherent conflict surrounding the conceptualization and trajectory of the education system in West Bengal. Specifically, it revolves on the question of whether education should be structured as a fragmented entity or as a cohesive entity. The first function would provide a concentrated foundation for instruction, whereas the subsequent function would need a more comprehensive foundation. The current endeavours in broad-based education, however limited in scope, have shown the recognition of the need to establish a direct connection between education and development. However, with the exception of a limited number of irregular and small-scale initiatives aimed at connecting education and development, prevailing education policies and programmes are characterised by a high degree of compartmentalization and a narrow focus on cognitive learning and development. The aforementioned phenomenon may be elucidated by examining the historical origins of contemporary educational institutions in the region of West Bengal, with their reliance on external sources of funding. As previously said, the establishment of educational institutions in West Bengal originated as an outside supported initiative driven by an external ideology centred on modernization and development. This elucidates the reason for the perpetuation of an exclusionary and centralised educational system in West Bengal, whereby the power and administration is in the hands of individuals who are answerable to government officials rather than the local community (Onta, 2000; Caddell, 2005; Shields & Rappleye, 2008; Khanal, 2010). The educational system in West Bengal was established and executed with the intention of endorsing a

certain cultural framework upheld by a select group of established and emerging elites, including politicians, bureaucrats, entrepreneurs, and community leaders, in order to maintain their authority. The aforementioned practise had a greater degree of directness and expressiveness prior to the year 1990, however it continues to persist in varying manifestations (see to Avinash Dixit, 2002). The aforementioned statement holds true in relation to the development practises implemented inside the nation. According to Shrestha (1997), the planning approach used in West Bengal included the consolidation of development under the oversight of a centralised authority. This strategy enabled the newly established governing elites to exert exclusive control over the allocation of resources, mostly sourced from foreign nations (p. 65). According to Fuller (1991), the purpose of schooling was primarily to serve the interests of the state, as political elites sought to expand and strengthen their own lawful power within civil society (p. 13). The West Bengal state, or its governing authorities, are using education and development primarily to serve its own implicit agendas rather than prioritising social reform inside the nation. The donors, who have had significant influence in defining the educational landscape of the nation (Bhatta, 2011), have consistently linked themselves with the elites and bureaucrats involved in these processes (Incentives and Organizations in the Public Sector: An Interpretative Review Avinash Dixit, The Journal of Human Resources, Vol. 37, No. 4 (Autumn, 2002), pp. 696-727 (32 pages)).

The education system in West Bengal, particularly in regards to schooling, may be characterised as a mostly hegemonic process. This process, as observed by Gramsci, involves the dissemination of elitist ideals and norms across society, hence reinforcing the power and influence of the elite class (Burke, 1999/2005). By using the Freirian framework, it can be said that the current educational system in West Bengal mostly adheres to a banking model, whereby knowledge is seen as a bestowal from those who perceive themselves as knowing onto others whom they perceive as lacking knowledge (Freire, 1970/2005, p. 72).

The preceding discourse elucidates that the prevailing structure of education and schooling, as presently implemented, would yield minimal impact on societal transformation in terms of facilitating constructive and progressive alterations that empower previously marginalised individuals and groups to challenge established traditional and contemporary power structures. Moreover, it fails to provide a trajectory for individuals to achieve self-actualization, leading to a dignified livelihood and personal growth. According to Castles (2001), the term "it" should pertain to constructive social and political endeavours aimed at enhancing the well-being of communities and addressing the challenges arising from the effects of globalisation and other societal and technical transformations. Drawing upon these identical concepts, it is possible to conceptualise rural transformation as "a conceptualization of an active and constructive process of alteration and advancement of rural communities within the framework of both national and global shifts". In order to alleviate poverty, a global fund for Agricultural Development, better known as IFAD, defines rural transformation as "development of rural regions in all aspects" (IFAD, 2014). Overcoming traditional educational approaches and recognising the presence regarding native knowledge and educational practises within local communities is crucial to successfully achieving the goal of rural development.

Understanding Local Practises of Knowledge and Education:

The origins of education and learning may be traced back to the earliest stages of human civilisation. Nevertheless, it is important to note that the establishment of contemporary universal and mass schooling has occurred relatively recently, spanning a period of around 200 to 300 years. This educational model originated in Europe, namely in the Western region, and was primarily designed to foster allegiance among people towards the state or state-related objectives. Among these aims were secular and political aims. Among these aims were financial and political ones. Intent on accomplishing this goal. In order to do this, the establishment of education occurred as a standardised institution that operated in an objective and logical way, equipping pupils with corresponding ideals. As the notion of mass education eventually diffused to non-Western nations, it retained its underlying logic and significance. This phenomenon occurred due to the Western nations disseminating the concept of development and education to regions outside of the Western world. Due to historical and political circumstances, the non-Western globe was mostly positioned to passively receive the ideas being transmitted to it. During the process of disseminating Western ideology pertaining to development and mass education, the notion of Western supremacy or Euro centrism resulted in the portrayal of

non-Western beliefs, norms, and practises as occultist unreasonable, and lacking in rationality. Consequently, these non-Western elements were seen as "utterly barbaric and ignorant" and subsequently discarded.

The presence of a paradox and a difficulty is evident in this context. One perspective suggests that modern science employs a standardised and objective methodology to construct knowledge, utilising a shared language of generalisation and abstraction. This approach operates at a macro level. On the other hand, there are some that thrive thanks to more societal, experienced, and individualistic means of sustaining themselves. These individuals work at a micro level or within everyday contexts (Alessa, 2009). The inherent contrast between contemporary educational systems, which embody scientific principles, and traditional non-Western settings, accounts for the challenges non-Western pupils have in assimilating curricular content and achieving desired learning outcomes. Moreover, the prevailing paradigm of contemporary education has been characterised by hegemony, operating on the premise that children, their parents, and community members possess little knowledge, and that the primary purpose of schooling is to impart knowledge to individuals. The achievement of social or rural change is evidently unattainable given the aforementioned premise and viewpoint.

Furthermore, as previously examined, the inception of modern schooling was characterised by the rejection of conventional local customs pertaining to knowledge acquisition and education. In several regions, including West Bengal, individuals have cultivated distinct lifestyles, while developing unique epistemologies and educational practises to preserve and augment these ways of life. The primary epistemic merit inherent in conventional modes of knowledge acquisition and education is in their emphasis on experiential learning. According to Bates and Nakashima (2009), learning takes place within this particular system via the activities of observation, engagement, and prolonged interaction with experienced individuals and the surrounding natural environment (p. 6). Local knowledge is accumulated through several generations via a systematic process of experimentation and learning, actively engaging all members of the community, regardless of gender or age. This collective knowledge is intended to serve the present and future well-being of the whole community. Therefore, the processes of cognition and instruction are closely interconnected. Children actively participate in the process of knowledge-building while engaging in labour and interacting with older individuals. Consequently, it may be argued that the process of knowing and teaching is a continuous and perpetual endeavour, devoid of any definitive commencement or conclusion.

In various regions, including West Bengal, individuals have engaged in a multifaceted process of knowledge acquisition and education. This has led to the development of intricate land management practises, the establishment of extensive irrigation canal systems, the cultivation of physical fitness to ensure productivity, the evolution of trading practises, the formation of intricate social networks and leadership structures, and the emergence of diverse artistic expressions, among other notable achievements. Despite their efforts and accomplishments, a significant portion of individuals may still lack the ability to read and write. As educated individuals, we have labelled these individuals as 'illiterate'. Governments worldwide, with the assistance of donors and international organisations, have been exerting significant efforts to provide education and empower individuals. It is essential to discontinue the perpetuation of the disparaging practise that stigmatises illiteracy as a source of shame, a moral transgression, and a squandering of human aptitude and capability (UNESCO, 2007). It is imperative that we refrain from diminishing the inherent worth of those who lack literacy skills, but possess profound knowledge and insight. This situation is an act of injustice against the affected individuals.

It is essential to recognise that contemporary education and schooling are not the only means of acquiring knowledge and facilitating learning. It is crucial to acknowledge the existence of several kinds of knowledge acquisition and educational practises used by individuals and communities worldwide. Certain individuals or collectives may exhibit limitations in their ability to engage in literacy practises, although concurrently possess a diverse array of other essential skills and proficiencies. The recognition and appreciation of these factors are crucial. Furthermore, rather than embracing the practise of dichotomous classification by designating individuals as either literate or illiterate, it is important to see knowledge and associated behaviours as existing along a continuum. Recognising this notion has significant importance when discussing societal change.

In the contemporary globalised society, it is imperative that we refrain from rejecting modern science or modern education. The acquisition of this information has equal significance for both people and groups, including those residing in their respective traditional settings. The argument presented is predicated only on the recognition of the existence of many types of knowledge and education. By acknowledging and valuing all of these practises, we would not only be enriching our knowledge repository, but also demonstrating respect for the many cultures and identities of individuals across different genders and age groups. The recognition of this fact would constitute a significant advancement in the process of rural transformation. Furthermore, by including the notions proposed by Freire (1970/2005), it can be argued that the process of change necessitates concretisation, conversation, and praxis. However, these elements are entirely lacking in contemporary schooling and education. Therefore, it is imperative to modify the current educational system and its structure in order to facilitate experiential learning that aligns with the daily environment and requirements of individuals.

Conclusion

The state of West Bengal began the process of modernising its educational system with the aim of fostering growth and facilitating social change. Nevertheless, this objective has not been fully realised since the educational system in West Bengal was not originally created with this intention in mind. Therefore, except from its indirect impact on factors such as empowerment and awareness, and a limited number of initiatives aimed at connecting local schools with local development, the role of education in West Bengal has had little direct influence on rural development. This observation suggests the presence of a discrepancy between officially declared policy goals and the implementation of those goals, so highlighting a disconnect amidst scheduled periods of progress and the education sector plan. These aforementioned facts highlight the inherent conflict in the educational system's design, namely over whether it should just focus on cognitive learning or also include the facilitation of social growth and transformation processes. The presence of conflict and its lack of contribution to the local development process has resulted in the education system in West Bengal being seen as an external endeavour, hence limiting its function and significance within the internal dynamics of local communities. The present state of West Bengal's education system may be attributed to its historical origins. The initiative was devised and executed with the aim of establishing legitimacy for the norms, values, and practises upheld by both established and emerging elites. The escalation of conflict and controversy may be attributed to both the external origin and the reliance on donor support. The educational system in West Bengal has always adhered to a hegemonic approach, characterised by the adoption of a banking model of pedagogical practise, for many compelling reasons.

The empirical evidence from West Bengal suggests that the current state of education is unlikely to make a significant contribution to rural transformation in the near future. The reason for this may be attributed to the influence of modern education, which originated in the Western world. Modern schooling was intentionally structured to align with the concepts of modern or Western science, resulting in a standardised system that adheres to the ideals of objectivity, rationality, generalisation, and abstraction. Contemporary education has shown a tendency to disregard indigenous methods of knowledge acquisition and instruction, despite the existence of diverse and intricate systems of knowledge and education among communities worldwide. These systems primarily rely on interpersonal connections, hands-on experiences, individualised approaches, and internalised learning processes. Therefore, while examining the role of education in facilitating rural development, it is crucial to consider the underlying ideology, aims, and structure of the educational system implemented inside a given nation. For effective participation in rural development, it is essential that the education system aligns in accordance with the ideals of the aesthetic observed by the local population.

Acceptance of regional structures as significant artistic works has importance due to their relevance to human societies. It is important to acknowledge the existence of many modalities of knowledge acquisition and pedagogy. The recognition of such a realisation would represent a significant advancement towards rural transformation, as it would facilitate the integration of experiential and dialogic elements into the process of knowledge acquisition and education, grounded in praxis. This

implies not only extending the process of acquiring knowledge and education outside traditional and informal educational settings, but also modifying the structure of education in order to facilitate a more practical and applicable type of learning that aligns with the daily circumstances, requirements, and ambitions of students. The recognition and appreciation of individuals' knowledge and their respective frameworks for acquiring and disseminating information need the cessation of the deplorable practise of stigmatising individuals as illiterate only due to their deficiency in reading, writing, and numeracy abilities. These initiatives have the potential to contribute to rural transformation, particularly in the context of education for rural change.

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