

EXPANSION OF EDUCATION, ECONOMIC & SOCIO-CULTURAL TRANSFORMATION: A CASE STUDY OF NORTH-EASTERN HILL STATES OF INDIA

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ABSTRACT

The current study proposes a novel approach in solving age old conflict among the North-Western Hill tract region of India that needs to be addressed carefully. Internationalisation of education has been proven to be fruitful to both from economic and socio cultural perspectives for the home country of returning international students as shown by the recent trends. But existing literature shows no reports where international education acts as a tool for integrating a divided society and a country like India in its North-Western Hill tract regions it is even more important. This study aims to fill up this gap and aims to propose a method of integration that may prove to be beneficial for both the Government of Indian and the local residents of this area. The study would aid those intending to conduct research regards to influences of international education on the sustained growth of Hill states of India.

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KEYWORDS: International Education, Integration of Society, Conflict Resolution, Sustained Development, Socio-Cultural Changes

INTRODUCTION

Economic development is not the only factor in development rather development is influenced by many other factors such as *Societal norms, Cultural changes, Human capital transformation, Technological adaptation* and many other variables. Planning for development requires the planners to consider many variables that might be independent from each other but influences the entire process jointly.

Education as a tool for development has been recognised by many developmental economists and it plays a key role in sustainable development of regions (Bank, 1993). The internationalization of Education in the relatively recent history of mankind has introduced a new paradigm with the role of education in development and transformation of societies. Education is believed to influence the productivity of the Human capital and processes within the production, benefits of which trickles down to many spheres of development in a society. The direct and indirect impact of education, particularly at the Primary and Secondary level has been of keen interest for different development agencies such as UNDP, UNESCO and World Bank. This importance of Primary and Secondary education in development is widely accepted and we can see the recognition of the importance of this development factor with its inclusion in the Millennium Development Goals. But the recent shift of how education at the tertiary level is delivered and

commoditization of the same has created an interesting phenomenon that needs to be studied to understand the cross border mobility of education and its impact on the local regions.

Current research aims to investigate this phenomenon in depth the impacts of internationalization of education and how it contributes towards the regional growth and development.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Many researchers have looked in to the supply side of the higher education and identified strong economic contribution towards the receiving side of international students (Altbach, & Knight, 2007; Harman, 2004; Qiang, 2003). But the impact of this phenomenon on the home countries perspective remains a fairly uncharted territory in current literature. The globally moving international students not only can contribute towards their home country through increased productivity after they return, they also have the capacity to contribute through short term remittances while they are staying overseas. On top of that, their contribution toward the home development should also be considered for their contribution through societal, cultural and technological transfers that take place due to their academic training overseas. They become an amphora of knowledge and practices in the western world that can contribute towards the development of their home region. This has been proposed in a

number of researches particularly in Chinese context (Liu, Liu, & Qu, 2013; Stier, 2003; Stohl, 2007).

The North-eastern hill states of India (Assam, Mizoram, Meghalaya, Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh, Sikkim, Tripura and Nagaland) remain to be treated as the step daughters of the country with marginalized policies by the central government and also due to sheer distant geographic location being divided by a foreign country (Bangladesh) from the major part of India (Sarma, 2001). Interestingly with all the limitations and disproportionate treatment the region continues to grow in terms of socioeconomic indicators, per capita income, child nutrition and many other indicators. Sarma (2001) further claims that more than average literacy rate could contribute towards the sustained growth in this regions. Thus this region qualifies to be a good candidate to test our research hypotheses and will be a good control specimen to compare the role of international education as an influencing factor for development within the region.

Objective of the Study

The research aims to understand the role of internationalization of education in economic and socio-cultural growth of a region within Hill states of India.

Significance of Study

The existing literature shows no past researches where international education acts as a tool for integrating a divided society and a country like India in its North-Western Hill tract regions where it can lead to solve an age old conflict.

METHODOLOGY

The research will be carried out using a mixed method of study using both Qualitative and Quantitative analytical techniques to triangulate in to the research objective. Initially in depth interviews with officials serving in the region were conducted to develop the research question of the study. Using Romer's (1994) Endogenous growth model a multiple regression model will be constructed through a quantitative survey among the returning/expatriate students who has studied overseas from this region. The trends identified within the model will be verified through in depth interviews with the local government officials who are involved in local government policy decisions using a Fuzzy Deplhi technique.

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

The current article reports the findings of the pilot study conducted for formulating the research questions and research hypothesis. Twenty-four officials were involved in the interview process including government officials forms the Ministry of Education, Local government officials involved in

the disbursement of funds for various education projects, Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) workers working in the area and various social workers who works closely with the local residents in the area on a day to day basis.

The interviews focused on five different areas that relates to our research scopes: the instances of practices of sending students overseas as a mean to obtain higher education, the notion of achieving progress in developing standards of life, government as a key contributor to development, the socio-cultural impact of returning international students and the economic impact of internationally educated students in the hill tracts of India. Various common themes came out from the in depth interviews that helped us formulate future research scopes.

Overseas Education as a Practice

It is not a very common practice to send children overseas for higher education as compared to the rest of India (Cummings and Shotnes, 1985; Rajan, 2015). It is reported that there is an increasing trend in India to send children overseas for higher education and they tend to end up migrating overseas permanently (Kritz, 2015; Tan, & Hugo, 2016).

One of the government officials with the ministry of education believes,

"..... there are no such policies of the government to make it unfavourable for the students to go overseas for education however working in this region, I believe the parents lack interest in sending students."

This is in contradiction with a recent study carried out in this region where the researchers found affection towards the idea of sending students overseas among the parents from this region (Sengupta, 2015). Other officials mostly working at the grass root level also presented a variant experience stating the affection to be prevalent among the parents and particularly children to go overseas for higher education. One social worker reported,

"Most of the households I visit in my line of duty has aspirations to send their children overseas for studies".

Another local bank manager reported,

"We have a scheme for Student loan that is being commonly used by my clients".

Therefore, it may be concluded that there is a disparity between the perceptions and practices among the government officials about the rate of population going overseas for higher education from this region. Although there might be some question about the interest of sending children overseas for education as a matter of fact current practices indicate an increasing interest.

Living Standards of the Locals

The Quality of life is a very ambiguous concept. It is relative to the residents' perception and varies significantly with the expectations of residents. Much of the literature in this area reports depleting standards of nutrition, economic power, social status, poverty for the residents of hill tracts residents of India (Das, 2016; Haque, 2015; Yadav & Barua, 2016). Which is in line with the common themes found among the interviews with the officials.

"They live in a poverty stricken lives." Or "I have seen better in other parts of India."

Government's Role in Development

Most of the residents are in the view that they are treated as a second class citizen although contradicted by the government officials in the interviews,

"We do not have a double standard in our policies".

Many NGO workers reported otherwise, saying,

"The residents do not get access to government funds and facilities available in other parts of India as readily. That is why they have to access us as alternatives." Or "We need to take care of them as they are in need."

One of the teachers from the primary school reported that he believes that the quality of teaching that they are providing to their students are always hampered due to the time that it takes to approve a fund for any infrastructural development project from the central government. The standard of life is also reflected through the health and nutritional values of residents. And study shows that residents from this region are mal nourished in one way or another (Haque, 2015).

Socio Cultural Impact of Returning International Students

International students are thought to be not only ambassadors of their society in a foreign culture they have multi-folding effects back in their societies when they return. They become the linkage between the two cultures and they have been reported to have much better economic output than that of their counterparts who studied locally. Visser & Gerharz,(2016), reports in the context of Bangladesh that these ambassadors create economic opportunities and popularize internally practiced standards in their local societies. When asked about the scopes of these outcome in the Indian hill tracts context, the respondents shared similar values,

".....they can be assets to this disadvantaged society." One of the NGO workers stated. The government officials also reiterated, "They can contribute heavily in developing efficient society from their overseas knowledge". One of the road and

highways engineer states, "We need better trained people who can transfer technologies".

But, when asked if they were worried about cultural infiltration of foreign cultures they were not reporting to be that sceptical about the possibilities of cultural mixes. They believed the world is global village anyways.

Economic Impacts

There are bound to be positive impacts of returning international students as they come back better trained, globally focussed and experienced individuals. Visser (2016) in his study demonstrated this among the hill tract students of Bangladesh. There is no reason this cannot be or should not be replicated in this region of India. The Indian governments should promote and support schemes to train students from this region overseas to benefit for a better integrated globalized society within their country. When presented with this idea both the governmental and non-governmental officials supported the idea and concurred that this is an opportunity that everyone should appreciate and take advantage of.

This study believes that there are opportunities in internationalizing the education system not only from the economic and social-cultural perspectives but also there are political implications for integrating this part of India with the mainstream society.

The findings of this study contribute towards the understanding of a knowledge gap about the development aspects of Internationalization of education for the home countries. The research results may also contribute towards developing a model for development of under privileged parts of a nation by introducing a policy of preferred cross border studies for the students of those regions thus contributing towards improved trades in services in the region.

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE STUDIES

The study promotes a novel approach in integrating the torn apart society of North-Western Hill tracts of India. Further research is needed to prove the detailed scopes of the findings of this research. The hypothesis and the research objectives are outlined below:

The research will look in to the specific questions of;

- 1) How much the international education influences the sustained growth of Hill states of India?
- 2) What are the socio-cultural changes contributed as a result of the international education that benefitted towards the sustained growth of the region?

- 3) To what content does the education as a factor contribute towards the development of this region?

4)

Hypotheses

H₀= International education directly influences the sustained development of the Hill states region of India.

H₁= International education cannot influence sustained development of the Hill states region of India.

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