



Original Article

A Geography of Education as An Emerging Field for Indian Research Scholars and Policy Makers

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Manuscript ID:
RIGJAAR-2025-0204017

ISSN: 2998-4459
Volume 2
Issue 4
Pp. 84-86
April 2025

Submitted: 10 Feb 2025
Revised: 20 Feb 2025
Accepted: 05 Apr 2025
Published: 30 Apr 2025

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Quick Response Code:



Web: <https://rlgjaar.com>



DOI:
10.5281/zenodo.16198224

DOI Link:
<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.16198224>



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Abstract

Good quality education is the foundation of new discoveries, new knowledge, innovation and entrepreneurship that trigger growth and prosperity of the individual as well as that of a nation. The essence of human resource development is education, which plays a significant and remedial role in balancing the socio-economic fabric of the country. Education being an important social activity and it is the fundamental means of human development. Education is the "Third Eye" of man, which gives him, an insight into all affairs and teaches him how to act; it leads us to all round progress and prosperity. The Indian government has set up various education commissions to address the challenges of education, to recommend comprehensive education policies and improve the entire education system in India. Because of this, education facilities are also reached to doorsteps of all societies irrespective of their caste, religion, occupation, race, socio-economic status and geographical locations and disparities. A person who does not possess the light of education may be really described as blind. Education process with its nature and quality, its horizontal and vertical expansion is controlled by social, political and environmental factors. These factors are integrated ingredients of geographical environment. However, the study of education process in the context of geographical approach has often been neglected by geographers and research scholars. Therefore, in this investigation, researchers have accepted this challenging subject for new discoveries in the field of geographical study.

Keywords: Geography of Education, Geographical Approach, Geographical Factors, Education Progress, Education System.

Introduction

The idea of "A Geography of Education" was given by Maurice Debesse, a French educator at a Conference of the French Comparative Education Society in 1958. Ramond Ryba had posed the question: "The Geography of Education- A Neglected Field?", in an internal publication of the University of Manchester in 1968 (Brock, 2016). From the 1970s onward geographers were working on the "Geography of Education": an area of long-standing interest within human geography (Waters, 2018). It was primarily concerned with social and spatial inequalities in access to education, differential outcomes for children of different social backgrounds as well as relationship between education, and social exclusion. In 1972, Gerry Honess (University of Bath, UK) and Raymond Ryba (University of Manchester, UK) presented a paper titled, "Why Not A Geography of Education?", in the meeting of the International Geographical Union (IGU) in Toronto. Peter Meusberger from Austria, arguably the "Father of the field of Geography of Education." Because, aspects of the 'Geography of Education' have remained foremost among his interest since 1983, being the chair of Economic and Social Geography Department at the University of Heidelberg, Germany until 2007 (Brock, 2016).

Since around 2000, Geographies of Education has emerged as a vibrant and fast-moving area of academic interest. Any development process or activity does not take place in isolation in society. In the same way, the education process is also governed by physio-socio-economic and political factors. Therefore, from around 2000 onwards, there has been a shift in the pace, volume and reach of work in Geography of Education (Waters, 2018). In 2009, Chris Taylor (Cardiff University, UK) contributed an article 'Towards a Geography of Education'.

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How to cite this article:

Khatal, G., & Lavate, M. G. (2025). A Geography of Education as An Emerging Field for Indian Research Scholars and Policy Makers. *Royal International Global Journal of Advance and Applied Research*, 2(4), 84–86. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.16198224>

In 2016, Colin Brock published the most valuable book, 'Geography of Education' and Johanna L. Waters added an article in this field like 'Geographies of Education' in 2018. Thus, early 21st century work on the Geographies of Education has explored the boundaries between formal and alternative learning. Moreover, it is a sub-field for geographical research on education. In this way, Geography of Education is concerned with spatial analysis of patterns of educational provision, spatial disparities in the delivery and spread of education as well as educational landscape is influenced by physio-socio-economic and political factors.

Objectives

1. To explore the 'Geography of Education' as a new theme for Indian research scholars and policy makers.
2. To study the spatial relationship between geography and education.
3. To examine the growth and development of schools associated with geographical factors.

Data Base and Methodology

The total analysis for the present paper is based on secondary data. For this, essential secondary data collected from different reference books, websites, articles, and research papers. The collected secondary is analyzed with the help of qualitative geographical approach.

Study Region

The whole India has been selected as the study region for the present analysis. The country is situated north of the equator between $6^{\circ} 4'$ ($8^{\circ} 4'$ for mainland) to $37^{\circ} 6'$ north latitude and $68^{\circ} 7'$ to $97^{\circ} 25'$ east longitude. It is the 7th largest country in the world, with a total area of $32,87,263 \text{ km}^2$. Currently India is divided into 28 states and 8 union territories.

Approaches in the Geography of Education Research

The following approaches can be used in the Geography of Education research:

1. Spatial Analysis Approach

Educational opportunities are not evenly distributed across geographical landscapes; it varies from place to place. Hence, spatial distribution of schools in India, disparities in educational access and its quality between rural and urban areas can be analyzed with the help of maps, Geographical Information Systems (GIS), and spatial statistics.

2. Quantitative Analysis Approach

For quantitative analysis statistical techniques are very useful to examine the spatial relationship between geography and education. Historical growth of educational institutions in India associated with geographical factors, horizontal spread and progress of public vs private schools, as well as variables in literacy rates, school distribution, student-teacher ratios, etc. themes are available for research.

3. Qualitative Analysis Approach

The qualitative analysis aims to understand 'how and why' educational experiences, its access, and outcomes

vary from region to region. In other words, qualitative analysis approach in the Geography of Education involves exploring the spatial dimension of education through interpretive, descriptive and context-rich methods. This approach also useful to analyze the impact of physio-socio-economic and political factors on the entire education system.

4. Comparative Regional Approach

Comparative regional approach in the Geography of Education helps to understand the role of education in socio-economic development of both rural and urban areas along with migration of students across the regions for better educational opportunities. Moreover, how local environment and geographical factors influence and shape the learning experiences and educational outcomes. It means that regional disparities in terms of spread and progress of schools, quality of education and regional development of educational institutions related with geographical factors can be studied in this theme.

5. Field Survey and Case Studies

In this approach, there is an opportunity for researchers to examine the local educational conditions, regional disparities, and explore the spatial distribution of educational institutions based on geographical factors through field surveys. A field survey involves the collection of primary data directly from schools and communities through tools like questionnaires, interviews, and direct observations. So, it helps to geographers to analyze access to educational facilities in the different geographic regions, socio-economic and environmental barriers in the growth and development of schools, etc.

Spatial Relationship between Geography and Education

Geography plays a vital role in the growth and development of schools and colleges in the every part of the country. India's educational landscape is vast and diverse which influenced by various physio-socio-economic and political factors. Thus, present research paper examines the geographical determinants that affect the establishment and growth of educational institutions in India.

1. Physiography

The physiography including mountains, plains, plateaus, rivers, etc influences the establishment and accessibility of schools. The fertile and flat Indo-Gangetic plains have historically supported to the growth of schools and universities in Delhi, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar due to dense population and infrastructure facilities. Contrary to this, mountain ranges and hilly areas act as an obstacle to the growth of schools and universities in Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, and north-eastern states of India due to challenges in connectivity.

2. Climate

There are inter-state variations in terms of rainfall, temperature, drainage pattern and natural vegetation in India. In fact, these variations are become base for the spatial distribution schools and universities from region to region in the study area. In short, climatic factors are acting and determining the site and situation for the establishment of schools and their growth and development.

e.g. favourable climate in Pune and Bengaluru become attractive for the establishment of educational institutions. While extremely hot and cold climates represent less presence of schools and universities in India.

3. Rural-Urban Nature

Urban centres like Mumbai, Pune, Delhi, Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Kolkata have become educational hubs due dense population, world class infrastructure, and availability of skilled human resources. While the spatial density of schools and universities is very poor in the rural areas due to scattered population. It means that there are big disparities in access to quality education between rural and urban areas.

4. Transportation Network and Connectivity

In India, regions with strong transportation network and connectivity with surrounding areas are more likely to see the development of educational institutions. e.g. roads, railway stations and airports are playing most important role to better accessibility and mobility for both students and teachers. But remote areas and islands makes education difficult to access. Distance is one of the major challenges of education. There is close and positive relationship between transport and school attendance. Therefore, road accessibility has a very significant place in education system. It is the main link between home and school has often remained neglected not only at the policy level but also in research and analysis.

5. Geography-Based Government Initiatives

Government of India has implemented some geography-based schemes like digital education in remote areas, e.g. "SWAYAM" online classes to reduce geographical barriers. Also, government has started "Eklavya Model Residential Schools" which targeting for hilly and tribal areas. Kerala state boasts high literacy rates due to widespread school network along with public support for education system. Besides this, central government assistance is helping improve access to education in isolated north-eastern states.

Conclusion

There is close relationship between geography and education. Geographical factors are playing a pivotal role in shaping the educational landscape of India. Access to education is uneven distributed, which shaped by geographical factors. The spatial relationship between geography and education creates spatial disparities in the educational landscape of India. As a developing field, the Geography of Education offers valuable insights into the intersection of physical factors and educational outcomes. Further, making it an essential area for research scholars and policy makers. Therefore, effective educational policies must consider geographical factors to ensure inclusive growth of country. The Geography of Education is an emerging field that addresses spatial disparities and their impact on learning outcomes. Hence, by integrating geographical perspectives into education policies, policy makers and researchers can work towards a more equitable and accessible educational system. Future research should focus on integrating geographical factors impacting the educational landscape in India.

Acknowledgment

I am Dr. Ganesh Khatal thankful to Department of Geography, Walchand College of Arts & Science, Solapur for granting Permission to carry out the work.

Financial support and sponsorship

Nil.

Conflicts of interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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