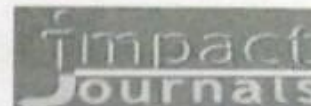


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## VOUCHER SCHEME IN EDUCATION: EXPLORING THE DEBATE

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### ABSTRACT

The present paper explores the concept and policy of vouchers in education in detail and the debates pertaining to the implementation of the voucher scheme in general and in the Indian context in particular.

The paper is divided into 2 sections. The first discusses the voucher scheme in education in general reflecting upon the aspects like its rationale, guiding principles, the kinds of the voucher schemes that exist or have been proposed etc. The second section looks at the arguments in favor and against that have been put forth in general by the opponents and proponents of the same. This somehow helps us to capture the debate around the issues. At the same time a reflection on the debate around the issue in India has also been made. This is followed by the conclusion.

**KEYWORDS:** Vouchers, Voucher Scheme

### INTRODUCTION

Education, as the countries across the world recognize, is a significant public good. It is a social investment for human development and a major instrument of equity besides being a measure of quality of life in itself (Tilak, 2004). In the view of such a significance of education for the individual personally and the economy and the society at large, it becomes important for the State that opportunities for education are provided to all the members of the society. One of the ways to ensure that education is available to most of the sections in the society is to subsidise it. Subsidies mainly aim at reducing the price of the public good like education, health services and others and make them available to the larger sections of the population. Thus, we find a dominance of the state subsidies as one of the outstanding features of most education systems and even in the cases where education is not publically provided it is subsidised by the state (Tilak, 2004).

As far as the Indian case is concerned, then education up to the elementary level is fully subsidized, while proposals are being made to reduce the scale of subsidies for the secondary and in particular higher education (Tilak, 2004). There exists a government run school system, where every child is provided with a free education. Though there are criticisms regarding this education as actually not being free in the full sense and involving indirect costs, but the cost of education still remains low for the student in comparison with the private schools which thereby become out of reach for many students especially those from the lowest socio-economic backgrounds. Thus, for a large number of such children it is the government schools that exist as the only or as a major option as far as schooling is concerned.

In view of the fact that a number of children are left with no other choice than to attend the government schools, these schools often come to have their local monopolies. But at the same time the quality of education as provided in these schools is abysmal and has been a central concern for educationists, policy makers, researchers and scholars of the subject.

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