A Study on Relevance of Voters Education through SAP-LAP Inquiry

Shubhanshu Naik[1*], Dr. Mallika Srivastava[2] and Dr. Poornima Tapas[3]

[1] *Junior Research Fellow [Full-Time PhD. Scholar], Symbiosis Institute of Business Management, Symbiosis International University, Lavale, Mulshi Taluka, Pune. Mahrashtra, E-mail: shubhanshunaik@sibmpune.edu.in*
[2] *Asst. Professor, Symbiosis Institute of Business Management, Symbiosis International University, Bengaluru. Karnataka E-mail: mallika.srivastava@sibm.edu.in*
[3] *Professor, Symbiosis Institute of Business Management, Symbiosis International University, Lavale, Mulshi Taluka, Pune, Mahrashtra, E-mail: poornimatapas@sibmpune.edu.in*

Abstract: Voter education programs equip citizen with relevant information to citizens to exercise their voting rights. Since, a significant proportion of voters are less either less educated or uneducated in India. The purpose of this paper is to explore need and relevance of voter education in India. This will make voters' informed and motivated for ethical participation. The present study is based on extensive review of extant literature by authors and Appreciative Inquiry [AI]. Furthermore, authors tested the relevance of voters' education using situation–actor–process and learning–action–performance [SAP-LAP] technique of enquiry. The study findings proposed the design of formal training modules for voters to aware about political system, their voting rights and to make rational choice. In order to reduce the induced high risk of bias and to further strengthen the study findings, these findings need to be further validated using various methods including empirical ones.

Key Words: Voter education, Clientelism, Democracy, Voters.

Paper Type: Research Paper

1. INTRODUCTION

In a democratic setup, voters' in routine practice assume their responsibilities are merely towards exercising their voting rights. However, the voters' responsibilities in democratic society are more crucial in nature. They play a prominent role here in deciding the fate of the society and nation at large. In most of the democratic societies there is no provision of prerequisite basic educational qualifications/ there is no prerequisite of basic educational qualifications to exercise the voting rights. In India, any individual aged eighteen years and above having Indian nationality is eligible to vote. Under traditional approach, most of

developing countries do not have any provision of formal voter education. Here, voters in developed nations like USA, CANADA and UK seems to be better informed and aware than their counterparts in developing nations.

According to International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance [IDEA], many countries today including developed, developing and newly-established democracies are facing the problem of overall low level of participation of people in elections. People especially youth, women, minority communities and the indigenous population seem reluctant to participate in politics and exercise their right to vote. Such behavior is alarming in nature which may indicate to weakening of democracy. Therefore, it is crucial for the respective governments to find out the reasons which are specific to low turnout so as to reverse this trend and encourage these groups to participate enthusiastically in the political and democratic process.

In developing countries like India, it is a vital challenge to create awareness about formal voter education. There the role of voter education takes a lead than merely casting the vote and participation in electoral process. Here, the voters have to ensure about electing of honest candidate to get best resolution of their problems. The uninformed and flawed decision of electing inappropriate public representative in elections may turn fatal and potentially threatening not only to democracy but for nation at large.

The United Nations defined 'voter Education' as the dissemination of information, materials and programs designed to inform voters about the specifics and mechanics of the voting process for a particular election. Here, voters receive information about eligibility criteria to vote, procedure to get registered to vote and inclusion as voter in voter list, awareness about type and schedule of elections and candidates with their propositions and issue stances.

Voters are the integral pillars of democracy who play pivotal role in deciding fate of democracy. Though India is the largest democracy in the world but voters here seems to be less informed and less rational. The same scenario seems prevalent in developed nations as well. Keefer and Khemani (2003) in their research proposed that in developing countries, poor voters tend to vote in uniformed manner, they are not only susceptible to campaign slogans but also are polarized are more likely to vote in uninformed ways, being susceptible to campaign slogans, or polarized along non-economic ideological dimensions such as religion or ethnic identity. At the same time, political promises are tend to be less credible and prone to 'Clientelism'.

Over the years, voter education as a subject has been enriched with ample of research with multiple dimensions. Many eminent professional and governmental bodies like United Nations etc. along with individual researchers found voter education quite appealing as a branch of study resulting there is rise in research. Most of the researches about voter education here revolve around studying effect and relevance of voter education in developed countries. Also, majority of them are conducted by professional agencies of governmental and non-governmental sector. Thus, there exists a dearth of literature especially from academia which emphasize the relevance and unspoken needs of formally education voters from developing nations including India in specific. **Aristotle** has also expressed the relevance of proper selection in election with a quote "**A right election can only be made by those who have knowledge**".

OBJECTIVES

The formal voter education would lead voters as better informed and rational decision maker. Thus, the present study is driven by this research gap and leads to following research objectives:

1. To analyze the present status of voter education and its relevance in India;

2. To analyze relevance of formal voter education using SAP-LAP analysis so as to create an informed and motivated voter pool; and

3. To outline further research directions.

Since, Voter education and participation are of prominent concern for sustained and healthy democracy and even today, in traditional approach to there is no provision of formal voter education. So above objectives are in synchronization with prominent but unfulfilled need of democracy.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The objective of conducting literature relevance is to understand the relevance of formal voter education to voters of developing countries and to identify the research gaps in existing democratic system.

2.1. Roles and Responsibility

The authors employed a technique termed Appreciative Inquiry [AI] to get a fair idea of voters' perception about their roles and responsibilities to create sustained and healthy democracy. Cooperrider et al. (1998) termed Appreciative Inquiry technique as a well-regarded qualitative technique which is amalgamation of interpretations, drives and motives of people outcome of their interactions to specific industry. In order to get a plethora of views, author collected opinions from various locations of India, namely Indore, Lucknow, Mumbai, Noida and Pune. The respondents in the study include all local politicians, political activists and common citizens. The objective behind such collection was to understand the synchronization between practitioners' expectations and voters' understandings about their roles and responsibilities in democratic system. In order to receive unbiased responses from respondents, they were promised to keep their identity as anonymous. Next paragraph summarizes the two fold aspects of roles and responsibilities based on inputs from AI and extensive literature review.

It is equally important to understand government and political players' roles and responsibilities along with those of voters. A democratic system vests the voters with supreme power. Voters here are visualized as the kingmakers provided they participate enthusiastically and make a rational decision. Casting vote is not merely right rather it is responsibility towards to nation. Ben Brewster (2005) termed that in a way voting can be termed as Democracy. A democratic system cannot sustain without requisite support and votes of the citizens. In other words, the voting right enables people to express their opinions about the government. In democratic system voters should not restrict themselves towards self-exercising voting rights but they are also expected to contribute freely and fairly by being vigilant during the elections. According to Civic Education Coalition in Uganda [CECU], voter should have responsibility and opportunity to listen to all candidates/parties to look out for important issues and seek clarification so that he or she can make an informed decision. They should share information and encourage others to cast their votes without fear or intimidation. At the same time they should be tolerant and respectful to the different views of peers. Constructive ideas should get listened to irrespective of gender or religion.

The CECU further defines the roles and responsibilities of government and political players. According to it government comprises incumbents they are the elected representatives in the office and while rest

political players are the contenders in the elections. Wherein strategically voters are considered as fate decider the government with other political players are strategic fate creators of the democracy. They are responsible from formulating public welfare strategies to implementation of these strategies. Also, both the government and political players are accountable and answerable to citizen.

2.2. Voter Education

There exist numerous researches which pledge voter education with various dimensions. Christian Peters-Berries (2004) studied the voter education impact in Malawi. The author clarified the distinction between Civic education (CE) and Voter Education (VE). According to author, CE is long-term process with broader perspective wherein voter education is usually conducted before and during election. In order to ascertain the impact of VE, the study indicated four parameters namely Election participation rate, Number of null and void votes, Incidents of election-related violence, and Choice of candidates.

2.3. SAP-LAP Analysis

SAP-LAP framework for inquiry, the widely popular tool for analytics, was proposed by Sushil (2000). Over the time, it has emerged as strong tool and researchers from various domains used it extensively in their researches. The SAP-LAP framework for inquiry, invented by Sushil (2000), has emerged as popular and strong tool for analytics and it has widely employed in numerous prominent studies in various domains.

Table 1
Authors' own compilation of few research studies using SAP-LAP framework

Author(s) / Year	Domain	Research Study
Sushil (2000)	Proposed SAP-LAP framework	SAP-LAP model
Sushil (2001)	Further advancement of SAP-LAP	Devised SAP-LAP framework of inquiry
Pramod and Banvet (2010)	Telecom Service Sector	Strategic Change management
John and Ramesh (2012)	Disaster management	Humanitarian Supply Chain Management
P. K. Suri and Sushil (2012)	E-Governance	Conventional Planning and Implementation framework
Kabra and Ramesh (2015)	Information and Communication Technology	Supply Chain Management
Venkatesh et. al. (2016)	Medical Science	Palliative care process

3. RESEARCH GAPS

In order to validate the insights obtained from extensive review of extant literature, authors have employed Appreciative Inquiry method [AI]. This procedure called authors' attention to an unmapped region which is yet to be explored by researchers with uttermost attention. Over the years, voter education as a field is developed with plenty of research efforts in developed nations by various authors. But, the field lacks literature which emphasizes the needs of voters in terms of "voter education" in developing nations especially in India. Thus, there exists an unrelenting demand to develop the appropriate training framework modules for promoting voter education. This will make voters better informed and rational decision maker.

3.1. SAP-LAP Framework for Relevance of Voter Education

3.1.1. Situation

As mentioned earlier, voter education is a vital component of democracy. However, it seems to be at nascent stage in most of developing countries including India. Although, India is the largest democracy of the world but still the subject is awaiting for the due consideration by voters, politicians and the government.

Also, political players and voters from develop nations seems to be much aware about the relevance of voter education and numerous researches in developed nations have validated the relevance of voter education through its findings. There is no minimum educational qualification to join as well as exercise the voting right. At the same time there is no provision of voter education in India in a formal manner. As a routine practice votes receive information partly from traditional media sources and partly based on discussion with friends and peers.

The Indian Census 2011 reported that out of the total 1.21 billion populations, 833 million live in rural India indicated thus a larger proportion of voters in India comes from rural area. It also revealed that a majority of 32.6 per cent population is not even educated up to the primary school level which is followed by primary (25.2 per cent), middle (15.7 per cent), matric (11.1 per cent), higher secondary (8.6 per cent) and Graduate and above (4.5 per cent). So, majority of Indian voters are either less educated or not educated. Due to lack of awareness they do not take the electoral process and participation seriously. It is now only the election commission of India is paying attention to this unexplored area. Sensing all these challenges and to improve enlightened participation in a democracy the election commission under the leadership of government of India has introduced a comprehensive program named as Systematic Voters' Education and Electoral Participation [SVEEP]. It was launched in 2009 but before reaching to the present shape it has to pass through various transformations. Thus it seems to be at nascent stage of implementation.

In similar lines, the present study is an attempt to highlight the unfulfilled and unsaid need of voter education so as to fetch attention of policy makers and researchers to research and enrich the subject. Introduction of formal voter education will not only help voters to make them informed and rational but also motivate them to participate.

3.1.2. Actors

In India, Election commission of India [ECI] along with state election commissions are policy formulators related to elections and voters etc.

Voters along with government and political players may play the role of need generator and ensure uninterrupted implementation of policies and voter education. Government as change agent may induce policy for formal voter education and devise distinctive voter education program separately for less educated voters and voters from rural areas.

Voter education facilitators work as link between the policy makers (givers) and voters (receivers). Initially, in order to assess the voters' information needs voters education facilitators scan the environment and demographic profiles of the voters. So as they could equip voters with relevant information to vote properly without difficulties and with understanding of what exactly he/she is doing. The facilitators also enable voters to cast their votes with really understanding the process and its relevance.

3.1.3. Process

There is a strong need to introduce a strategic planned voter education program at National, State and Municipal level. Also, the implementation of formal voter education at all levels is necessary for voters to ensure their political. Voter education is a blend of activities. It starts with mobilization i.e. creating awareness among voters about elections and political parties, leaders and various related issues including voter registration process. Later, voter education facilitators make voter understand about various technical aspects of the electoral act including relevance of their votes and process to voter. The voters are further informed about the freedom of choice, secrecy and feel motivated to exercise their right to vote. Effective voter turnout is the most desired indicator of successful voter education. Thus, in this manner effective voter education can contribute effectively to strengthen the democracy.

3.1.4. Learning

There is an urgent need to develop a common understanding about voter education among all stakeholders. In order to ensure maximum voter turnout there is a need to develop and execute formal voter education programs. Unfortunately, the voters in developing nations including India seem to be less aware about their voting rights and relevance of their participation. The government and politicians overlooked this aspect. The voter education will not only make voters aware about the relevance of execution of voting rights but also make them learn about registration process and voting procedure. It also makes voters aware about secrecy of the vote and the freedom to vote for the party of one's choice. In this manner, proper information in an organized manner motivates the women and other people from minority communities and the indigenous population to participate actively in electoral process to strengthen democracy in India. Thus, in this way it would strengthen Indian democracy in terms of service quality and service delivery to voters.

3.1.5. Actions

In order to ensure healthy democracy with maximum voter turnout, it is necessary to devise voter education plan and systematic implementation of the same. It is essential for all stakeholders to join hands for the development and implementation of this plan. This will place voters at an integral position and keeping in mind the current and future voter educational needs the government may introduce a comprehensive policy. The government and other political players may run special campaigns to educate voters. The voter education facilitators also need to be properly trained and developed to render quality voter education in all-inclusive manner. They may rely on the integrated marketing communication tools to impart voter education effectively. These facilitators should ensure continuous improvement in procedures to render voter education. It should begin with imparting the information about elections, candidate along with registration process to voting procedure. The basic purpose behind voter education is to motive voters and turnout in elections.
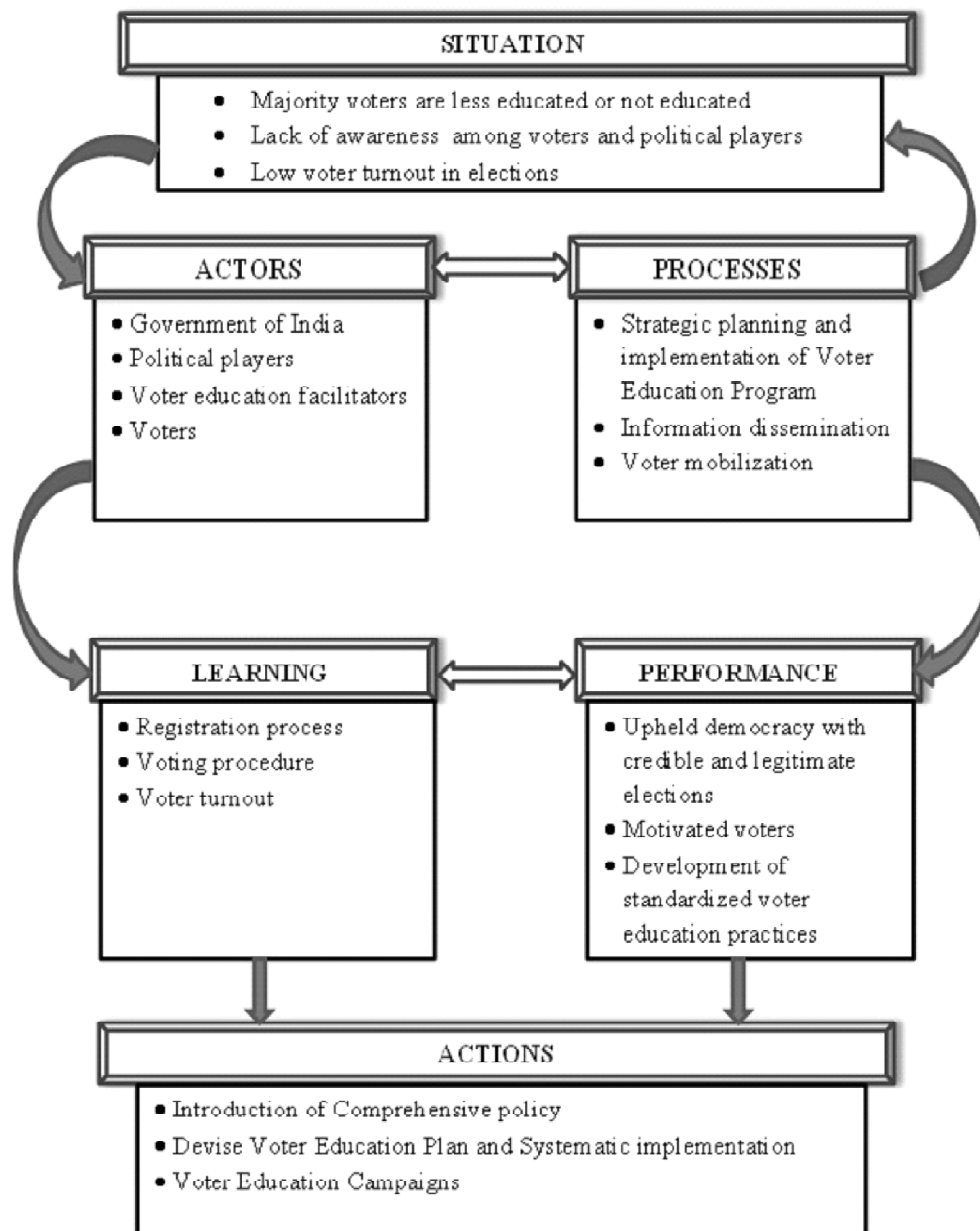
All these efforts will enable government to render uniform voter education everywhere. Thereby Indian democracy will not only achieve a strong distinct but it will be future ready to meet with the challenges.

3.1.6. Performance (Expected)

For any democracy to be upheld it needs regular free and fair, credible and legitimate elections. Here, Citizens participation in governance can be regarded as lifeblood of in democracy. Thus, citizens need to

understand the process, significance of electing these leaders. So, voter education enables citizens to effectively take part in electing their leaders who will represent them at various levels.

The systematic implementation of formal voter education will have wholesome impact on morale of all stakeholders including Government, political players and voters and society at large. It will strengthen the democracy. The Indian voters will be more motivated to gather more information to keep them more informed to make rational selections in elections. Standardized voter education and practices modules can be developed to import voter education to the last man of the society and the same could be benchmarked to attain higher goals and quality.

Figure 1: Proposed SAPLAP Framework

4. DISCUSSION

The SAP-LAP analysis above clearly indicates how the formal voter education under moderation effect of government regulations and political players' commitment can transform an uninformed voter into motivated active voter ready to participate in electoral process. It can successfully help them to acquire desired information and rational selection. The training can enable them to be vocal to raise demand for unfulfilled civic needs. Thus, based on these premises, authors offer the following recommendations so voters can actively participate.

1. First and foremost election commission of India along with the government and other political actors acts like driving force to transform pool of uninformed voters. They may join hands to develop formal training modules to educate voters to stimulate their interest in electoral process and motivate them to participate.

2. Next, trainers must identify the personality traits and information desirable for voters. Later, the training content must be developed in sync with their personality traits as to keep their interests alive in getting information.

3. In order to establish healthy democracy Indian Government and political players must join hands and run the awareness campaigns about voter education in public. These organized efforts will lead to establish a pool of informed and rational voters.

4. Formal voter education has twofold advantages. It will not only make our less educated and under privileged voters into informed and rational ones but also motivate them to cast their votes in India.

5. In order to keep interests alive, the content matter must be comprehensive enough i.e. it must equip voters with appropriate information about:

   a) eligibility criteria, voter registration process,

   b) various types of elections, when, where and how to vote,

   c) various ways to gather candidate information, his/her issue stands and propositions etc., and

   d) What all things are to be taken into consideration while selecting the appropriate candidate etc.?

It must be inclusion of psychological, behavioral and scientific aspects wherein the method of imparting information can be traditional mentor-mentee method or role play method etc. They may use the technological advancements like simulation and online training.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The authors, while keeping the first objective of the study in mind, have conducted extensive literature review. In addition to this, they have employed AI as a quasi-ethnographic approach to identify roles and responsibilities in democracy. Authors attempted to respond second research objective using the SAP-LAP analysis which confirms the unfulfilled need of formally education the voters and thus establishes its relevance for sustained and healthy democracy. In India, voters particularly less educated or not educated seemed to be less aware and informed to make rational choice. The present research findings are based on pragmatic approach guided by extant literature and AI data thus they need to be further validated.

5.1. Unique Contributions

The present study is amongst one of the initial attempts which propose the relevance of formal voter education in India. So it can be regarded as an attempt to contribute to the existing body of knowledge. Although voters are the most important constituent of any democratic system, somehow formal voter education in developing nations like India has received little attention from earlier researchers and industry personnel. Both, the industry professionals and previous researchers have overlooked the nexus between two important aspects i.e. sustained and healthy democracy and voter education needs in developing nations. Based extensive literature review along with AI and SAP-LAP analysis the present study proposes the relevance of voter education in formal manner in India. Thus the study contributes to the literature of political studies.

5.2. Managerial implications

The present study attempts to provide a comprehensive picture about the roles performed by voters in democracy along with the unfulfilled need of formal voter education of the domain. It proposes the relevance of the same. The research findings seek the attention of government and political players along with voters towards imparting voter education in formal manner and to devise appropriate training modules for voters to make rational decision in selecting appropriate candidate. This will not only help them to get prompt resolution of their problems but it will strengthen the democratic system in developing nations. Various governmental and non-governmental professional organizations can join hands together to make it feasible to impart voter education in India. These whole efforts will result into a sound democratic system in India. Also, to create awareness among citizen and keep them informed the government should ensure the information dissemination on continuum.

5.3. Limitations and Future Research Directions

Nothing is perfect in this world and thus the present study has its own limitations but these limitations are stimulus for further research. The study proposes need and relevance of voter education based on insights from AI and literature review; it needs to be further validated using various methods including empirical ones. Based on availability and willingness to contribute we could interview few selected politicians. The may induce high risk of bias which can be eliminated by conducting the study on large scale. Also two important aspects may act as prominent limiting factor in imparting voter education in proper manner. Firstly, the government regulations and political players' commitment towards imparting voter education while sincere reception of imparted information by voters on the other hand may restrict in achieving desired objective. However, interviewing the politicians and voters across various cities have provided diversified insights.

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