



ORIGINAL RESEARCH PAPER

Education

Approaches to Fostering Quality Education at Primary stage

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ABSTRACT

Education plays a pioneer role in the creation of human capital and social progress which in turn determines the progress of the country. The role of education is not only to strengthen the foundation of democracy, but also to produce good citizens. India has the second largest education system in the world after China. Primary education is crucial for spreading mass literacy, which is basic requirement for the effective functioning of democratic institutions, economic development and modernization of the social structure. UNICEF (2000) defines quality education as the one which includes family support; healthy, safe, gender-sensitive environment with adequate resources and facilities; quality content and materials; teaching approaches. One of the goals of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) is to provide elementary education that is of equitable quality to every child. Having achieved near universal access at the primary level, the focus is now on quality improvement and enhancing student learning. The present paper throws light on the approaches such as improvement of school infrastructure, increasing teacher availability, training of in-service teachers, teacher qualification and Teacher Eligibility Test (TET) etc. to fostering quality education at the primary stage.

Introduction

Education has continued to evolve, diversify and extend its reach and coverage since the dawn of human history. It is the only way to achieve desired goals in life. It plays an important role in socio-economic and political transformation of a country. Education plays a pioneer role in the creation of human capital and social progress which in turn determines the progress of the country. The role of education is not only to strengthen the foundation of democracy, but also to produce good citizens. It lays the foundation for adaptability of new ideas and scientific temperament of citizens. While speaking about education, the father of the Nation, Mahatma Gandhi said, "By education, I mean an all round drawing out of the best in the child and man- body, mind and spirit."

Education contributes to the individual's well-being as well as the overall development of the country. Education is not only an instrument of enhancing efficiency but is also an effective tool of widening and augmenting democratic participation and upgrading the overall quality of individual and societal life (Goel, 2008). Thus, the importance of education can't be ignored. It is also a process through which the essence of accumulated knowledge and virtues of the previous generations are transmitted to the present and future generations. The contribution of education is more crucial in countries like India, where it is not only utmost required for getting economic growth but also for new ideas, scientific values and attitudes, which are instrumental in behavioural transformation for making the people more liberal in their behavior, (Ghuman et al.).

"Well begun is half done" is a well known maxim. The entire superstructure of the educational set up of a nation rests upon primary education. At this level of education the entire growth, development and environment of mental as well as physical potentialities of the child depends. If the child is well looked after at the primary stage, the secondary education automatically gets a fillip.

India has the second largest education system in the world after China. The degree of processes involved in ensuring quality education for all in the country is definitely a unique and challenging experience. Primary education is crucial for spreading mass literacy, which is basic requirement for the effective functioning of democratic institutions, economic development and modernization of the social structure. It also represents an indispensable first step towards the provision of opportunity to all citizens of the country (Tilak, 1997). Primary education, thus, is the training or preparation for future life whereby the child gets benefitted physically, intellectually, socially, morally and psychologically. It prepares the child for future life.

Quality of Education

Quality is at the heart of education. It influences what students learn, how they learn and what benefits they draw from their education, says the Education For All Global Report, 2005. UNICEF (2000) defines quality education as the one which includes family support; healthy, safe, gender-sensitive environment with adequate resources and facilities; quality content and materials; teaching approaches.

One of the goals of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) is to provide elementary education that is of equitable quality to every child. During the initial years of SSA, the focus was on ensuring physical access and equity, and building school infrastructure along with recruitment of teachers. Having achieved near universal access at the primary level, the focus is now on quality improvement and enhancing student learning.

Approaches to Fostering Quality Education

A series of programmes have been initiated by the Central and State/UT Governments to foster quality education and improve student learning outcomes. The approaches to fostering quality education at the primary stage include the following:

Improvement of School Infrastructure: An important aspect of the efforts aimed at qualitative improvement of elementary education has been the programmes designed to improve school infrastructure and improvement of learning environment in all schools. About 33 per cent of the total funds invested at the district level are earmarked for infrastructure with a view to creating a supportive environment for learning in schools. The SSA envisages a safe and secure, clean and hygienic school compound, complete with toilet, drinking water facilities, boundary wall, electrification, mid-day meal kitchen and land-scaping. Construction of school buildings, classrooms, toilets, drinking water facilities, rain water harvesting systems and boundary walls is undertaken with the support of local bodies. The SSA encourages community participation in all civil work activities. The community is also encouraged to participate actively in the selection of the site, choice of design and maintenance of the school facility. Up to March 2013, 1.55 million additional classrooms were constructed. This has contributed to substantial improvement in the Student Classroom Ratio (SCR) from 41.1 in 2004-05 to 28:1 in 2013-14. Nationally, the percentage of primary and upper primary schools having drinking water facility has increased from 83.1 per cent in 2005-06 to 95.3 per cent in 2013-14. The percentage of primary and upper primary schools with separate girls' toilets has increased from 37.4 per cent in 2005-06 to 84.6 per cent in 2013-14.

Increasing Teacher Availability: The SSA has been investing a substantial proportion of its funds in recruitment of additional teachers for Government schools. This has brought about a

substantial increase in the number of teachers. The total number of teachers engaged in teaching in schools imparting elementary education was 5.22 million in 2006-07. This increased to 7.72 million in 2013-14 (U-DISE, NUEPA). Up to March 2013, 1.48 million additional teachers have been appointed under SSA. In addition, 2.65 million teachers were recruited by the State governments. These efforts have contributed to a sharp improvement in PTR at the primary level from 36:1 in 2006-07 to 25:1 in 2013-14. This achievement brings the national average at par with the norms set under the RTE Act 2009.

Training of In-service Teachers: Periodic in-service teacher training for up to 10 to 20 days in a year, induction training for newly recruited teachers, and two-year training for teachers who do not meet professional qualification as laid down by the National Council of Teacher Education (NCTE) constitute an important component of the quality improvement initiative. These programmes are designed to strengthen teacher capabilities in teaching subject contents, especially maths, science and social studies; new pedagogical approaches like handling multi-grade classrooms, inclusive education, and child-centered classroom transactions. The training modules include inputs for specific programmes like early grades reading, teaching of science and maths at upper primary stage, and continuous and comprehensive evaluation.

Teacher Qualification and Teacher Eligibility Test (TET): The proportion of trained teachers has shown a positive trend during the past few years. The proportion of professionally trained teachers at the elementary stage of education (Classes I-V) increased by 9.3 percentage points during the period 2005-06 to 2013-14 (U-DISE, NUEPA). However, the proportion of trained contract teachers was only 49.37 percent in 2010-11. About 640,000 teachers in the government schools across the country are yet to acquire the qualifications prescribed by NCTE. Out of these untrained teachers, more than 450,000 are pursuing different programmes supported by government through SSA, to obtain professional qualifications as per the norms. In 2012, the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) conducted the first Central Teacher Eligibility Test (CTET) for those who had completed a course of pre-service teacher training. The CTET conducted by CBSE is applicable in case of UTs without legislature.

Strengthening Academic Support Structures: For decentralised training and academic support to teachers, a total of 6,742 Block resource Centres (BRCs) and 77,520 Cluster resource Centres (CRCs) have been set up. The BRCs and CRCs (one CRC each for 6-10 schools) cater to the needs of a group of schools for conducting various in-service training programmes and also for extending regular academic support and supervision to schools. The subject-specific Resource Persons, based in the BRCs and CRCs, conduct training programmes for teachers. They also visit schools in the cluster/block to provide on-site academic support to teachers on pedagogic and content-related issues. The BRCs and CRCs are also involved in academic monitoring of schools, classroom observations and development of resource materials for teachers and students.

Curricular Reforms: Curricular reforms involving revision of syllabus and textbooks based on the National Curriculum Framework, 2005 prepared by the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT), facilitating learning in age-appropriate classes, improving learning through the provision of library and other supplementary materials and the selection of appropriate pedagogy for various levels of school education, multi-lingual education for tribal children to facilitate their transition from home language/mother tongue to the State language of instruction, and creation of joyful learning systems constitute important aspects of quality improvement initiatives.

Development of Learning Indicators: The NCERT has developed learning indicators to determine expected learning outcomes of all classes covering all subjects. Several states (Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh,

Odisha) have developed state-specific learning outcomes based on their curriculum. The purpose is to track each child's performance through continuous comprehensive evaluation (CCE).

Development of a Framework for Teacher Performance Standards for Accountability: The NCERT has developed a framework for Performance Indicators for Elementary School Teachers (PINDICS) and shared with the states. These performance standards define the criteria expected when teachers perform their major tasks and duties. These are further delineated as performance indicators that can be used to observe progress and to measure actual result compared to expected result. PINDICS will eventually evolve as the framework for effective teacher performance for effective monitoring and benchmarking across the country.

Development of Indicators for School Performance Assessment: The National University of Educational Planning and Administration (NUEPA) is in the process of developing indicators for school performance assessment. The initiatives include (a) development of school performance standards to provide common core and expectations for all schools (b) guidance on strategies for helping schools to improve their performance, and (c) use of the performance standards as the reference or benchmark for both internal and external evaluations of the school. School performance standards will be integrated and interlinked with school leadership and teachers' performance. State programmes on school standards and performance assessment like the Gujarat's-Gunotsav, Odisha's Samiksha and efforts of Karnataka School Quality Assessment Organization (KSQAO) are used as reference points.

Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation (CCE): A key aspect of the programmes to foster quality education and student learning has been the efforts under SSA to move towards continuous and comprehensive modes of learning assessment. Under the continuous and comprehensive evaluation process, each child's learning progress is continually tracked as an integral part of the teaching-learning process. CCE has been envisaged in the RTE Act, 2009 as a means to assess the progress taking place in a child over time in different subjects, to identify individual and special needs, accordingly plan teaching-learning situations to help the child and to provide evidence of children's progress to parents and community. As education is concerned with the total all-round development of the child, all aspects of a child's development are expected to be assessed rather than assessing only academic achievement, which is presently the focus. Assessment would cover a range of activities, both 'in' and 'out' of the school classroom. The RTE Act mandates maintaining a profile for each learner. To help States/UTs in their efforts, subject-specific sourcebooks have been developed to support teachers in implementing continuous assessment in line with the principles underlying NCF-2005.

National Repository of Open Educational Resources (NROER): The Central Institute of Educational Technology (CIET), NCERT has designed a National Repository of Open Educational Resources (NROER) which is a store house of e-content, targeted at students from Classes I to XII. The aim of the repository is to bring together all digital and digitisable resources for the school system for all Classes and for all subjects in all regional languages. The CIET is in the process of developing an on-line course portal for training and re-training of teachers and teacher educators on ICT in education. All NCERT textbooks are available on the website: ncert.nic.in.

Enhanced Funding for Quality Improvement: SSA funding for quality improvement includes several interventions. These include teacher salary, teacher professional development, capacity building of Block and Cluster-level functionaries, teacher and school grants, child entitlements of textbooks and uniforms, computer-aided learning and specific programmes for enhancing learning. For the year 2012-13, 69 per cent of the total SSA funds were earmarked for quality improvement components.

Conclusions

Education contributes to the individual's well-being as well as the overall development of the country. One of the goals of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) is to provide elementary education that is of equitable quality to every child. The cumulative achievements (completed) under SSA till September, 2015 include:

- Opening of 3.59 lakh new primary and upper primary schools.
- Construction of 1,80,997 new primary school buildings and 1,04,355 new upper primary school buildings.
- Construction of 17,14,076 additional classrooms
- Provision of 2,26,627 drinking water facilities
- Construction of 9,37,124 toilets
- Appointment of 15.58 lakh teachers
- In-service training imparted to 11.70 lakh teachers at BRC level & 9.87 lakh teachers at CRC level.
- Supply of free textbooks to 7.02 crore children. Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan would be increasing focus on quality of education in future. An outlay of Rs. 22500 crore has been allocated for 2016-17.

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