

## **CHALLENGES IN SCHOOL EDUCATION POLICIES IN INDIA:A FOCUS ON SCHOOL CURRICULUM ON THE BASIS OF EMPIRICAL RESEARCH**

**Dr. Garimella Vanisri\***

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### **ABSTRACT**

The 2013 National Policy for Children unequivocally prioritizes education for underprivileged group of children by creating an enabling environment with necessary legislations, policy measures and provisions (National Policy for Children 2013). It calls for addressing discrimination of all forms in schools and promoting equal opportunity, treatment and participation in education. The 12<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan (2012-17) further reiterates the continuing of four priorities for education- access, equity, quality and governance. The 12<sup>th</sup> plan acknowledges strategies adopted so far to resolve the multifarious and enduring nature of inequality and exclusion have been secluded, fragmented and devoid of institutional support. One of the form of exclusion is encouraged with private players involved in schooling ( Five Year Plan, Social Sector Vol. 111 ) .It increases the gap between haves and have-nots in education. Liberalization allows more autonomy to private players to run institutions. Much private institutions from play school to secondary school are trying to get affiliated with European Universities for obtaining better curriculum. Same with the case referred with IGCSE(The International General certificate for Education) board affiliated to IB International Baccalaureate. The cost is borne by the individual .With ICSE, which started as replacement to Cambridge syllables to establish all India examinations curriculum, CBSE boards, private schools are coming up with senior Cambridge curriculum with advanced version, which some where overrides the national curriculum. This

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**\* Ph.D in Political Science, University of Hyderabad, P.O. Central University, Hyderabad**

shows there is no uniformity in curriculum in India. In this background, the paper focuses on various disparities in school education with special thrust on reasons affecting uniformity in curriculum by studying the policies and acts related to school education and the role played by the state in bringing uniformity in curriculum. The analysis is based on reports of various organisations on curriculum, and also my empirical research on different aspects of schooling.

**Key words: education reforms, international curriculum, judicial judgments, social interdependencies.**

Education reforms in India underwent profound changes since post reforms starting from 1990s. Two significant developments happened in the arena of school education in the decades after 1990 are- a) Sarava-Siksha-Abhiyan (SSA), a flagship programme related to universal access to education and promoting literacy; b) Right to Education Act, which aimed at covering almost every aspect of schooling and placed education in the concurrent list. While SSA is a first step in promoting universal access and development of infrastructure facilities in schools, it failed in reaching the expected outcomes sans legal backing, and RTE Act too, though having a legal status, failed to achieve the targets set out in the act due to improper and poor implementation.

After 1990s, with the entry of market forces and commercialization in the realm of education, a mammoth growth of private schools and the role of private players increased tremendously across the states and regions in India. This phenomenon has had innumerable impacts on various aspects of school education in general and government schools in particular. Also, this phenomenon seriously caused the substantial increase of household expenditure in education. The rich and affluent sections of population could be able to sustain the burden of private education but the poor and disadvantaged suffered a lot and continue to suffer if this sort of commercialization of education kept going un-disturbed and un-regulated. Commercialization of education to cater to the needs of market forces and encouraging youth to seek such education which woos employability would ultimately result in the destruction of very foundation of education. Enormous amounts of fees are charged and collected by private schools from nursery to intermediate in the name of offering various curriculums, providing special and modern infrastructure facilities, instituting special coaching and training centres etc. As a result of uncontrolled and continuous liberalization and privatization of education, the very purpose of

education to impart true knowledge, to transform individual towards moral, spiritual and material wellbeing, and as liberating force of humanity will be jeopardized. In this context, the present paper focuses on the implications of various curriculums offered by regional, national and international Boards in school education in India. Also, the need and significance of uniform curriculum across the nation is discussed.

India, in post-independence era, came up with many policies and strategies for restructuring school education starting from Kothari Committee (1964-66). National Educational Policy 1986, Sarva-Shiksha Abhiyan, and the significant Right to Education (RTE) led to the eventual progress of school education in terms of access, quality, teacher training, infrastructure, vocational education etc. These developments in school education also accompanied with them various disparities, particularly, from the initiation of structural reforms in the guise of neo-liberal framework. The visible disparities/gaps are found if one sees high class international schools having rich infrastructure and offering international curriculums on one side and the local government schools with poor infrastructure facilities offering local curriculum on the other. This kind of uneven progress of school education have serious repercussions on children's education, particularly, when it comes to future job market. Many a times Public Interest Litigation (PIL) was filed in the courts regarding issues related to school education and the Supreme Court also voiced against issues like capitation fee etc. In this context, as there is no unified policy or Act to address various aspects of schooling, the concept of RTE came to prominence. In the RTE Act, every aspect of schooling is covered. The act says school curriculum, and evaluation procedure will be laid down by state governments for government schools. It means the schools are not supposed to specify or determine any particular curriculum but the government.

### **The RTE Act and its Loopholes**

Broadly speaking, amongst all educational policies, Right to Education Act is a step forward and plays a significant role. In Right to Education, the quality norms for various issues including infrastructure, teacher education, class room transactions and assessment were laid down for the first time. Many of these issues are interrelated with general governance scenario and the essential supportive mechanism in the country in general and states in particular. As the Act guarantees right, it is imperative for the government to ensure that it takes a proactive measures

for the provision of education facilities, equally and consistently, across the country. The rural and remote backward areas suffer from serious ailments related to governance like red-tapism, apathy and negligence. With such ailments the right becomes infructuous to an education aspirant. This act indirectly imposes a pressure on the government education to each child. The basic challenges in the path of implementation of right to education are proper estimation of required resources and development planning. Despite the significant contribution and benefits associated with the RTE Act, certain anomalies are ingrained in the Act. The following are important of such anomalies.

The child between 6-14 years of age and not 2-18 is taken in to consideration, whereas private schools are providing education from kindergarten. Since the age frame is limited, the child dropout rate in higher education after 10<sup>th</sup> class is more.

There is no standard definition of teachers' qualifications. Although it is mentioned in the Act that the teachers need to be qualified, but the exact definition of it is not mentioned.

There is always a wide time gap between education cost per child and reimbursement by the government. It is not clear who will bear the cost for child in mean time.

In rural areas, the pressure of single teacher and less recruitment of school teachers poses a burden for studies in primary schools.

The feelings of prestige and attraction towards English medium education brought in the cause of private schools. Even the lower middle class families are opting for low cost English medium private schools. The RTE mentions about 25 percent reservation for underprivileged children in private schools, but it is not being implemented in practice (Mishra, S 2013).

Since the children will be suddenly exposed to students from different backgrounds in private schools, there may be a possibility of differential treatment by the peers and teachers.

The Act is deemed to be excessively input focused rather than outcome oriented.

The Act promises the admission of the children in to schools, but the quality of education, understanding of the subject, repetition of concepts, imbibing the thought provoking process in education etc. are not discussed in detail in the Act.

The Act Emphases on admission according to age, but not on providing facilities for bridge courses that can prepare the child to adjust to the admitted classes.

As per the Act, every student will be promoted to next class. Sometimes this can promote indolence and insincerity among children towards their studies and carelessness and laxity among teachers.

Section 19 of the RTE Act requires all schools, except government schools, to meet certain norms and standards relating to infrastructure, pupil-teacher ratio, and teacher salaries for obtaining recognition within 3 years. This makes private un-recognized schools to provide similar if not better facilities than government schools. If failed, they are susceptible to extinction in three years.

The Act requires every government and aided school to form school management committees (S.M.Cs) that will comprise parents and will be responsible for planning and management of the schools (Suneetha, Burra 2014). SMC members are required to volunteer their time and effort. This can be a burden for poor parents. For aided schools, the SMCs norm will lead to a breakdown of their existing management structure.

The right to education has become more right to schooling than education with the view of higher dropout rate in secondary schooling. The neglect of education and human resource development in India during post-colonial era has created obstacles for an upcoming economy like India to reap the benefits of liberalization and globalization, initiated since 1991. In spite of strong pro-education rhetoric in the Indian national movement, the growth of school education has been extremely sluggish in India. The agenda of liberalization does not address this failure; it cannot turn a blind eye to the issue either. Any attempt to make everyone competent in job market and other issues internationally, the level of education and skill formation need to be

brought to the levels internationally. For example, China has currently passed the stage of quantitative expansion in basic education. Chinese official statistics (for 2009) show a net enrolment of 99.4 percent at the primary school level (Cheng,2007). The gross enrolment ratio for junior secondary school was 99.7 percent in the same year and the gross enrolment at senior secondary level, both general and vocational, was 79.2 percent. The general (i.e. academic) senior secondary schools enroll 52.5 percent of students at this level; putting about half of senior high school students in the academic stream. In most urban areas, gross enrolment at the senior secondary level is 100 percent or above, which means that the number of students enrolled exceeds the number in the appropriate age group (Cheng,2007). The Chinese government has brought many changes in education system on par with globalization. It has become successful in word and work. They have brought changes in curriculum, equity, equality, and strengthening of the weak schools. This is not same with India, as there is difference in word and work.

The Ministry of Education reported a 99 percent attendance rate for primary school and an 80 percent rate for both primary and middle schools (Ministry of Education, China,2013). Many children in India who are nominally enrolled do not attend classes regularly. There is a close link between access, regular attendance, learning outcomes, meaningful attendance, and progression through grades, with little or no repetition. Here, learning outcomes that confirmed basic skills are being mastered. In the realm of education, problems of extended absenteeism, irregular attendance and repetition are present in India (Lewin, Keith 2011). In the Ontario province of Canada, education policy underwent remarkable changes in the 1990s and early years of 21<sup>st</sup> century (Anderson, S.E., and Sonia Ben Jaafar 2006) . As per the Ministry of Education in Ontario, the new curriculum in secondary schools responds to public demand for reliable standards and apparent expectations that will ensure all Ontario students receive a high quality education (Anderson, S.E., and Sonia Ben Jaafar 2006) .These timely changes in policy with stake makers and stake holders assign much seriousness in basic education. In the wake of increased financial, cultural and environmental transactions, mobility of individuals with new social interdependencies, new political formations, with more inflow of information, with both homogenizing and differentiating tendencies took place in liberalized era. This has created many problems with regard to children and their education in India.

According to National Crime Record Bureau Karnataka, West Bengal, Maharashtra, and Madhya Pradesh recoded among few states in the missing children from school. This aspect is related to security issues in schools. The children are being sold as child labour in many places and only few of them are rescued. These tendencies have brought the problems of child bonded labour, missing children, child sex workers etc. in the era of liberalization (Brinda, Adige 2014) . Educational exclusion is one of the most important challenges in universalizing education to all. The children from marginalized communities depend on the government schools as they cannot afford private schools which are expensive. The expectation and aspiration of the parents to send their children to schools is to make them learn and make difference to their lives in future. The government schools in India, few years ago, were common places for rich and poor, irrespective of gender, caste and community. Many private schools with advanced marketing techniques made the government schools run for relatively underprivileged and very poor families.

### **SarvaShikshaAbhiyan**

The SarvaShikshaAbhiyan, intended for the overall growth of school education in India, has been modified with RTE Act. The main aim of SSA is the universalisation of primary education at an acceptable level by the end of 2010. This trend of SSA in school education occurred in the junk of private schools as a possible change in government schools. In the union budget outlay for SSA for the financial year 2013-14, there was 7 percent increase from previous years. However, the outcomes have been completely out of sync with outlay (Ahmed, Raunaq 2013). The primary education is still a challenging goal which is yet to reach a satisfactory level in terms of learning outcome and country-wide coverage. There is priority need to develop the mode and channels of service delivery in SSA. There is need of role clarity and accountability in service delivery. The existence of overlapping roles, assigned between levels of government, seriously undermines accountability under SSA Ahmed, Raunaq 2013). Constitutionally, school education is supposed to be a charitable institution in India, but in fact private bodies (registered charitable trusts, real estate conglomerates etc.) operate schools under different banners. Same is the case where field study has been conducted (selected private schools of the study). The reasons for this trend are the gap between supply and demand but the gaps are not filled by the state. Centre backed schools do not suffice the demand side of public. Private institutions which are

mushrooming have barely served the purpose with over 50 percent of them are not meeting the specifications provided in state Government orders on the lines of RTE.

### **Observations from the Field**

A field study was conducted in the city of Hyderabad in the year 2012 to ascertain various disparities in public and private schooling, specifically, the differences in curriculum and the factors that make parents to choose particular curriculum and its importance. Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation (GHMC) was formed on 16th April, 2007 by merging 12 Municipalities and 8 Gram Panchayats (Information collected from Commissionerate Office, GHMC). It constitutes mainly two districts- Rangareddy and Hyderabad. The municipalities constitute L.B. Nagar, Gaddiannaram, Uppalkalan, Malkajgiri, Alwal, Kukatpally, Kapra, Serilingampally, Qutubullapur, Rajendranagar, Ramachandrapuram, and Patancheru. These municipalities are located in Rangareddy and Medak districts. The panchayats constitute Shamshabad, Satamarai, Jallapalli, Mamidipalli, Mankhal, Almasguda, Sardanagar and Ravirala.<sup>1</sup> Hyderabad comprises 16 revenue mandals, out of which, 12 are education mandals, whereas all revenue divisions in Ranga Reddy district are educational mandals. There are 700 Government schools, 1800 aided schools and 300 non-aided schools in 12 educational mandals of Hyderabad and the number of private schools is unknown.<sup>2</sup> Approximately 2800 schools are located in Hyderabad region only. Ranga Reddy district comprises of 5 revenue divisions and 37 mandals. Each mandal is an education mandal in the district. A large number of unrecognized and unregistered schools are present in Ranga Reddy district. Around 912 Government recognized schools are present in Ranga Reddy district, in which, 1040 are unaided/ private schools.<sup>3</sup> Serilingampally region is chosen for empirical research as there are more than 180 private schools present in Serilingampally mandal only. Further, there is no proper estimate of the number of private schools in the area.

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<sup>1</sup>       ibid

<sup>2</sup>       Data collected from Department of School Education, Govt. of Andhra Pradesh

<sup>3</sup>       ibid



The migrant labour problem is very severe in the study region. A large chunk of migrant labourers usually come to Hyderabad from different states like Odisha, Bihar, Chattisgarh, and Jharkhand and also from some of the districts in Telangana. It was noticed that due to unavailability of means, a large number of Hyderabad population is depending on large part of their household expenditure to gain proper secondary education for children. Different problems like child labour, child trafficking and missing children are highly linked to financial, social, environmental transactions, mobility levels of individuals with new social interdependencies. These issues are highly reflective among children from the stage of secondary education. From adolescent age every child has to face different expectation, like preparation for competitive exams, it works as a base structure for further education. To cope with this Government has come up with many policies. Private players are also playing vital role related to secondary education. Write few lines on secondary education here) It creates space for an ideal business opportunity for private players to make benefits without specifications of corporate social responsibility. In the long run, as the gap between rich and poor is very much relevant in India, differentiated spending on education also leads to huge educational gap between rich and poor. Liberalization in any way doesn't guarantee improving the quality of education neither in private nor in government, because this would entail monetizing the opportunities in educational space not conforming to long term educational goals. For bringing school education to a plat form and for flexibility at high school education, the state governments are required to merge with central government to play a significant role.

During the field study analysis, the Government Orders of pre-bifurcated Andhra Pradesh State are referred. It is found that the government itself is not very serious about implementation of Gos (Government Orders). Articles 14 to 18 of the Constitution of India seek to ensure right to equality, but in practice, institutions position them in grey areas and tweak these provisions. Education was a subject in the state list till 42<sup>nd</sup> Amendment Act 1976 and thereafter moved to concurrent list. On April 1, 2010 Right to Education became a legal right. There are stringent provisions against child labour for children in age group 6 to 14 years (Jha, Praveen and PoojaParvati 2010). According to these norms, the state of Andhra Pradesh formulated the Government Orders.

## Issues of Curriculum

In general, the curriculum for schools in India can be categorized in to four. In the same way schools are named after curriculum.

**1. InternatinalCurriculum:** The Cambridge IGCSE (International General Certificate of Secondary Education) is a certificate offered by University of Cambridge. This course is offered at different levels. The teachers while interaction said, ‘in this kind of syllabus, there is no scope for mugging-up but the student has to understand the subject( Information collected during field study).

**2. National Curriculum:** The schools having CBSE/ICSE (Central Board of Secondary Education/ Indian Certificate of Secondary Education) from Pre-primary to Grade 10 and CBSE/ISC/IGCSE/IB from Grade 11 to Grade 12 follow national curriculum. ICSE is an examination conducted by the Council for the Indian School Certificate Examination, a private non-governmental board of school education in India for class 10, i.e. grade 10. It has been designed to provide an examination in a course of general education, in accordance with the recommendations of the New Education Policy 1986 (India) through the medium of English (Information collected from schools during field study).

**3. State Curriculum:** The schools affiliated to individual boards of the states of India for example; Andhra Pradesh Board of Secondary Education follow state curriculum. It is known as state SSC and HSC (Secondary School Certificate and Higher Secondary Certificate).

**4. Schools Curriculum Providers:** In India, some private organizations are also involved for providing curriculum to schools. ‘Pre-School for Child Rights,’ a private organization has pioneered in to areas of providing Pre-Primary Curriculum to schools.

Now, to look into how various curriculums are being followed and offered to students in different schools, a study has been done in the city of Hyderabad. The study chose only secondary schools-three private schools and three government schools. The private schools chosen for the study are Srinidhi International School, Chirc Public School and Voxpop International School and the government schools include two ZillaParishath High Schools (ZPHS) located in Madhapur and Serilingampally and one Girls residential school located at Gowlidoddi.

In an interaction with the authorities of private international schools like Srinidhi and Chirec, they said that they are providing international curriculums. In reality, they are providing all three curriculums-international, national and state. It is optional for the student and parent to choose a particular curriculum as the fee differs for different curriculums. Srinidhi International School has a foreign faculty exchange programme but in other two schools no such programme exists. In Voxpop International School, they follow both the state curriculum and CBSE. In this school, the students from LKG to 7<sup>th</sup> class are offered CBSE syllabus and from 8<sup>th</sup> class they follow both state syllabus and CBSE.

### Teachers' Perception on the Curriculum:

The perception of the teachers regarding school curriculum is given in the following table. Few teachers out of thirty in the sample during the interaction said, it's high time to change everything so that teaching methods can be improved. For instance, one English teacher said phonetics need to be included in to English teaching in secondary education. He says, formative assessment is the best way than other and for every syllabus the assessment should be different. For SSC, it should be a semester wise assessment, and monthly for other syllabus. Formative Assessment is a tool used by the teacher to continuously monitor student's progress in a non-threatening and supportive environment. It is used in CBSE syllabus.

### Views of teachers about school curriculum

Curriculum	Views of teachers					Total
	Very good	Good	Average	Not needed for students	No answer	
<b>International Board</b>	5	Nil	3	20	2	30
<b>Central Boards</b>	18	6	1	nil	5	30
<b>State Board</b>	10	3	2	15	Nil	30

In Srinidhi International School, only 5 teachers supported the International Board curriculum. In other schools teachers opined that International Board examination system was not necessary for

their students. Few teachers who are teaching International Board syllabus did not favour it. Maximum number of teachers admired Central Board Syllabus. Only 15 teachers admired the state syllabus and the rest 15 said this syllabus was not according to the need of the hour. So, Table 5.4 clearly shows that there is more demand of central boards. In all the curriculums, the assessment styles need to be changed. There is a need to change the old pattern books in CBSE/ICSE syllabus too. Many teachers admired the grade system in comparison to percentage system. They stated that percentage system only enhances unnecessary competition.

Private schools have to prove themselves in the line of teaching experience, training, and professional qualifications; details of the curriculum and system of pupil assessment. On these criteria government provide recognition to private schools. If the school failed to receive due recognition in 3 years, it needs to be ceased by D. E. O (District Education Officer).

In findings of the empirical research on government school teachers opined in favour of complete change of government text books and curriculum. The International General Certificate of Secondary Education (IGCSE) is an academically rigorous and internationally used specialized English language curriculum which is offered to students in Srinidhi School to prepare them for International Baccalaureate and CIE A-level (which is recommended for higher tier students) (Information collected from schools on 2012). It is based on the GCE O-Level and is recognized as being equivalent to the GCSE. The IGCSE was developed by University of Cambridge International Examinations in 1985. The examination board Edexcel (an international British education and examination board) offers its own version of the Edexcel International GCSE (Information collected from schools on 2012). The acronym "IGCSE" is the registered trade mark of the University of Cambridge and is used under license. Recently, Edexcel renamed its IGCSE as the Edexcel International GCSE. Mostly, non-resident Indians prefer this syllabus for their kids. Currently, few affluent families in India also prefer it. Among the selected private schools, Srinidhi and Chirec are affiliated to IB (International Baccalaureate) Board. As mentioned earlier, both of them offer different kinds of curriculum according to the demands of the parents. In the Voxpop International School, both CBSE and state syllabus are offered. In contrast, in the selected government schools, although CBSE syllabus has been introduced recently, examinations for SSC are conducted in state syllabus only. As noticed by the

researcher, the Gowlidoddi Residential School is following only state syllabus. It indicates that the students in international schools are exposed to international curriculum apart from CBSE and ICSE, whereas the government schools are still following the outdated state syllabus.

Each curriculum board has its own governing body, examination pattern, structure of curriculum of different subjects. Commonly, in India, parents are enticed to medical and engineering entrance for school goers. The apex court of the nation has set the responsibility of conducting national medical entrance examination process to CBSE; the CBSE has gained more fascination among parents, students, and teacher community. On the lines of CBSE's policy decision, many state boards in India adopted Continuous Comprehensive Evaluation (CCE) method of exams to reduce the burden on students. The National Curriculum Framework, 2005 suggested to increase child's understanding of the subject than rote learning (editorial, epwvol 50). As observed, the CCE method is a positive step as it focuses on formatia study has been done in the city of Hyderabad. ve assessments which encourages students learning level outcomes than detention to low achievers. There are criticisms on CCE method by reports of central advisory board and their national surveys. The criticism is that it is burdening both the teachers and parents. Students' assessments do not reflect where he/she stands in larger competition and also in completion of more tasks. The class 10<sup>th</sup> exams conducted by CBSE has 2 schemes. Under scheme-1, there shall be no board examination at secondary level (Class X) for students who do not wish to drop out till class XII in the schools affiliated to CBSE.

Under scheme-II, which is applicable to a student who wants to move out from CBSE syllabus after class X. Such students are required to take board's external examination at secondary level i.e Class X level. Question papers and marking scheme will be prepared by CBSE board and evaluation will be done by the board through external examiners (official website of CBSE)

Grade system was introduced as part of CCE that tremendously affected the standards of students in rural areas. The CBSE again thinking to change the system in to board examination as it was before, with retention of CCE method. Now, the students are writing board exam for 12<sup>th</sup> class in CBSE board, whereas, in the state boards, students are writing boards exam with internal tests, with CCE method. Even ICSE board is aligning with CBSE for teaching Physics, Biology,

Chemistry, since students are shifting to CBSE boards for 12th class, with aspiring to be doctors and engineers. The CBSE has decided to revamp its syllabus from 2017-18 and in the same lines the ICSE is also planning to revamp its syllabus. The ICSE wanted to introduce NCERT books for science subjects in their courses, whereas for humanities and social sciences they retained the same. To elevate the levels of equality, state should provide uniform education having common curriculum to all children of the age 6-14. But, there are obstacles and opposition regarding uniformity in curriculum from various quarters. The judiciary also tried its part in several of its judgements related to schools and curriculum. The civil society and the job market also come on the way to make its realization more cumbersome. As part of their attempts, all the school boards in association with CBSE are putting efforts to draw a common curriculum. But still, this process has to go a long way for realization of uniform curriculum.

In private schools, although the students differ in talent in every class, the parental attention and the care by school administration make the pass percentage higher than the government schools, the private schools are better performing in English, Mathematics, Science and Social Sciences but poor in Telugu language. From this, it is evident how 'Telugu' is ignored in Hyderabad where study has been conducted. If we compared the government schools with private schools, private schools do better. In government schools, the number of failure students is more. This may be due to high class strength and poor economic background of students. But, the average number of students' performance in Science, Telugu and Social Science in government schools is more than private school. In mathematics, the Madhapur ZPHS performs equally on par with private schools. So, except in English language, in all other subjects, the performance is more or less same in both the government and private schools. The positive steps have to be taken regarding access, curriculum, other facilities, advertisements, and about the achievements of government schools. All these issues are interlinked.

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