

QUALITY UNIVERSALISATION OF ELEMENTARY EDUCATION IN INDIA: A CHALLENGE

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Abstract

The investigator attempts to study Quality Universalisation of Elementary Education in India: A Challenge. This article aims to analyze government innovations and challenges of universalisation of quality education. Universalisation of elementary education in India means making education available to all children in the age group from 6 to 14 or in the classes from I to VIII. The State should provide elementary education to all children irrespective of their caste, colour, creed, sex, language, religion, socio-economic status and place of birth or living. The Central and States Government have taken different innovations to improve the quality primary education like Operation Blackboard, District Primary Education Programme, Mid-Day Meal Scheme, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, Sarva Shiksha Mission and Right to Free and Compulsory Education Act-2009. Several factors pose as challenges of quality in elementary education in India in the 21st century. At present, the Right to Free and Compulsory Education Act-2009 is new innovation of Government of India for educating all children and ensure to get quality education. The quality elementary education has now become a challenge before the educationists, teachers, social reformers, political thinkers and social activities in India.

Keywords: *Elementary Education, Universalisation, Quality, Challenge, India*

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Introduction

Education is regarded as the third eye of human beings which gives light. It is the remover of literacy, ignorance, superstition and poverty. But the majority of the people do not realize the real value of education. Education is a critical input in human resource development and is essential for the country's economic growth. Some do not admit their children in schools due to their ignorance, illiteracy and poverty. Therefore, education should be made compulsory for every child. Because, primary education plays an important role in laying the proper foundation for the child's cultural, emotional, intellectual, moral, physical, social and spiritual development.

After the achievement of independence, free and compulsory elementary education has been given prime importance. The Article 45 of Indian Constitution states, "The state shall endeavour to provide within a period of ten years from the commencement of this constitution, for free and compulsory education for all children until they complete the age of fourteen years". Thus, we notice that the responsibility for elementary education lies with the Central Government, the State Governments, the local bodies and voluntary organization. Later, The National Policy on Education (1986), strongly articulated the need for a substantial improvement in quality education to achieve essential levels of learning. The Programme of Action, 1992 therefore stressed the need to lay down Minimum Level Learning for improving elementary education both at the primary and the upper primary stage irrespective of caste, creed, location and sex. The National Curriculum Framework 2005 has strongly articulated the need of quality education.

Objectives of the Study

1. To find out the concept of universalisation of elementary education;
2. To find out the concept of quality education;
3. To analyze the innovations of government to quality elementary education;
4. To analyze the challenges of quality elementary education;
5. To suggest some strategies for Quality Elementary Education.

Meaning of Elementary Education

Universalisation of elementary education in India means making education available to all children in the age group from 6 to 14 or in the classes from I to VIII. The concept of universalisation of elementary or primary education signifies that education is for all and not for selected few. It implies that education is the birth right of every child and it should be made free and compulsory up to the age of 14. Therefore, the State should provide elementary education to all children irrespective of their caste, colour, creed, sex, language, religion, socio-economic status and place of birth or living. Thus, all children of the country, whether rich or poor, living in rural or urban areas and in remote places should be provided with the facilities of elementary

education. At present, we may think that universalisation of elementary education is a free education up to the primary stage. In developed and advanced countries free education means no tuition fees, free books, and stationary, free mid-day meals and free school transport. But in our country free education means “free of tuition fees” and other facilities free of cost.

There are three stages for universalisation of elementary education:

- ❖ **Universalisation of provision:** This means that elementary education should be provided to all children between the age group of 6-14 years in the country. The location of the primary school should be within a walking distance from the house of every child. It enables and encourages the parents to send their children to schools.
- ❖ **Universalisation of enrolment:** This means that all children of the desired age group (6 years old) must be enrolled in the school. It is essential that all eligible children should be enrolled compulsorily by the school.
- ❖ **Universalisation of retention:** This means that every child enrolled in class I must continue in the school till he completes class VIII. That is, after the enrolment of the students in school is over, it is essential to see that they progress regularly from year-to-year. There should be no stagnation in the school. Again we should see that the child does not leave the school before the completion of the course so that there is no wastage. It is important schools to provide all assistance to enroll the children in the age group 6-14 and it is important to retain the children in the schools in order to complete their primary education without wastage.

Meaning of Quality Education

Quality has been the goal of an eternal quest through the corridors of human history. It has been the driving force for all human endeavors. Quality is the inspiration for transcendence from the mundane to the highest realms of life. The British Standards Institution (1991) defines quality in functional terms as the totality of features and characteristics of a product of service that bear upon its ability to satisfy the stated or implied needs.

Quality education is that education that is relevant and adapted to the needs of the society (Ndiomu, 1989). He argued that such needs must meet the standards in health, growth, and physical survival in a complex and globalized world. It implies education that is worthwhile and which empowers the recipients with relevant skills, knowledge, ideas, values and attitudes needed for him /her to make informed decisions and live a self-sustaining life. Majasan, (1998) maintained that quality education is value-loaded arguing that quality education should produced disciplined behaviour, hard work, improved cultural heritage and mutual respect within and outside the school community. If a society expects quality manpower for rapid development and transformation, quality education is a must do affair. The International Commission on

Education for the 21st century called for holistic development of individuals, thus optimizing physical, mental, intellectual and spiritual potentialities. Quality education must be supported by the four pillars of learning: Learning to Know, Learning to Do, Learning to Be and Learning to Live Together (UNESCO, 1996).

Innovations of Government to Quality Elementary Education

The Central and States Government have taken different innovations to improve the quality primary education. These are:

❖ Operation Blackboard:

The scheme of operation blackboard is a centrally sponsored scheme for bringing about improvement in primary education by providing additional facilities to the school already established. The Operation Blackboard scheme, started in 1987-88, which aimed at improving the classroom environment by providing infrastructural facilities, additional teachers and teaching-learning material to primary schools.

❖ District Primary Education Programme:

DPEP was launched in 1994 as an integrated and holistic programme for achieving universal primary education in educationally backward districts of India with the objectives of improving enrolment and reducing dropout rates and disparities among gender and social groups, and improving the level of learning achievement. a favourable climate for universalisation.

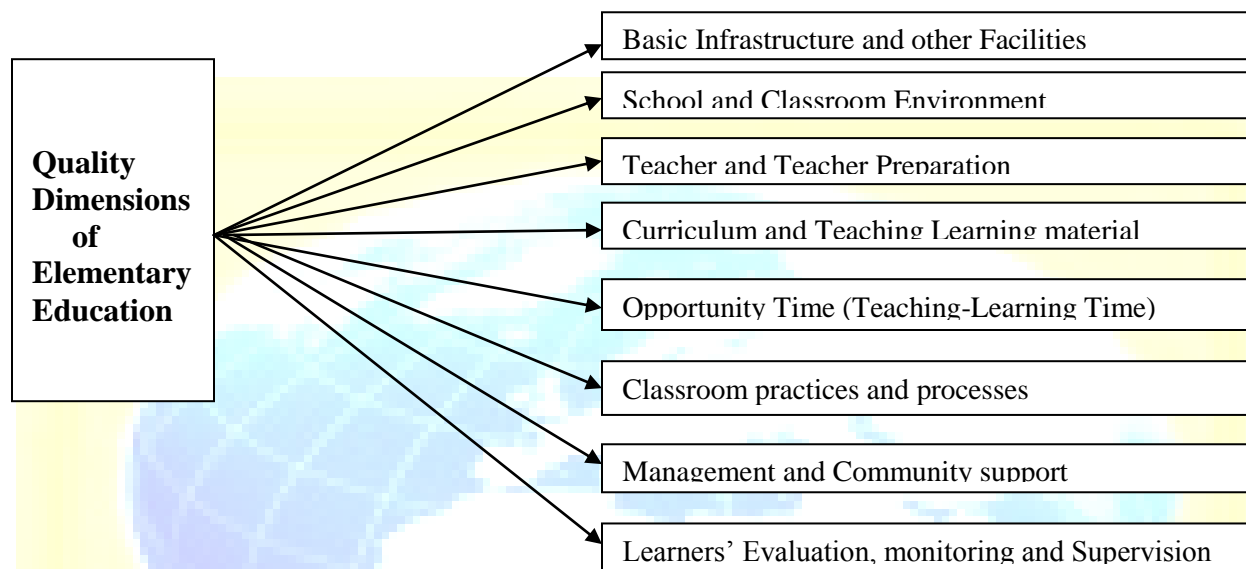
❖ Mid-Day Meal Scheme:

The National Programme of Nutritional Support to Primary Education commonly known as the Mid-day Meal programme was launched in 1995. It aims to give a boost to universalisation of primary education by increasing enrolment, retention and attendance and simultaneously improving the nutritional status of students in primary classes. The programme originally covered children at primary stage (class I to IV) in Government, local body and Government aided schools.

❖ Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan:

The same is true for the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan programme, which aims at providing useful and relevant elementary education to all children in the age group of 6-14 years. It is an effort to universalize quality elementary education for all children by 2010 in a mission mode. The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan emphasizes a holistic and comprehensive approach and suggests community-based monitoring system and also encourages developing partnerships between communities and

research institutions for effective supervision mechanisms. The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) Framework for programme implementation also emphasized the significance of quality education and suggested various parameters to be addressed in state and district plans to achieve the desired goal. The quality dimensions for elementary education have broadly been identified as:



❖ Sarva Shiksha Mission:

The SSA was conceived as a centrally sponsored scheme at the end of the Ninth Five Year Plan to improve the educational status in the country through interventions designed to improve accessibility, reduce gender and social gaps and improve the quality of learning. It laid down a framework for achieving the goals of universal enrolment through time bound targets and it is an attempt to provide quality education to all children through active participation of community in a mission mode.

In present, Sarva Shiksha Mission is a represented form of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan. Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan is quantitative approach i.e., children universal enrolment and universal retention in institutions and Sarva Shiksha Mission is qualitative approach i.e., not only universal retention but to give all children universal quality education and emphasized on decentralized education. For improvement of quality education to all children SSM was launched. For improving the quality of learning SSM interventions include opening of new schools and alternative schooling facilities, construction of schools and additional classrooms, toilets and drinking water,

provisioning for teachers, teacher training and academic resource support, text books and support for learning achievement, and holistic view of education, i.e., process of education with significant implications for curriculum, teacher education, education planning and management. Objectives of Sarva Shiksha Mission are:

- To develop effective Teaching Learning Materials.
- To improve competency of teachers for ensuring quality education.
- To ensure retention through joyful learning.
- Behavioral improvement and development of good qualities in children.
- Improvement of quality of learning.

❖ **Right to Free and Compulsory Education Act-2009:**

The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act or Right to Education Act (RTE) is an Act of the Parliament of India enacted on 4th August 2009, which describes the modalities of the importance of free and compulsory education for children between 6 and 14 in India under Article 21A of the Indian Constitution. It indicates that 'Compulsory Education' means obligation of the appropriate government to provide free elementary education and ensure compulsory admission, attendance and completion of elementary education to every child in the 6 to 14 age group. The law came into effect in the whole of India except the state of Jammu & Kashmir from 1st April 2010. And the Act also provides under Article 51-A (K) that it shall be a fundamental duty of every citizen of India who is a parent, guardian to provide opportunities for education to his child between the age of 6 and 14 years. The features of RTE Act-2009 are:

- Free and compulsory education to the age group of children 6 to 14;
- Provide school will have to take 25% of their class strength from the weaker section and the disadvantaged groups of the society through a random selection process and the Government will fund education of these children;
- This Act will be applied to all states except Jammu and Kashmir;
- No child can be held back and required to pass the board examination till the completion of elementary education;
- No donation and capitation free is allowed;
- No seats in this quota can be left vacant;
- No admission test or interview either for child or parents;
- There is provision for establishment of commissions to supervise the implementation of the act.
- All school has to adhere to rules and regulations laid down in this act, failing which the school will not be allowed to function. Three years moratorium period has been provided to school to implement all that is required of them;
- A fixed student and teacher ratio is to be maintained;

- This Act also prohibits all unrecognized educational institutions;
- Norms for teachers training and qualifications are also clearly mentioned in the act;
- All schools except private unaided schools are to be managed by School Management Committees with 75% of parents and guardians as members;
- Quality education will be improved;
- There will be provision for special training for drop-out students to bring up as par with students of same age.

Challenges of Quality Elementary Education

Several factors pose as challenges of quality in elementary education in India in the 21st century. These factors are highlighted and discussed below:

- ❖ **Access:** The reasons for children out-of-school are to do with physical access as well as social access. In several parts of the country, especially in small, remote habitations, children still do not have access to schooling facilities and thus remain out of school. Seasonal migration of families in search of work for several months every year is another reason which deprives children of the chance to go to school. In addition, sizeable proportion of children live in villages and habitations where formal schools exist, but due to social reasons such as caste and gender they are either not allowed to go to school, or not given the proper treatment in school.
- ❖ **Retention:** this is the issues of serious concern. Many children drop out of school before completing the elementary level. This high dropout is due to poor functioning of schools, i. e., dilapidated school buildings, overcrowded classrooms, irregular attendance of teachers and children, lack of teaching learning materials, ineffective teaching and the discriminatory attitude of teacher towards children of the marginalized sections of society.
- ❖ **Population explosion:** Tremendous increase in population frustrates all efforts to bring every child under the roof of schools. in spite of overall planning for the enrolment of vast number of children in schools, the explosion of population does not allow us improve their condition.
- ❖ **Poverty:** Due to poor economic conditions, parents are forced to keep their children away from school. Instead of sending them to schools, parents send them to work and live on the labour of their children. The female children are engaged in domestic work due to poverty.
- ❖ **Wastage and stagnation:** Wastage and stagnation stand in the way of universalisation of primary education. But wastage and stagnation should have controlled. It is challenge for Government to control wastage and stagnation and provide quality education for all.
- ❖ **Inadequate funding:** Inadequate funding is the most critical challenge that has threatened the attainment of good quality elementary education in India. The problem of

inadequate funding of education has been a bane to educational development in the country. Many institutions of elementary learning in India were unable to build lecture halls, students' hostels. The institutions because of inadequate funding are not able to employ additional teacher.

- ❖ **Education for women's:** Some people do not like girls' education due to ignorance, superstition and poverty. Such parents do not like to send their daughters to school. Moreover, the girls are more useful at home. Therefore, instead of sending them to school, they are engaged in domestic work.
- ❖ **Illiterate parents:** illiterate parents do not realize the importance of education for their children. They are indifferent to education due to their ignorance.
- ❖ **Inadequate teaching staffs:** A big challenge to the attainment of quality elementary education in India is the lack of trainee teacher and academic staff. According to Coombs (1970), teachers are the hub of any educational system. Teachers determine the quality of education because they transmit educational policies into practice and action. As rightly pointed out by Ukeje, (1996) without adequate number of inspiring, well-informed teachers, fully prepared to meet their responsibilities in our schools, we cannot have good education and without good education, we cannot hope for long to meet successfully, the challenges of a changing world.
- ❖ **Unattractive school environment:** Primary school environment is unfavourable for child full potentialities development. School programmes are dull and boring, because they follow traditional and uninspiring method of teaching. The courses of study are unrelated to the lives of the students.
- ❖ **Poor policy implementation:** Poor policy implementation is a challenge to quality delivery in education. The several factors could be adduced as inhibitors to smooth implementation of educational policies and thereby resulting to poor quality delivery. Low quality of education to little attention is given to teaching effectiveness, stressing that institutional policies are not geared towards making students learning a priority.
- ❖ **Education for backward class:** Like scheduled class and scheduled tribes, backward groups also do not bother about education because of different values of life and their social set up. The Government cannot provide education for backward classes.
- ❖ **Education of the handicapped:** Due to the non-availability of special teachers and financial resources for the education of disabled children, their education stands against the universalisation of primary education.
- ❖ **Lack of resources:** Quality education is dependent on the quality and quantity of human and material resources put in place in institutions. The lack of infrastructures such as students' hostels, libraries and electricity will affect the quality of education. Like materials resources, human resources are the most important factors in primary education. The words of A. K. Ghosh "Most of the backward countries are backward not because of inadequate supply of physical and financial resources but because of acute shortage of skilled personnel and techniques".

- ❖ **Poor leadership:** Poor leadership both at the government level and at the institution level have been a big challenge to quality in education. This is the place of leadership in the institutions of elementary education. The duty of leadership is to reduce problems within the system in order to enhance efficiency.

Suggestions for Quality Elementary Education

- ❖ **Financial support:** To provide primary education to all children, large number of primary schools and appropriate facilities are required. The Government needs a lot of money for improve quality elementary education.
- ❖ **Control population explosion:** Due to high birth rate, it is not possible to admit 100 per cent children of the age group of 6-14 in the primary schools. To solve this complicated problem, family planning should be enforced in the country.
- ❖ **Managing financial resources:** the total educational expenses devoted to primary schools are much less than that of the secondary and university education. so, both the Central and State Governments should see that primary education gets its proper share out of the total expenditure on education.
- ❖ **Community involvement:** A community establishes schools for the fulfillment of its needs and education should respond to the specific needs of the learner and have a sustainable impact on the development of the community. A community opens schools to perform ideas, traditions, cultural values, activities and experiences should be transmitted and developed from generation to generation. Community involve is an important for achieving quality elementary education.
- ❖ **Participation of parents:** participation of parents in the educational programmes may be encouraged to create awareness and interest regarding the utility of the education of the children.
- ❖ **Lessening wastage and stagnation:** To avoid wastage and stagnation, a system of automatic promotion should be adopted. No student should be asked to repeat a class even if his performance is not up to the mark. The teaching in primary schools should be made efficient and attractive in order to decreases wastage and stagnation.
- ❖ **Suitable Curriculum:** We can make primary education attractive by making the curriculum rich through not cumbersome and laborious. This should be life-centered, activity based and learner freedom oriented. Now National Curriculum Framework (NCF-2005) suggests building social constructivist learning climate in the classroom the encouraging children to the real partner of knowledge creation.
- ❖ **Broadening objectives of primary education:** The qualitative improvement of education at primary level should be broadened. J.P. Naik says, "The objectives of teaching should be 3 Rs, good manners, healthy habits, some skills with hands, general knowledge about the physical and social environment of India, level land people and the building up of some essential qualities like sense of responsibility, cooperativeness,

discipline and patriotism”.

- ❖ **Provision of audio-visual aids:** Provision of audio-visual aids for the development of education of children is very essential. This will attract the attention, motivation of the children towards education.
- ❖ **Pupil-teacher ratio:** Pupil-teacher ratio should be increased to meet the shortage of teachers especially in the villages. Increase the number of teacher is also essential to solve this problem. The national target of pupil-teacher ratio was set at 40:1. This has not attained uniformly. The revised PRT must be 30:1.
- ❖ **Separate schools for girls:** Separate schools should be established for girls. Parents should be persuaded to send their daughters to co-educational schools where separate schools cannot be established for a small number of girls. Lady teacher should be appointed with proper training in the rural areas.

Conclusion

Universalisation of elementary education is a free education up to the primary stage. In developed and advanced countries free education means no tuition fees, free books, and stationary, free mid-day meals and free school transport. But in our country free education means “free of tuition fees” and other facilities free of cost. Universalisation of primary education has now become a challenge before the educationists, teachers, social reformers, political thinkers and leaders and social activities in India. To achieve their targets, we will have to overcome many different problems such as, financial resources, physical resources and human resources. In fact, various effects have been taken for the last five decades for the universalisation of elementary education. However, it is time for us to face all challenges and build the emerging Indian society into a learning society, where education will be for all.

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