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The quality crisis in Indian primary education

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Abstract

Education is the fundamental for all development. In India, primary education is a fundamental right of every child (6-14 years age) irrespective of their caste, religion and area. After independence, India has extended her educational facilities. The high growth rate of GER, NER and declining rate of dropout tell us the success of Indian primary education. But "Are we achieving these milestones in the cost of quality? The study conducted by Pratham and NCERT exhibits that India's education system is achieving these milestones in the cost of Quality. Reports explored the reality of India's rural primary education. The quality of primary education of India is very poor. Large number of students are not learning the prescribe contents of the curriculum in primary education. A major portion of student cannot read simple text of Standard II nor do a simple division even after five years of primary education and the portion is increasing day by day.

Keywords : Quality crisis, Primary Education, Natural Integration.

1. Introduction

The goal of achieving universal primary education (UPE) has been on the international agenda since the Universal Declaration of Human Rights affirmed, in 1948, that elementary education has to be made freely and compulsory available for all children in all nation. This objective was restated subsequently on many occasions, by international treaties and in United Nations Conference Declaration. Most of these declarations and commitments were silent about the quality of education to be provided.

The two most recent United Nations International Conference Declarations focusing on education gave significant importance on 'quality aspect of primary education'. The Jomtien Declaration in 1990 and more particularly the Dakar Framework for Action 2000 recognized the 'quality of education' as a prime determinant whether education for all achieved or not. The World Education Forum (2000) agreed on six "education for all" (EFA) goals. The sixth goal concerns with quality of education: '… improving all aspects of the quality of education and ensuring excellence of all so that recognized and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all, especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills'. Moreover at the sub-regional meeting of South Asian Ministers in Kathmandu in April 2001, 'quality education' was unanimously identified as a priority area from the regional perspective. The World Bank (1997) in one of its reports on elementary education suggested that '... the best way to improve access is to improve quality which would make coming to school or staying in school a more attractive option from the perspective of parents as well as children. Moreover, efforts to improve quality will tend to increase the efficiency of the public expenditure and will encourage parents to contribute children education'.

Quality is a dynamic idea. Many educationalist and research scholars are defined the quality education according to their perspective. Defining the concept of quality is a little like trying to define 'motherhood'—it is clearly a good thing but elusive and likely to be dependent on the perspective of a person attempting the definition (Stephens, 2003). There is no universally accepted definition for 'quality of education' (Takwala, 2006). Terms like effectiveness, efficiency, equity, equality and quality

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are often used interchangeably (Adams, 1993). In education, perception of quality is around students (Mukhopadhyay, 2001). The performance of the students in examination results, learning achievements, ability to apply learned knowledge in practical life— exhibits the quality of education. For some, "quality of education" means value addition in education (Feigenbaum, 1951); excellence in education (Peters and Waterman, 1982); for others, fitness of education outcomes and experience for use (Juran and Gryna, 1988). Researchers measure the quality of education by the students' performance in labour market, such as extra earning or employment of the educated workers. One problem with this measure is that labour market performance depends on external circumstance, rather solely on schooling (Psacharopoulous & woodhall, 1985). Some research scholar measure the quality of education of a country by the enrollment ratio in the various stage of education. If a country has a high gross enrollment ratio, net enrollment ratio, disparities between boys and girls less, high completion rate, than that particular country has a high quality education. Another indicator of quality education is the learning achievement of the students. This concept of quality education is widely accepted by the international organization. The definition provided by World Bank, United Nations Millennium Declaration's committee and UNICEF on quality education reflect this concept of quality education. According to this concept quality education is measure by the learning acquire by the student in a particular stage of education through the learning achievement test in various subjects.

The Right of Education Act 2009 has implemented in India from the 1st April of 2010. This is a bold step of the government to meet the goal of universalization of primary education in our country. In article 45 of the Indian constitution incorporates directive principle of the state policy which states: the state shall endeavour to provide within a period of ten years from the commencement of this constitution free and compulsory education for all children until they complete the age of fourteen years. However, it takes almost 60 years to make an Act for free and compulsory primary education. This Act talks of compulsory and free admission in the primary level of education, but what about the learning of the students? The Act is silent in this important aspect of education. Because how well pupil are taught and how much they learn can have a crucial impact on how long they stay in school and how regularly they attend. Furthermore, whether parents send their children to school at all is likely to depend on the judgments they make about the quality of teaching and learning provided upon and whether attending school is worth the time and cost for their children and for themselves (education for All Global Monitoring Report, 2005).

The National Educational Policy 1986 and program of action 1992 formulate Minimum Level of Learning (MLL) for each class in primary education. MLL expects that every child by the end of a particular stage or class should be master on the content of the curriculum of that stage. But in subsequent time, importance on quality is replaced by quantity. During this period many program and schemes (Operation Black Board, District Primary Education Program, Sarvha Shiksha Abhiyan) had adopted to meet the goal of universalization of primary education. Importance had given to quantitative expansion of education ignoring the quality of education. And that is the fore most reason for which those program or scheme had not able to achieved their aim.

2. Data Source

The study is based almost solely on the data from the secondary source, mainly the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) (Rural) and The Learning Achievement of Class V Students— Base Line Study.

3. Objective

Are children learning in primary schools of rural India?

Are we achieving quantity in the cost of quality?

4. Interpretation

In a study, Jishnu Das and Tristan Zajone have measured the performance of Indian 8th grade students in an international benchmarked learning achievement test in mathematics. They used TIMSS (Trend in International Mathematics and Science Study) methodology and item (test items) of mathematics achievement test to compare the learning achievement of the Indian pupils with other countries in general and Asian countries in particular which participated in TIMSS-2003. They selected

two Indian states namely, Rajasthan and Orissa to conduct the learning achievement test in mathematics. They revealed that the learning achievement scenario of India is very poor than the other participate countries of the TIMSS-2003. The average learning achievement of the Indian student was 392 (Rajasthan: 381 & Orissa: 403). On the other hand our Asian neighbor had done great in TIMSS-2003. The average score of Chinese students was 576 and for Japan it was 570.

The quality of Indian primary education is going downstairs, especially in rural reas. The data from Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) (Rural) shows the fact of Indian primary education. Table No. 1 exhibits the percentage of Children in Standard V in Government Schools of rural area Who Can read Standard II level text. It is clear from the table that out of 20 Indian states 11 states experience negative progress during 2006-2009. In the 2006 ASER, 51.4 per cent of standard V students of government schools were able to read standard II level text but in ASER 2009 it has declined to 50.3 per cent with a negative per cent point change (-1.1). Only three Indian states, namely Madhya Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh and Maharashtra have achieved 70 per cent spot (ASER, 2009) i.e. 70% of students from those states have acquired the minimum level in language.

The scenario for mathematics was worst than language. Table No.2 presents the percentage of Children in Standard V in Government Schools Who Can Correctly Solve a Division Problem. Out of 20 states 16 states who had participated in ASER study, have a negative per cent point change. In the 2007 ASER, 41.0 per cent of standard V students of government schools who can correctly solve a division problem but in ASER 2009 it has declined to 36.1 per cent. So, the data exhibits that the quality of education in India is going downward day by day.

Table No. 1 : Percentage age of Children in Std V in Government Schools who can read Std II level text.

Selected States		Reference Year			Change in % points
	2006	2007	2008	2009	2006-2009
Madhya Pradesh	73.1	77.3	86.8	76	2.8
Kerala	71.8	73.3	73.3	63	-7.9
Uttarakhand	69.3	67.9	64.6	65.5	-3.8
Haryana	68.8	65.2	61.1	59.3	-9.4
West Bengal	65.1	68.2	45.2	45.9	-19.1
Bihar	64.3	66.7	62.8	56.7	-7.6
Himachal Pradesh	61.9	81.2	73.6	72.2	10.3
Maharashtra	60.1	73.7	74.3	71.5	11.4
Assam	58.7	53.0	40.9	39.8	-18.9
Jharkhand	58.5	56.6	51.9	45.9	-12.6
Orissa	55.4	49.5	59.6	56.4	1.0
Chhattisgarh	52.6	56.8	74.1	64.1	11.5
Rajasthan	52.2	45.6	45.1	40.1	-12.0
Gujarat	47.4	47.9	43.8	42.8	-4.6
Punjab	44.3	65.9	61.3	63.8	19.5
Andhra Pradesh	41.0	70.6	57.6	55.2	14.2

Uttar Pradesh	30.9	41.8	33.4	30.3	-0.6
Jammu & Kashmir	30.0	30.4	23.2	20.2	-9.7
Karnataka	28.8	43.3	42.9	46.1	17.2
Tamil Nadu	27.8	33.9	26.7	34.6	6.8
All India	51.4	56.7	53.1	50.3	-1.1

Source : various years ASER report

Table No. 2 : Percentage age of Children in Std V in Government Schools who can correctly Solve a Division Problem

Selected States	Reference Year			Change in % points
	2007	2008	2009	2007-2009
Madhya Pradesh	65.2	77.8	64.9	-.3
Himachal Pradesh	64.6	57.4	62.9	-1.7
West Bengal	61.4	29.4	36.5	-24.9
Bihar	61.4	50.9	51.5	-9.9
Punjab	55.2	39.7	47.5	-7.7
Haryana	53.8	45.7	46.5	-7.3
Uttarakhand	50.9	38.4	42.3	-8.6
Maharashtra	45.7	46.9	49.8	4.1
Andhra Pradesh	45.2	33.5	41.5	-3.1
Jharkhand	40.4	30.5	29.8	-10.6
Kerala	39.9	38.3	36.4	-3.6
Gujarat	34.0	24.1	23.6	-10.4
Orissa	31.7	36.0	44.0	12.4
Rajasthan	31.5	25.9	25.7	-5.8
Chhattisgarh	31.1	59.5	50.7	19.7
Jammu & Kashmir	28.7	17.5	16.9	-11.7
Assam	28.1	15.5	22.02	-6.1
Uttar Pradesh	25.9	15.8	16.0	-10.0
Karnataka	18.9	14.9	21.0	2.2
Tamil Nadu	15.2	9.0	11.9	-3.3
All India	41.0	34.4	36.1	-4.9

Source : various year ASER report

The Learning Achievement of Class V Students— Base Line Study conducted by NCERT, has also revealed the poor learning achievement of the primary school children in different subjects. The average learning achievements of the students are 46.51, 58.87 and 50.3 respectively for mathematics, language and environment. The rural–urban difference in performance is also very marginal. In mathematics and environment, the difference is less than 2 per cent point and in language it is less than 1 per cent point.

5. Findings

So, from the above discussion, we can say that a major portion student of primary schools of India is not acquiring the minimum level of learning in the contents of the curriculum, especially in rural areas. Right to Education does not merely mean right of admission in a school. Right to Education also means right to learn (knowledge). Every enrolled student of the school has the equal right to learn and it is the responsibility of the government to ensure or protect this right of the children.

6. Conclusion

The quality of primary education, especially in rural India, is very poor and it is declining year by year. Poor quality of education/learning has many long term effects on the learners as well as for the society as a whole. The long-term implications include lower productivity levels of work force, resistance to modernization of productive assets and ineffective production system (Aggarwal, 2000). Moreover to compete with the global world and more particularly with Asian countries like china, the quality of Indian education has to be enhanced. Primary education is the foundation stage of education and the success of the students in subsequent stage of education is likely depending upon it. It is the time for the government of India to formulate a policy which deal with minimum level of learning norms that a student must have to learn the prescribe contents of the curriculum in a particular stage of education. Facilities should be provided to the schools that enhance the quality of education such as qualified and trained teacher, basic infrastructure, continuous monitoring & inspection and other facilities which makes a school more effective.

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