

Challenges Ahead for Teachers in Elementary Education in India

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Elementary Education is the foundation on which the development of every citizen and the nation as a whole is built upon. The Indian Parliament has passed the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009 which came into force with effect from April 1, 2010. Under this Act, every child between the age of six to fourteen years has a right to free and compulsory education in a neighbourhood school till the completion of elementary education. ¹Some of the highlights of this Act are: -No child would be failed or expelled from school till the age of 14, The Act calls for a fixed pupil-teacher ratio i. e. 30: 1, Financial burden will be shared between the centre and states, the Act also mandates improvement in quality of education. ²

The Government of India has implemented a range of initiatives in the field of elementary education. Basic School structure has been put in place across the country, classroom and toilets have been built, in many states thousands of teachers have been recruited and most villages have a school within one kilometre. Over the past decade, India's annual budget for elementary education has risen steadily and is currently Rs 21, 000, crore. ³Though the Indian Government has taken many steps to achieve the aim of universalization of elementary education, but the quality of elementary education in India has been a major concern.

However due to shortage of resources and lack of political will, this system suffers from certain weaknesses including high pupils to teacher ratio, shortage of infrastructure, poor level of learning outcome, high level of dropout of students, teacher training, teacher absenteeism, lack of community involvement, prevalence of child labour, absence of parent's interest in school functioning, lack of accountability and lack of effective performance monitoring system. In the light of the challenges discussed earlier, following are some suggestions which may be helpful to meet these challenges.

The first step to improve the quality of education is to have well trained teachers. The majority of institutions imparting education are private ones and unregulated. The quality of training imparting by these institutions are questionable. These institutions need to be assured quality. So a regulatory system should be developed for these institutions. The government should enhance the competency and skill of the teachers by promoting pre-service and in-service training for them because it make them to meet the requirements of profession and face the challenges there in. DIET (District Institution of Education And Training at Elementary Level) and other training institutions must be utilized for this purpose. Such Pre-service and in-service training programmes should be constantly reviewed and strengthened, as its quality has a direct bearing on the quality of education in state. However, Teachers Eligibility Test introduced by the centre government will provide benchmarks for quality standards of teacher education. ⁴There is a requirement of bringing in research methods and methodologies in appropriate form in teacher education at pre-service and in -service programmes. The new initiatives, innovations, surveys and studies need to be encouraged. These may be exploratory or diagnostic in nature. Research must referred to policy issues, curriculum issues, evaluative procedures, training strategies, classroom practice etc. These research, innovations and survey must become an integral part of training programmes of teacher education institutions. So the top priority should be given for improvement in the quality and content of teacher education programme.

Yet, despite massive investment in primary education, about 20% of Indian children between the age of six and fourteen are not enrolled in school. Even among enrolled children, attendance rates are low and 26% of pupils enrolled in primary schools dropout before Grade5. ⁵The data produced by Government of India shows that at elementary level gender gaps also exist. Literacy rates are 21% lower for females than for males. Among those Children age six to 14 are not enrolled in school, more than 60% are girls. ⁶

The main reason of the absence and dropout of pupils is their poor family conditions. Though, the child labour is banned but many children need to work and earn in order to supplement a meager family income and therefore do not attend school. In order to meet the challenges of dropout and gender gaps in elementary education, there is a need of combined efforts not only by the teachers but the community as a whole. For this awareness camps should be arranged for parents, and teachers can also visit the homes to bring the students in schools.

Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) shows the poor level of learning outcomes at elementary level. Many children are not acquiring even basic abilities in reading and arithmetic. 53% of Std5 children in India could not read a std 2 level text and 36% could not solve a three digit by one digit division Problem. ⁷The main reason for this poor learning outcome is absence of the pre- primary classes. To make the strong base of students there should be kindergarden classes in elementary schools, because a strong building can be built on strong foundation only.

As the RTE Act says that no Student would be failed or dropped from School till the age of 14 is also a big challenge for teachers to deal with. With the mix of students in class, it would be very difficult for teachers to remain impartial and treat all the

students equal without any bias. However substantial efforts should be made by teachers to maintain and impart quality education. No detention should not be seen as no quality. Children should be given remedial coaching. The root cause of failure, lack of interest among students and no support from their home need to be addressed.

Another suggestion to improve the quality of education, pupil teacher ratio must be maintained as per requirement. For this required number of teachers must be recruited on regular basis. Though the financial burden is to be shared between the centre and the states, many states have already voiced their inability to mobilize funds and entered into dispute with the centre. This financial crisis can be solved by the centre -state co-operation. Central government should also release budget of its share to the states.

Under the RTE Act, each Schools has to establish SMCs (School Management Committees) and involve the parents in committees.⁸ School Management committees (SMC) should be empowered to improve school infrastructure and reduce teachers absenteeism. They should be trained to monitor the attendance and performance of teachers. The role expected to be played by SMCS is not very difficult. To make them aware of their responsibilities, periodical awareness training programme should be organised. Because without this awareness and their cooperation, this provision will remain on paper only.

At present, the major challenge before teacher is to regulate the grant- in- aid apart from improving the education standard. To regulate the grant -in- aid, separate clerical staff should be recruited by education department at block and cluster levels, so that teacher can freely give their best to impart the quality education to students.

In order to meet the challenges in elementary-education, It is needful to continue all the efforts with full dedication and commitment not only by the centre and state government but the community as a whole. Because community participation and involvement of NGOs can make marked difference in the meeting the challenge in elementary education. So there is also need for greater coordination among difference agencies and functionaries involved in this task.

References

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- [5] See: SSA data on enrolment of elementary students at: <http://ssa.nic.in>
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- [7] *ibid* 2010.
- [8] The Right of children to Free and Complousary Education Act, 2009, *op. cit.*
Also see: right to education: in/school management committees.

