

EDUCATION SCENARIO IN INDIA TO ENSURE QUALITY OF UNIVERSAL PRIMARY EDUCATION: A STUDY

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Abstract: In education system primary education is very important stage for development of children, while getting primary education at early stage of life learn and develop mind. Primary education level is varied by different states of India. Every state having different course study and facilities in schools. My paper deals with only primary level educational scenario and with suggestions to improve quality.

Key Words: Primary Education, Quality Education, Education system, Students, schools.

1. INTRODUCTION:

The key concern about education, in any formal educational system, of all time, has been its quality. Every stake holder, direct or indirect, of education is concerned about its quality. Guardians or parents, irrespective of their socio-economic status, want to educate their children with best quality education which would add better value to the degrees their wards acquire subject to the budget constraints. But what do we mean by 'quality education'? How this quality is being assessed? What is the status of the quality of education in India? This paper seeks to focus on these issues with respect to the quality of primary education in India.

There is no universally accepted definition for 'quality of education'. In education, perception of quality is around students (Mukhopadhyay, 2001). The performance of the students like examination results, learning achievements, ability to apply learned knowledge in practical life-- exhibit the quality of an 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).

For a society, "excellence" and "value" are most appropriate indicators for quality education. A generally accepted definition of quality education does not exist and different end users adopt different criteria for determining the quality of education.

In this study we measure the quality of primary education on the basis of student learning achievement (i.e., ability of read, write and do mathematics).

2. PRIMARY EDUCATION : UNIVERSALITY VS QUALITY:

The universal declaration of human rights (1948) considered primary education as the basic human right of all people. Accordingly, all nations prioritized universal access to education. The developed and developing countries have attained universal or near universal access to primary education. Now the focus is on the quality of student learning. The quality concern is not uniform across the nations. The developing and poor nations are still striving for expansion of educational access. It has been established that access to education and its quality are not sequential elements. At the sub-regional meeting of South Asian Ministers in Katmandu in April 2001, quality education was unanimously identified as a priority area. All participants were in agreement that there was an urgency to develop the quality of education to meet the intermediate target and education for all by 2015. 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. Further whether parents send their children to school at all is likely to depend on the judgment they make about the quality of teaching and learning. Based on this perception parents decide whether attending school is worth the time and cost for their children and for themselves. The World Bank (1997) 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'.

In the year 1950, when the Constitution of India was adopted, education was recognized as a basic individual right. Directive Principles of State Policy, Article 45, states that “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” (The Constitution of India). In line with the commitment of the country to provide elementary education to all children, educational facilities have got tremendously expanded during the post independence period, especially in primary stage. The number of primary school in India has increased from 2.2 lakhs in 1950-51 to nearly 7 lakhs in 2004-05. In addition, there are at present nearly 3 lakhs non-formal education centres providing primary level education to out-of-school children in the age group 9 to 14. This expansion has definitely helped in making primary level education more easily accessible to a large section of children. As a result, the illiteracy rate and drop-out rate at school stage have come down. The national literacy rate has increased from 52.21 per cent in 1991 to 64.84 per cent in 2001. The drop-out rate has also declined from 64.9 per cent in 1960-61 to 29 per cent in 2004-2005. Although the literacy rates for both males and females have increased, the latter still continues to lag behind the former. However, there has been a narrowing of the male-female gap in literacy from 24.8 percentage point in 1991 to 21.7 percentage point in 2001 (Selected Educational Statistics 2004-05).

Primary education is the first stage of formal education. The main objective of quality primary education is to inculcate basic knowledge about reading, writing and arithmetic among the children. It is expected that after the successful completion of the primary level of education, a pupil should be able to read, write, and solve simple arithmetic problem.

3. QUALITY SURVEY:

The study was conducted in primary schools in all the States of India (excluding Union Territories, Mizoram, Sikkim) to measure the learning achievement (quality) of students in language and mathematics. This study found that in India after completion of primary level education, 11 per cent student were not able to recognize anything, 14.1 per cent can recognize only letters, 14.9 per cent can read a word, 17 per cent can read a paragraph of a story and only 42.8 per cent can read the complete story (Table 1).

Table 1
School Children who can read-standard-wise (IV)
(in per cent)

State	Nothing	Letters	Word	One-Para of the story	Complete story
Andhra Pradesh	8.8	10.5	15.6	17.7	47.35
Arunachal Pradesh	7.2	13.5	21.6	13.3	44.4
Assam	10.8	15.5	20.2	21.2	32.3
Bihar	14.9	15.2	12.8	14.8	42.3
Goa	6	6.1	12.9	24.2	56.2
Gujarat	7.2	12.4	18.9	18.6	42.9
Haryana	8.5	12.1	12.7	16.1	50.7
Himachal Pradesh	3.5	14.9	11.8	14.5	55.35
Jammu & Kashmir	3.4	10.2	26.5	20.8	39.1
Karnataka	5.4	12.1	17.7	19.0	45.9
Kerala	3.2	3.7	10.7	11.3	71.1
Madhya Pradesh	15.7	15.3	15.5	17.1	36.5
Maharashtra	7	12.1	13.0	17.4	50.45
Manipur	10.6	10.7	18.7	15.7	44.4
Meghalaya	9	8.9	22.0	8.9	59.5

Nagaland	3.1	16.5	21.7	255.6	33.2
Orissa	12.4	15.0	13.5	15.05	44.2
Punjab	8.9	15.3	15.1	17.85	42.8
Rajasthan	15.8	13.2	12.7	14.95	43.6
Tamil Nadu	10.3	11.4	17.5	17.3	43.6
Tripura	1.0	7.3	11.7	16.8	63.4
Utter Pradesh	16.8	19.2	14.6	14.8	34.6
West Bengal	4.3	12.3	13.8	24.6	44.9
Chhattisgarh	7.3	16.0	15.0	15.5	46.4
Jharkhand	13.8	16.9	15.5	15.4	38.5
Uttaranchal	6.8	13.0	11.2	13.3	55.7
All India	11.0	14.1	14.9	17.0	42.8

Source: India Education Report 2011

The condition of students learning achievement (quality) is extremely poor in mathematics compare to language. This study found that after the successful completion of the primary level education, 18.6 per cent children could not recognize the numbers, 26.7 per cent children can recognize the numbers but not able to do addition or subtraction, 23.9 per cent children only can do subtraction, and only 30.7 per cent children can do addition, subtraction as well as division. Table 2 contains data relating to mathematical learning achievement (quality) in all Indian states.

Table 2
All school children who can solve written numerical sums standard-wise (IV)
(in per cent)

State	Nothing	Number recognition	Subtraction	Division
Andhra Pradesh	11.9	25.7	26.5	35.9
Arunachal Pradesh	7.6	21.1	31.3	40.1
Assam	22.1	28.1	25.7	24.0
Bihar	22.6	21.1	21.4	35.0
Goa	5.6	24.8	32.5	36.8
Gujarat	16.	27.3	22.2	34.3
Haryana	13.8	19.6	20.7	45.9
Himachal Pradesh	5.8	26.2	21.0	47.0
Jammu & Kashmir	5.0	29.6	25.1	40.3
Karnataka	8.6	36.0	31.4	24.0
Kerala	4.9	22.8	25.7	46.6
Madhya Pradesh	20.5	28.8	23.2	27.5
Maharashtra	17.5	31.8	23.9	26.7
Manipur	14.4	24.7	26.9	34.0
Meghalaya	10.1	25.2	27.6	37.2

Nagaland	7.6	33.4	36.4	22.5
Orissa	24.0	26.8	25.3	23.8
Punjab	14.7	25.8	27.0	32.5
Rajasthan	23.9.	23.2	18.7	34.2
Tamil Nadu	14.0	30.2	28.1	27.7
Tripura	5.9	17.1	37.4	39.6
Utter Pradesh	30.3	27.2	19.8	22.8
West Bengal	7.8	21.7	28.0	42.5
Chhattisgarh	14.8	28.0	23.5	33.8
Jharkhand	24.0	25.3	24.2	26.5
Uttaranchal	10.0	27.8	25.1	37.1
All India	18.6	26.7	23.9	30.7

Source: India Education Report 2011

This is the scenario of primary education in India where students are not in a position to read, write and do a simple arithmetic problem even after completing the primary level education. The learning achievement of the student is very poor in all Indian states whether it is educationally backward or forward.

The National Knowledge Commission (2007) has been emphasizing on 'quality primary education' for making India as a knowledge society in the world. The quality of education mainly depends upon physical infrastructure, qualified and competent teachers, curriculum and instructional materials, support materials and equipments, teaching learning strategies, comprehensive and continuous evaluation and effective management. Unfortunately in our country, where 90 per cent of our primary schools are run by government, most of them are situated in rural areas, lack the average criteria for quality education. The low learning achievement problem in India mostly due to the combination of following factors:

- Most of the primary schools are shelterless.
- The schools with buildings have insufficient accommodation.
- Students mostly sit on mats/tats.
- High pupil-teacher ratio.
- Textbooks for teachers, which contain the methods for teaching for every unit of the curriculum, are not provided in time.
- Teaching aids are very old. Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is still not used for teaching in primary education which is recognized as very effective for learning.
- The teachers of public schools often participate in political activity or other profitable activity rather than concentrating in teaching the pupils.
- Most of rural areas of India have their own local dialect. In many states the use of mother tongue as medium of instruction is not followed strictly. This is particularly so in case of the students belonging to linguistic minorities. The students belonging to the linguistic minorities have to study in the language of the linguistic majority of the state.
- Political nature of appointment of the primary teachers is largely responsible for poor quality of teaching.
- Resource materials are never provided in adequate quantity.
- Community support is at the very low.
- A high absentee rate of the students in primary school particularly in rural areas.
- Co-curricular activities have not been given due importance as the teachers of the primary schools particularly of public schools and rural areas consider them as wastage of valuable time. As a result, making learning a fun for the students is not done.
- Inspection system for primary education has become only a ritual.

- Curriculum of primary education is hardly matches the surroundings of the students in which they live. As a result, students often suffer from fish-out-of-water syndrome leading to a high drop-out rate.

For quality improvement, we have to re-think about the idea, structure and system of primary education which have very crucial motivating effects on the students. The teaching–learning environment and quality of education are so unsatisfactory particularly in government controlled primary schools that teachers of those schools themselves prefer to arrange education for their children in a better run school in private sector. The elite and rich groups of the society or village enroll their children in private schools where quality is presumed to be far better than the government schools. So the clients of these public schools are the poorest of the poor, economically and socially downtrodden people. The stakeholders of these schools being weak and vulnerable cannot ensure accountability of the system for quality education. The elite groups are not concerned about this, as their children are safe in private schools. The marginal groups of the society or villages are not in a position to enroll their children in private schools which provide quality education. Due to the economic factor they have to enroll their children in government run primary schools where quality is very poor. So the children belonging to marginal groups are deprived from good quality education and as a result they can hardly climb ladder of development. To overcome this problem, government should implement the voucher system, especially in case of primary education. Suppose government spends Rs.2000 per child per year for their primary education, under the voucher system of education the government should give voucher of Rs.2000 per child to parents, who can use this voucher to pay fees for schools of their choice. So that the children of marginal groups also get the opportunity to access to good quality primary education and can develop their standard of living. This needs to be done in the larger interest of rural India and particularly for the poor who are worst affected due to the degradation of quality of the government primary schools. Besides the introduction of the voucher system, it is also important to revamp the public sector education system with a particular focus on the quality of primary education.

4. SUGGESTIONS:

For improving quality, the concerned authorities need to emphasis on the following issues:

- Early childhood education is extremely important and must be universalized.
- A relevant curriculum.
- Accurate assessment of learning outcomes.
- Participatory management of education system.
- Engaging local communities.
- Using ICT in teaching learning process
- Training of teachers and administrators of ICT.
- District Institute of Education and Training (DIETs) and State Council of Educational Research and Training (SCERT) need to be more strengthened and undergo structural changes.
- Establishment of a National Primary Education Assessment system like National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) for Higher education.
- Strengthening the teacher training institution.
- Reform in examination system.
- Proficiency in English is widely perceived as an important avenue for employment and upward knowledge, which also greatly facilitates the pursuit of higher education. English should be incorporated into the curriculum of primary schools as a language subject.
- Special strategies needs to be devised to ensure greater access to schools for children in backward regions, remote locations, children belonging to SC/ST and Muslim communities and other backward caste (OBC).
- Substantially higher public spending is required for quality primary education.
- There should be transparent, norm-based and straightforward procedures for the recognition of private schools.
- Community participating in monitoring the primary education.
- Parent-teacher association.
- Rigorous implementation of the inspection system.

- Optimizing the pupil teacher ratio.
- Developing new teaching learning strategies.
- Developing the infrastructure of primary education.
- Appointment of duly qualified teachers in primary level.
- Appointment of female teachers and teachers in disadvantaged and rural areas. Local qualified applicants need to be preferred.
- District based educational planning and implementation body needs to be formed.

5. CONCLUSION:

It appears from the empirical study that quality of primary education has been compromised for its universality in India. Operation Black Board, District Primary Education Project, National Literacy Programme, Sarvha Shiksha Abhiyan—all aim at universalizing. It is time that the nation pays heed to the quality dimension. As it has already been pointed out, quality indirectly helps in making the quantity. As a result, quality improvement programmes need to be devised for all levels—national, state and district.

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