

**PRIMARY EDUCATION IN INDIA: STATUS AND CONCERNED QUALITIES
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Education is a means by which poverty, unemployment and social injustice in the society can be eradicated. Education acts as a lever for betterment of societies and races. Primary education is the foundation of education system of a nation. As a strong building cannot stand without a strong foundation similarly, we cannot achieve quality in secondary education, vocational education and higher education without improving the status of primary education but it is observed that primary education in India is not at a satisfactory level.

The present paper discusses the various causes underlying the unsatisfactory status of primary education in India. Factors responsible for the problems of primary education are related to students, their family environment, teachers and improper implementation of Governmental policies. All the above mentioned factors have been discussed in detail in the paper.

INTRODUCTION:

‘Education imparts knowledge and skills that enable people to realize their full potential, and so becomes a catalyst for the achievement of development goals. Education reduces poverty boosts job opportunities, and fosters economic prosperity. It also increases people’s chance of leading a healthy life, deepens the foundation of democracy, and changes the attitudes to protect the environment and empower women’ (UNESCO, EFA, 2013). This becomes extremely essential in the present scenario when we have to face the global competition. Thus, it can be said that primary education is the key to economic, social and global development of a country. Gandhi ji realized the role of primary education in national development and proposed the scheme of ‘Basic Education’. Basic education talked about providing free and compulsory education to all children in the age group of six to fourteen years. Article 45 of the constitution states that the state shall endeavor to provide within a period of ten years from the commencement of the constitution, for free and compulsory education for all children until they complete the age of fourteen years.

Many other steps had been taken for the betterment of the status of primary education in our country. Major steps in this direction include:

1. In 1986, universalization of primary education was accepted as national goal and emphasis was laid on its quality improvement and expansion.
2. In 1987-88 operation black board was initiated.
3. In 1990 world education conference on education for all (EFA) was held in Thailand. World declaration on education for all was made, India also participated in it.
4. District Primary Education programme (DPEP), was started in 1994.
5. National Programme of Nutrition’s support to primary education, which is also known as Mid Day Meal scheme started on 15Aug1995.
6. Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan was launched in 2000.
7. RTE Act 2009 was legislated on 1st April 2010 with the objective of free and compulsory education for every child in the age group of 6-14.

Despite of these major steps taken for improving the status of primary education, the position of India is found to be highly unsatisfactory in the international scenario. India scored 72th rank out of total 73 countries that participated in the **Programme for International Students Assessment (PISA, 2012)**. Children aged 15 years participated in PISA. Students from educationally advanced states of India as Tamilnadu and Himachal Pradesh were selected by central govt. to participate in PISA.

ASER, 2013 presents the real educational status of Indian students. Though ASER conducts the survey in rural region of the states but the condition of children in urban schools is no different than in rural region. It can be concluded on the basis of ASER that the children in India are approximately, over two or more grades below the level that is expected of them.

The reason underlying the lower level of educational achievement of children in spite of all the schemes, policies and programme being run for the betterment of primary education had been focusing on enrollment and retention of children in school. The earnest concern had been 'schooling for all' and not 'learning for all'. The need of hour is to shift the focus from 'schooling for all' to 'learning for all'. Batra (2011) stated there continues to be a tension between the contemporary policy imperatives and the lived reality in the school education in India. Shiv Kumar & Rustagi (2010), stated that 'studies indicate that the states are rushing to achieve enrolment targets but providing substandard education in the process'. There are many challenges to be faced to achieve quality education for all. The challenges are on the part of students, teachers, school and administration. These areas are interrelated and the problems associated with one area cannot be separated from the other. For a long period of time, students had been considered as the recipients of knowledge and the teachers as disseminators of knowledge, as that of a physical entity. The students memorize the facts, recall them and present in exams without understanding or any knowledge of practical application. 'Beyond teaching the basics, teachers must help children gain important transferrable skills to help them become responsible global citizens .Improving learning , especially among the most disadvantaged children, needs to be made a strategic objective' (UNESCO,EFA, **Global Monitoring Report, 2013**). The knowledge is not a physical entity to be passed on to students; students should be the creator of their own knowledge. The child must be able to apply it to his practical life. There exists a communication gap between the teacher and the taught. If the children do not understand the taught subject matter they dare not to ask it again.

C.C.E pattern has been introduced in the school education. The activities which were once known as extra- curricular activities are today known as co- curricular activities are expected to become an integral part of the schooling. In actual practice it is no more than the record work. The author visited govt. primary to know about the co curricular activities held in the school there was no other word than 'good' in the register. All the students studying in all the grades were marked 'A' in all the school activities.

RTE Act, 2009 has set standards for the learning level of students according to their grades. Section 29(2) of RTE Act emphasizes on learning through activities, discovery and exploration in a child friendly and child centered manner. In actual practice the concern of teacher is the completion of syllabus in the stipulated time irrespective of the students understanding. The evaluation of student's learning is based on the recalling of the memorized facts. Comprehensive and continuous evaluation of child understands of knowledge and his or her ability to apply the same is emphasized in RTE Act, 2009.

The teacher's profession in India is no less challenging. Teachers had been blamed for the decline in the learning level of students. It is a big challenge to deal with a classroom which contains students belonging to average, above average and children who do not possess the knowledge below two or three grade levels expected of them.

Absenteeism is another problem in typical Indian schools. Students do not attend school during the period of agriculture work at fields. They stay at home either to work in fields or to look after their siblings. Poverty and parental illiteracy that refrains the students from attending the school regularly worsens the problems. According to NCFTE 2010,' the teacher must be equipped not only to teach but also to understand the students and the community of parents so that children are regular in school and learn'. It

is another problem for teachers to teach when a fraction of students are absent every next day. No appropriate platform is available for teachers to share their experiences and problems. Azim Prem ji foundation has started a portal for teachers of India, this is a praiseworthy step in this direction, but it is the initial stage with only 7727 users. These programmes need to be in the knowledge and access of all the teachers and people related to education.

Illiterate parents do not realize the value of education; they are least bothered about their wards performance at school. Poverty is another major issue. Attending Parent Teacher Meeting at children's schools costs the poor parents loss of at least half day or full day wages.

'School teaching in India has declined to the status of a least favored profession in the last three decades. It has largely become the last resort of educated unemployed youth, part time business, people and young women seeking to find a part time socially acceptable profession. '(Batra, 2011). Problems related to teachers inefficiency are a result of inappropriate teacher training programme. Commercialization of teacher training programmer (B.Ed, M.Ed.) is an open secret. **NCFTE 2010**, states 'A glaring weakness of the existing teacher education practice is the restricted scope of evaluation of student teacher and its exclusively quantitative nature confined to measurement of cognitive learning through annual/terminal tests. The quantitative dimension of teacher education, other professional capacities, attitudes and values remain outside the purview of evaluation'. In service teacher training is nothing more than a formality where the trainees and trainers reach the venue and stay there for three four hours. They have two three lectures with the refreshment and the travel allowance and they depart. Ramchandran (2005), 'found that teachers in several states revealed that training is a ritual, often the teachers reached the training venue at 11 am and leave by 3 pm after attending two or three lectures...In some remote districts where govt. is not able to monitor the training programme, teachers reach the venue, collect their travel allowance and asked to disappear for three to four days- ticking of the activity as done'.

Teacher dissatisfaction is another issue related to primary education. Teachers are seen to be dissatisfied due to appointment in remote area. Para teachers, Shiksha Mitra, Shiksha Karmi, Contract basis teachers and low paid local teachers appointment by actually posed teachers in remote areas, are different categories of teachers which dilute the respect and resourcefulness of a teacher. 'While hiring contract teachers to alleviate teacher's shortage can help in short term, it is unlikely to meet the long term need to extend quality education. Countries that rely heavily on contract teachers, notably in Africa, rank at or near the bottom for education access and learning (**UNESCO, EFA, Global Monitoring Report, 2013**). Another reason for teacher dissatisfaction is high qualifications of primary teachers. Unemployment forces the highly qualified people to join the primary teaching jobs, where by the over qualified teachers are not able to do justice with their job.

Yet another area in primary education which is required to be bought to attention is the school infrastructure. The infrastructure of primary school in India has not been repoted satisfactory. Schools lack necessary resources as adequate building, teaching learning material, separate toilets for girls, boys and teachers, necessary equipment (charts, fans, mats. etc.).

Now it is the time to give a deep thought and find appropriate solutions to the problems that act as hindrance in the direction of achieving the goal of universalization of primary education and availing quality primary education to every child of our nation.

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