

# Primary Education: Suggestions to Improve the Status

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Wealth of a nation does not lie in the banks but in the primary classes, these are the words of the first Education Minister of Independent India, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad. In essence, this statement is indeed the foundation stone of the education policy of India. For any nation, the primary education system is of utmost importance. Primary education forms the basic step of an individual's formal education. If we imagine education to be a building, then primary education is surely the foundation stone, and as everyone knows and would agree that stronger the foundation stone-stronger the building. Primary education plays an important role in shaping the thoughts and character of a nation. Primary education is not limited to an individual only, it affects the entire population of the nation. The education of the masses is the basis of the growth and development of a nation. Swami Vivekanand had said that politics and strategic planning would fail and hold no position unless the common man is educated again.

India is a democratic nation and a developing country. In a democracy cent percent literacy is essential, because the public elects its own leader, also every citizen should be aware of his/her rights and duties. It has been 72 years since we have gained our

Independence, and the greatest matter of concern is that we still have not managed to attain 100 percent literacy. Although, the government is still trying hard and has come up with various state and national level schemes and programmes such as Sarva Shiksha Abhiyaan, Mid-day Meal, District Primary Education Programme, the Indian government has also banned child labour in order to ensure that children do not enter unsafe working conditions and they attend school, yet the condition is not even close to satisfactory. The problem does not just lie in increasing the literacy rate but also to increase the quality of education.

The present scenario of education in India is plagued by many problems. To improve the quantitative and qualitative growth very many endeavors are required. In the present paper I will try to find out some solutions with the help of supporting studies.

The problem is to curb the growing drop-out rate, after that a huge emphasis should be laid on improving teacher-student ratio. the education of girl child still faces neglect due to many social reasons. A lot of effort is required to get rid of the prejudices clouding the horizon. There should also be focus on bridging the gap between urban India and rural Bharat. A weak and impact-less primary education system can harm the society with a large impact. The government has made efforts but the sheer magnitude of the population makes these efforts incomplete. Sarv Shiksha Abhiyaan has emphasized on improving the teacher-student ratio, teacher's training, academic support, facilitating development of teaching, learning material and providing textbooks to children from special focus groups, etc.

What is quality ? In developing countries the examination results are often used as a proxy for the quality of education. However, such a method is fraught with great problems, as the examination system is limited in scope and coverage as far as learning is concerned. The researches have established that acquiring both cognitive and non-cognitive competencies necessary for a child's overall development. However most of the researches in learning achievement have focused on the assessment of cognitive skills acquired by the students. An equally reliable measure of quality of education is whether pupils are learning effectively, improving their skills and abilities, widening their experience and growing socially or morally or not. Ability to work with others, readiness to accept responsibility and to work for public good are highly praised characteristics among school leavers but assessment tools do not test such skills. Quality cannot improve by itself. It requires reforms in teacher training; improvement in facilities and infrastructure in schools, teacher's motivation; and change in the style of teaching to make it alternative to the students:

"Providing education for all is not just about educating teachers and training planners. It is also about making institutions work by improving administrative routines and changing organizational culture. Indeed, it is about moulding the broader institutional environment to ensure administrative transparency, accountability and integrity. To achieve the goal of education for all, we have to educate ourselves about how it can best be accomplished." G. Hernnes, Director I.I.E.P., Paris.

## **Suggestion to Improve the Status**

### **1. Health**

The health and nutrition of the children should be first and foremost. India is a developing country where due attention has not been paid to nutrition of the child. One of the methods can be to make mid-day meal more nourishing with a balanced diet. Monthly or bi-monthly health check-ups and vaccinations must be held to monitor children's health.

### **2. Syllabus**

An ideal primary education should be such that if a child cannot study further due to some reasons, even then he has both moral and social values instilled in him. He should be aware of environmental issues, he should have knowledge about the depleting non-renewable natural resources. He should be well versed with human rights and duties, treat humanity above all religions and love his country above all. He should be trained to cater to the needs of the local cottage industry or to start something on his own.

### **3. Methods**

Moral values can be imparted through storytelling. Social values like environment awareness, judicious use of water and human rights should be taught through charts, picture-stories and posters. Poem recitation can also be used as a method of teaching. By asking questions on picture stories, the teacher will impart the lessons and get active participation of the students as well. Activity based methods should be used. For instance, when the students are told about the afforestation then they should be made to plant a sapling and be made to look after the plant themselves. Postermaking and slogan-writing also helps to make studies interesting.

### **4. Books**

The books should be inspiring and should arouse both excitement and curiosity especially, science books should be colourful to make learning fun.

## **5. Teacher and teaching effectiveness**

The teacher plays an important role in shaping the student's personality. The problem of identification of a good teacher is of great importance. It is necessary for the teacher to develop his professional skills in a way that the child gets the best out of himself. At the time of selection we must make sure that the candidate should have both the attitude and the aptitude. Teaching should be confined to brief periods, according to the natural attention span of each child, which is normally 15 to 30 minutes during the first two years. The teacher-student ratio should be kept very low to enable the teachers to work with small groups of children at a time while others are absorbed in learning games or recreational play.

## **6. Evaluation of different other qualities and skills**

Skill of students like drawing, painting, music, sports, sense of responsibility, morality must also be recognized and acknowledged. Importance should be given to such students. In this way drop-outs may be checked.

## **7. Financial support**

To make primary education effective and accessible to all, the government needs money. In case the state government is unable to provide quality education to all, to procure the financial support and to do away with the paucity of funds we should invite the private sector and give primary education programme a new lease of life. Similar to the public-private undertakings in the industrial sector, corporate giants like Tata, Birla and Ambani can also join the government in jointly owned primary schools so that there is better handling of funds, more accountability and responsibility of providing education to all which or as does not lie with the government alone. By suggesting inviting private sector I do not mean that they open up exclusive primary schools for the elite class only, instead they should help the system at large. I suggest that they help invest in making buildings for the rural primary classes, improve the existing infrastructure, offer incentives to teachers for better performance and upgrade technical aspects like television and computer. In case such an active participation is not possible then the private industries can sponsor the already existing schools in rural areas and keep track of its functioning and progress. The private sector should not expect immediate results as there would be none and should focus on improving quality. The Economic Times, a national business daily, published a similar idea in its Chennai edition:



I also suggest that the NRIs be asked to donate just one percent of their income, which can be used to improve the quality of primary education.

## 8. Counseling sessions for parents

Counselling sessions must be held for parents, especially in rural areas. Parents must be made aware of the virtues of education and should be convinced for sending their children to school.

With the changing times new needs and problems will arise, to face which we will need an educated nation. Let us hope that with the above suggestions we will one day achieve both quality education and hundred percent literacy.

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