

ISSUES AND CHALLENGES OF ELEMENTARY EDUCATION IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

The constitution Of India clearly states that elementary education is a fundamental right of children in the age of 6-14 years. In order to meet the demands of the growing population, India has about 688,000 primary schools and 100,000 secondary schools. Two third of the children, of the school-going age, are admitted to schools. But the reality of the situation is that most of them leave school halfway or do not attend regularly. So, even though the government is trying its best to uphold basic education for all, some issues remain unsolved. The primary education is considered as the spring board for latter education. This article presents some of the common issues of primary education in India.

Key words: Primary education, constitution, independence.

INTRODUCTION

Education has a significant role in the development of the personality of the child. During the phase of school education, primary education is one of the strong pillars which determine the development of all the faculties of the child. Here I am presenting some familiar yet very important issues and challenges. They are given below:

1. Neglect of Education by the Foreign Rule:

The British Government needed clerks in India for their commercial establishments and Government offices. So the education system that they introduced in India geared only for producing clerks.

They feared that the mass education would expose their selfish policies and the common man would rise to oppose their unjust acts. Under such circumstances they would not succeed in making India a market for English goods. The Foreign Rule therefore, always neglected compulsory education.

2. Political Problems:

As a result of centuries of exploitation, India's condition at the time of independence was very pathetic. The last blow was inflicted on the country by the British through their policy of divide and rule. Their policy inflamed communal passions in this sub-continent and the Indian leaders. Since the first day of independence, they had to mobilize their entire resources in tackling the problems of communalism. This had some drastic changes in the life of people. The huge problem of refugees confronted them. Besides, the national leaders had to make all efforts for solving the problems of Indian Princely States, abolition of 'Zamindars' (feudalism), the problem of linguistic states.

3. Lack of Practical Knowledge in Administrative Policies:

Two main problems related to education cropped up before the country after independence. They are:

- introduction of compulsory education for the children of 6 to 14 years age group
- transformation of traditional primary schools into basic ones.

Although the first problem of compulsory education was covered in the Constitution, yet due to financial rigidity,

the achievement of the fixed target remained impossibility.

Another main reason for its failure was the implementation of basic education. Under such circumstances, when in the absence of required financial resources and political conditions far from being favourable, both these educational plans of the administration remained almost hidden in the files. Even today the pace of their implementation is not totally satisfactory.

4. Lack of Teachers:

Scarcity of teachers is a prominent factor in the slow expansion of compulsory education and this is due to poor remunerations. Due to poor salaries, no highly qualified person likes to take up a teacher's job in a primary school. So far as the urban areas are concerned, the shortage of teachers is not so acute due to other available resources for supplementing the teacher's income, but in rural areas where such avenues of supplementing income do not exist, the shortage of teachers is keenly felt.

This problem is even more serious as far as lady teachers are concerned. This situation is all the more harmful for India, a country comprising of villages habitually. The lack of training schools for teachers is also responsible for non-development of compulsory education to some extent. But these problems have been tackled to some extent now.

5. Shortage of Funds:

The burden of primary education is being shouldered mostly by local bodies since the British rule. The British adopted this policy simply to misguide Indians, but it is regretted that the same policy is still being followed. The only change that has occurred since the establishment of democratic rule in the country is that the percentage of financial help for educational purpose to local bodies has been raised from 30 per cent to 33 per cent. It is simply impossible to expect that the local bodies with their poor financial resources would go on implementing successfully the compulsory primary education scheme. But happily now since about fifteen years, i.e., from 1975 the state governments have been made responsible for paying salaries to primary school teachers.

6. Defective Educational Administration:

The burden of primary education in almost every State rests on local bodies, that is, on municipal and district boards. Constitutionally, pressure for the development of primary education could not be applied on district boards. Besides, the chairman and members of these bodies are the elected representatives of people. They do not want to further tax the already poor public and lose their votes. So these bodies generally fail in expanding compulsory education. In the sphere of the expansion of primary education, although the numbers of schools have increased, there still continues to be a shortage of good administrators and shortage of reading materials and necessary school equipments.

Consequently, compulsory primary education has not made the desired progress. But by the end of 1992 almost all the state governments in the country have taken the responsibility of promotion of primary education on themselves.

7. Defective Curriculum:

The old curriculum of primary schools was defective. It had no scope for the development of the student's creative and constructive faculties nor did it help him in acquiring practical knowledge.

Although the primary education has now been given the shape of basic education and the course of study has been changed accordingly, yet its implementation has not been satisfactory as it involves huge expenditure. Consequently, the desired success in this sphere has not so far been achieved.

8. Difficulties in Constructing School Buildings:

It is a complex problem to open schools in villages and unfortunately most of the Indian people live in villages. In this period of financial stringency, the problem of constructing school buildings is a difficult one. Moreover, the population in villages being small, it is all the more difficult to select a village for the construction of the school building for enabling sufficient number of students to be benefited.

9. Stagnation and Wastage:

Inadequacy and Unsuitability of reading materials, unattractive school buildings and difficult curriculum are some of the reasons responsible for not attracting sufficient number of children to schools. Besides, the poor parents in order to supplement their income induct their children into family business at an early age, and either they do not send the children to school at all or make them leave school before completing the full primary education. In this way wastage of money and stagnation prove a hurdle in the way of achieving the goal.

10. Shortage of Infrastructural facility and Their Unsuitability:

Due to shortage of funds the programme of construction of school buildings could not keep pace with the expansion of primary education. Consequently, in many places arrangements for teaching have been made in places like temples, public buildings and the houses of teachers, etc. Such school has neither played ground nor is their environment healthy. Unsuitable buildings and crowded and noisy atmosphere have severely impeded the growth of primary education.

11. The Problem of Language:

Like many other problems facing primary education, the one concerning the medium of instruction is also a major one. In the section of the Indian Constitution dealing with the languages for compulsory primary education, 15 languages (according to the Amendment made in 1992 for including Nepalese also), have been mentioned, but in India as many as unlimited languages and dialects are spoken.

Some of these languages are spoken by thousands of persons, but they do not have any script or their own literature. Under such circumstances, it becomes a problem to choose a language as medium of instruction at the primary stage.

12. The Problem of Social Values:

Although every nation or society observes its traditions and practices, yet in India due to deep ignorance, the traditions and practices rule the lives of our people. Among these traditions and practices are some like child-marriage, religious fanaticism and caste- discrimination.

These have proved obstructive in the expansion and development of primary education. Although the laws have been made to eradicate these evil practices, yet social practices proved more forceful those laws. Even to-day efforts are made in some schools to avoid admission of Harijans (Schedule caste and Tribals) students on some pretext or the other. Early marriage causes dislocation of education. After marriage boys and girls do not get opportunity to pursue studies.

Moreover, it becomes imperative for boys to begin earning. Many people have unfavorable attitude upon co-education even in primary classes. This also stands as a detrimental factor.

13. Geographical Conditions:

India is a country which abounds in rivers, mountains and forests. In the hilly areas the villages are small and scattered at a great distance from each other. Due to shortage of funds it is not possible to open schools in every village. Parents do not like their children to walk through difficult hilly terrain in order to attend schools situated far away from their homes. The same difficulty is faced in crossing rivers and forests which are really a very great

hardship for children of tender age. Under such circumstances, to expect successful implementation of compulsory education throughout the length and breadth of the country will simply be an act of over expectation.

14. Poverty and Ignorance:

Even today the financial condition of the country is not such as to provide full meals and adequate clothing's to each and every citizen. Even now a family of as many as ten members depends for their bread on one of its members. In many homes it is generally against social custom for the womenfolk to earn some money even when the entire family is unable to get two meals a day. Besides, the majority of the people, being ignorant, do not realize the importance of education. Therefore, many parents, instead of getting their children admitted in schools, try to introduce them to some trade at a tender age in order to supplement their income.

Conclusion

Over seventy two years of independence, many of the issues and challenges are addressed by the then governments with utmost importance. But still we have to work hard to solve the issues and challenges for the development of primary education sector.

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