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CHALLENGES IN ELEMENTARY EDUCATION IN INDIA: VARIOUS APPROACHES

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ABSTRACT

Education is a vital means for the potentialities of a human being to emerge in a positive direction so that a man can live in society with full of dignity and can mould the habits, tastes and character of individuals living in society by imparting knowledge and information. Therefore, in a democratic country like ours the government has felt the needs and importance of education and has an onerous responsibility to implement plans and programmes for democratization of education in the country. Now, education is constitutionally recognized as a birth

right of the citizens of the country. So, to make education accessible to all has been a mission of the government and many targets like the Millennium Development Goal by 2015, India Vision by 2020, have been identified including that of Inclusive Growth by the government. It is appropriate for us now to assess and evaluate the progress and the prospect of the approaches which are being implemented for ensuring the universalization of elementary education in India.

KEYWORDS: Education, various approaches and its achievement.

INTRODUCTION

Universalisation of Elementary Education (UEE) has been recognised as a one of the important pre-conditions to socio-economic and political developments of any society; particularly it is so in a developing society. The Government of India, recognising UEE as a goal of national importance has been putting every effort to achieve it. The provisions contained in the Article 45 of the Constitution of India insist on providing Free and Compulsory Elementary Education to all children. It may be observed however, that the present understanding of compulsory education is limited to compulsory schooling with physical enrollment of the child instead of facilitating the child to develop his/her academic interests.

Universal enrollment of children in the school going age is the main challenge before the nation and more so is the concern for providing a meaningful and useful education to them. This could be achieved by

making the school curriculum relevant by specifying the learning outcomes and by improving the instructional material and methods of teaching in the elementary schools.

The system of elementary education in India has expanded a lot with the the support of national and international agencies during recent years. As said earlier, compulsory primary education was given priority and efforts made from time to time by various prominent educationists and eminent philosophers like Mahathma Gandhiji, in the constitution on elementary education is recognized as a fundamental right and given stronger emphasis to the earlier efforts and assertions as article 45 of Indian constitution has the following implications:

- Provision of free schooling at the elementary stage (classes I to VII taking six plus as the entry point for a child in class 1).
- Enforcing compulsory schooling through legislation for all children.
- Enrolling all children in the age group 6-14 by adopting meaningful curricula.
- Retaining all children up to the end of elementary stage by making education relevant to the needs of various learners.

“Enrolling all children” signifies universal enrolment, which in turn implies that educational facilities must be provided throughout the country including thickly populated areas. Another facet of elementary education is about its efficiency in terms of being relevant to the needs and life situations of children of varying socio-economic and cultural backgrounds. This will then lead to universal retention.

Though the provision of free and compulsory education is available to all children till they complete the age of fourteen years, yet it appears to be single-minded goal of the Government of India. A number of factors have contributed to this sorry state of affairs resulting in our miserable failure to fulfill this constitutional obligation. Even after five decades of independence, nearly half the population (According to National Family Health Survey 1992-93, 61% of women and 36% of men aged 7 and above were unable to read and write) our country is not functionally literate. This is bound to shake the very foundation on which rests the whole socio-economic system of our country. Realizing this anomaly, in 1993, the Supreme Court gave the verdict that elementary education is the right of every Indian citizen and it is, therefore, the responsibility of the Government to provide it to all its citizens.

CONCERNS IN UNIVERSAL ELEMENTARY EDUCATION

The Universalisation of Elementary education involves the following four tenets,

- Universal Access
- Universal Enrolment
- Universal Retention
- Universal Achievement

Universal Access: This implies that an elementary school should be within an easy walking distance from the house of every child. In most states, the targets of universal provision have been reached in urban areas. However, it is yet to reach in rural areas, in respect of girls, scheduled castes, and scheduled tribes.

Universal Enrolment: This means that every child at the age of 6 should be enrolled in class 1 in an elementary school through propaganda, persuasion and penal action, if necessary. Thus, it was advocated that along with the programme of providing primary schools, a programme of increasing enrolment should go hand in hand to make the access more effective. It has also been observed that gender disparities are quite marked, especially in the case of socially disadvantaged.

Universal Retention: A more effective primary education will enable a person to acquire basic skills and interest and attitude required to take advantage of scientific and technological change to obtain and maintain a profession/job that can ensure them a decent standard of living. For achieving this, it is important that the child be retained in the school for a considerable period of time. This means that the child be retained till the attainment of prescribed age or till the completion of the prescribed course.

Universal Achievement: Learning achievement in our country is quite low. It has been observed that children who reach the final year of lower primary school (grade IV in some states and grade V in others) often would have

mastered less than half the curriculum, The organisation and implementation of Comprehensive Access to Primary Education (CAPE), A UNICEF financed NCERT project activities carried out in twenty nine states/territories showed varied levels of success (Grewal and Gupta, 1991).

Policy Concerns and Universalisation of Elementary Education

All efforts are being made to fulfill the constitutional commitment. The National policy on Education, 1986, Programme Of Action (POA) 1992, reflects an unqualified priority to the Universalisation of Elementary Education. Many innovations have been introduced the emphasis has now shifted from enrolment per se to enrolment as well as retention. An array of micro-planning based strategies has been formulated and is being applied for application at grassroots and to ensure children's retention at school. At present, more than 95% of the population has a primary school within walking distance of one kilometer (NCERT, 1995), but the recent studies on primary education have shown that levels of learners' achievement are rather low (Dave et al., 1998; Govinda and Verghese, 1993; Shukla, 1994; Bashiretal, 1993; Jangira, 1994; Verghese, 1994). Apart from talking about improving the quality of education, the National Policy of Education, 1986 also emphasized universal enrolment and universal retention.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main objectives of the study are

- 1) To study the level of mastery of MLL's in mathematics of V standard students in selected primary schools of Shimoga District
- 2) To identify the MLL attainment levels in mathematics of V standard rural and urban students of government primary schools of Shimoga District.
- 3) To find out the difference between male and female students in MLL attainment levels in Mathematics of selected schools of Shimoga District..
- 4) To study the effectiveness of the diagnosis based remedial programme in improving the proportions of students mastering each competency as well as in improving the overall competency (% of competencies mastered) by the group of V standard students in the selected (experimental) schools of Shimoga District.

Hypotheses

- 1) There is no significant difference in the competency levels of the students studying in different blocks (taluks).
- 2) Students studying in urban and rural areas do not differ significantly in their competency scores.
- 3) Male and female students do not differ significantly in their competency levels
- 4) There is no significant difference between male and female students in MLL attainment scores in Mathematics of schools of Shimoga District.
- 5) There is no significant difference between rural and urban students in MLL attainment levels in Mathematics of schools of Shimoga District.
- 6) There is no significant difference between control and experimental group in the effect of diagnosis-based remediation programme in improving the proportionate of students mastering each competency (percentage of competency mastered) by the group of V standard students in the selected (experimental) schools of Shimoga District

IMPORTANCE OF MATHEMATICS EDUCATION

Mathematics plays an important role in school learning and assumes a prominent position in modern education and curriculum. In the past, aim of mathematics in the school curriculum was to prepare children for the life to enable them to use mathematics in the everyday world around them. But in this century, there are several factors of life that requires us to examine a new role that mathematics education is to play in the development students for the scientific technological and industrial society. Every citizen of this complex society must understand mathematics if he/she is to comprehend the operation of Governments and the material he or she reads in newspapers. In fact not just mathematics, but also a strong foundation in mathematics is needed by

almost all the disciplines. Thus in these circumstances of increased importance and influence of mathematics, just a computational know-how of mathematics is not enough. The development of concepts and ideas of mathematics at the elementary school level is a must. Thus learning basic mathematics is a necessity in day today life and useful for continuing education in higher classes and courses.

NEED AND IMPORTANCE OF THE PRESENT STUDY

The Education is intended to develop basic learning skills, reading, writing and arithmetic and life skills, necessary for the children to survive and improve the quality of life. During childhood, developments in the domains of literacy and numeracy take place through acquisition of basic learning competencies (BLC). These competencies represent levels of learning in a particular subject comprising basic knowledge, understanding, abilities, interests, attitudes and values. The competencies are essentially to be acquired by the end of a particular stage or standard of education. As far as the primary stage is concerned it is in fact the foundation stage for the development of basic competencies (BAS, 2002). Primary education in particular has remained a serious concern of the nation since independence. A large number of programmes and schemes have been initiated both by the Central and State Governments to realize the goal of the universalization of primary education. This has led to the opening of a large number of schools with emphasis on enrolment and retention coupled with focus on quality of education. The quantitative expansion seems to have diluted the quality of education. Research studies conducted both at national and state levels point out low level of learning in schools and the situation becomes worse as children move to higher classes. Poor level of achievement at primary stage is a big de-motivating factor resulting in repetition and drop out from the schools.

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