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Special Training Centre — An Initiative towards achieving the Goal of UEE in India

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Abstract

The 86th Constitutional Amendment has made elementary education a Fundamental Right for all children in the age group of 6–14 years in India. Therefore, they are entitled to free and compulsory education. The Right to Education (RTE) Act 2009 was implemented across the country on 1 April 2010, which is a part of the 86th Constitutional Amendment. The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) is a flagship programme of the Government of India in partnership with the States and Union Territories (UTs) to achieve the goal of Universalisation of Elementary Education (UEE). To achieve the target, i.e., to enrol all children in schools, special efforts must be made. As per the RTE Act 2009, Special Training Centres (STCs) were established in every school to provide out-of-school children with additional help to ensure that they are at par with other students. STCs become all the more important because as per the Act the children are to be admitted to classes according to their age. Just like a teacher is recruited in a school, a specialised teacher must be recruited in an STC to teach children with learning gaps. The enrolment of children in an STC becomes more effective with the community's contribution. In order to establish these centres, rigorous work has been done by the SSA in Delhi. Moreover, nodal agencies have contributed to achieve UEE in all municipal schools in Delhi, Rajkiya Sarvodaya Bal Vidyalaya (RSBV), Rajkiya Sarvodaya Kanya Vidyalaya (RSKV), NGOs and madrasas.

Keywords: Right to Education, Special Training Centres, out-of-school children

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INTRODUCTION

Free and compulsory education to all children up to 14 years of age is a Constitutional commitment in India. At the time of adoption of the Constitution in 1950, the aim was to achieve the goal of Universalisation of Elementary Education (UEE) in the next 10 years, i.e., by 1960. Keeping in view the educational facilities available in the country at that time, the goal was far too ambitious to be achieved within a short span of 10 years. Hence, the target date was shifted a number of times. Until 1960, all efforts were focused on the provision of making schooling facilities available. It was only after schools were built, the other components of UEE, such as universal enrolment and retention, started receiving the attention of planners and policy makers. At present, quality of education is the focus of all programmes related to elementary education, in general, and primary education, in particular. The Government of India has initiated many programmes and projects to attain the status of universal enrolment. However, challenges persist.

THE STORY SO FAR

India, a country with over a billion population and per capita income of less than $1,000, has managed to reduce poverty from 46 per cent in the mid–1980s to around 34 per cent in 2004–05. The numbers are still high and the trend poses a huge challenge for the economy (World Bank).

Similarly, illiteracy has come down from 35 to 26 per cent between 2001 and 2011. The ability for many to find work or gain education has been hampered by physical, social and economic barriers, marked by regional variations and sociocultural biases. Policies on various aspects of education (for example, teacher recruitment and qualification) vary across States, as does the availability, quality and efficiency of investment in education. In 2002, India accounted for more than 25 per cent of all out-of-school children worldwide. They belonged to disadvantaged or minority communities, migrant families, urban poor, children with special needs and children in difficult circumstances. A disproportionate number of them were girls. Given the diversity of such groups across India, each group faced challenges that needed to be addressed with special initiatives.

Census–2011 shows that about 32 million children aged between 6 and 14 years have never attended any educational institution, even though government estimates of out-of-school children show substantially lower numbers. There are problems of definition and identification of such children across States and UTs, which in turn, point questions over the numbers in periodic National Surveys on the estimates for 'out-of-school children'.

In its Millennium Development Goals assessment in 2015, the United Nations Development Programme

(UNDP) has stated that India has made significant progress in universalising primary education and is moderately on track to achieve this goal.

Among girls in primary schools, the rate of enrolment and completion of studies till Class V has improved and is catching up with boys too. The trend is observed at the elementary level as well. At the national level, the male and female youth literacy rate is likely to be at 94.8 and 92.4 per cent, respectively.

However, the UNDP cautions that a large number of children are still out of school and have not completed their primary education, particularly, girls, children living in rural areas and those from marginalised or minority communities. Often, we talk about children in school premises but we need to understand that there is a substantial number of children outside the school premises, waiting for an opportunity to join school. It is here that the RTE Act 2009 comes into picture.

The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act denotes that every child has the right to get full-time elementary education of satisfactory and equitable quality in a formal school, which meets certain essential norms and standards. The RTE Act 2009 has become a reality and guarantees every child the basic Fundamental Right — the Right to Education. The RTE Act, along with Article 21A, a part of the Fundamental Rights, became operational on 1 April 2010. If one is to study the Act carefully, there are certain important elements that may be noted. These are as follows.

- 25 per cent seat reservation in private schools for children of economically weaker sections
- No-detention policy
- No form of test or interview at the time of admission
- Maintaining the pupil–teacher ratio
- Recruitment of trained and qualified teachers
- Establishment of School Management Committees (SMCs)

From the time of Independence, elementary education has crossed many milestones. Significant efforts have been made to universalise elementary education, yet there are children who are still devoid of this basic right. Many programmes for ensuring free and compulsory education to children aged between 6 and 14 years have been launched by the Government of India but they have only been partially implemented. Some important programmes are as follows.

- Non-formal Education (1979)
- *Lok Jumbish and Shiksha Karmi* Project (1992)
- District Primary Education Programme (1994)
- Education for All or *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan* (2000)
- Right to Education Act (2009)

Special Training Centres

Our concern is primarily on the condition and problems of children, who are in school. But we often neglect those children, who are out-of-school and not getting a chance to live a life they deserve. As per the RTE Act 2009, each school needs to establish a Special Training Centre (STC), where out-of-school children are provided with additional help to overcome their learning gaps.

In 1979, Non-formal Education was introduced in India. Educationists of that era had framed this structure for children, who had never been to school, were out-of-school, worked as labourers or lived in the streets. This programme was made functional with the help of NGOs and was financed by the Government of India. But the monitoring committees were weak because of which the progress of the programmes stagnated. However, there were few NGOs, which continued doing this work and even attained international laurels. Digantar School, Rajasthan, is at the top of this list.

In the current scenario, the work that was done by the Non-formal Education is being fulfilled by STCs. The need of STCs becomes all the more important because as per the RTE Act 2009, all children in the age group of 6–14 years are to be admitted to classes as per their age. In order to ensure that age appropriate admissions do not leave learning gaps in children, STCs have been established.

This implies that in case of learning gaps, the children are simultaneously enrolled in the nearest STC, where necessary support is provided to them for a minimum of three months and a maximum of two years to attain the minimum level of learning as per the class they are enrolled in. These centres have all facilities available for children as in a regular school.

According to the RTE Act 2009, the State Council of Educational Research and Training (SCERT) has been declared as the authorising body to fulfill the educational needs of students. Its responsibilities pertain to all schools in a State. Some of the responsibilities of an SCERT are as follows.

- Developing textbooks for children
- Development of teaching–learning material
- Training of the teaching staff
- Development of the curriculum
- Evaluating the students' learning progress
- Monitoring the progress of the STCs and its beneficiaries, etc.

The SCERT has divided the education of Classes I–VIII into four levels. These are as follows.

Level 1:   Classes II–III
Level 2:   Classes IV–V
Level 3:   Classes VI–VII
Level 4:   Class VIII

The *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan,* Delhi, started STCs for out-of-school children in the age group of 6–14 years in 98 government schools and NGOs from

April 2010. At present, 152 STCs are operating in Delhi under various agencies like government schools, madrasas and NGOs, who are catering to the educational needs of 4,560 out-of-school children.

CURRENT SITUATION AND FIRST-HAND EXPERIENCE

As a part of the M.Ed. course, I did a dissertation in the partial fulfilment of the course on the topic 'A Study on the Implementation of Provision of Age-appropriate Admissions under RTE Act 2009 by Special Training Centres in Government Schools of Delhi'. The objective of the research was to study the facilities available in STCs as per the provision of Section 19 of the RTE Act 2009, its composition as per the provision, the criteria and procedure teachers use to identify the level of children at the time of admission, evaluate students at the entry level and after the completion of the special training, the procedure adopted by teachers for the mainstreaming of students in formal schools and the problems faced by the teachers in STCs. The research study reflected many findings, which are as follows.

- There were a total of nine teachers and 318 students at the primary level, and 10 teachers and 294 students at the upper primary level.

- All 10 schools had sufficient furniture for teachers and students. All, except one, had furniture for students as per their age.

- Facilities for differently abled children were sufficient in the schools as the STCs provided classrooms on the ground floor for a large number of students. Though there was a provision of ramps in most schools, a lot needs to be done to make education convenient for children with special needs.

- There is a provision of ₹500 for all teachers of government schools to buy teaching–learning equipment. However, they feel more money needs to sanctioned and invested for buying teaching–learning material as the sanctioned amount at present is not sufficient.

- It was observed that game facilities were not available in the STCs. The students played in the playground during lunch hours. But there was no sport equipment for them, and they hardly got to play with other children of the school (those not in the STCs but studying in the same school). The teachers had purchased few indoor games for the students in the STCs but the students seldom played with them.

- The teachers said they used assessment tools developed by the SCERT, Delhi. The Council has developed assessment tools (pre–and post–test) for age appropriate admission under the RTE Act 2009. They said each school used the tools to identify the level of the children at the time of admission, during their stay in an STC and after

the completion of studies at the STC. After this process, the head of the school, such as those run by the Municipal Corporations of Delhi, Directorate of Education (DoE), New Delhi Municipal Council (NDMC) and Delhi Cantonment Board, would send the children to STCs to receive special training in order to achieve a level at par with students of the formal education system.

- Independent tests, as per the questionnaire prepared by the teachers, were also conducted to ascertain the level of the children at the time of admission. The teachers conduct oral or written examinations for promoting the students to the next class. They also evaluate the students' assignments and activities done in the class. After the completion of their training at the STCs, the teachers forward the documents on each child's progress to the school the child is inducted to. All teachers do a follow-up on their students' progress after their mainstreaming.

- At the time of admission or mainstreaming, the school administration asks for the rent agreement, birth certificate of the child, etc., which are, generally, not available with out-of-school children. Besides, many schools are, generally, not interested in admitting such children. Parents of such children are also reluctant to admit their wards in school. They prefer that the children either work or take care of their younger siblings. Moreover, students who work or take care of younger siblings also do not want to attend an STC.

- The teachers stated that lack of books caused problems in teaching.

- The teachers added the age of students becomes a problem because they had to be admitted to lower classes.

CONCLUSION

Despite those gaps, STCs are doing a commendable job with their existing limitations and curbed resources. It needs to be understood that policies are only effective if individuals are prepared to execute them. There is a significant gap between intention and implementation.

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