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**SIGNIFICANCE OF ELEMENTARY EDUCATION
TO PROMOTE QUALITY EDUCATION IN INDIA**

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Significance of Elementary Education to Promote Quality Education in India

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Abstract – Universal elementary education has been at the centre of attention in discussions of both democracy and development in the last decade. The focus of the education policy must shift from enrolment to improvement in the functioning of schools as well as towards raising the quality of education outcomes. This paper begins with a consideration of the need for universalizing elementary, and not just primary, education in India.. This paper addresses concerns of equity, inclusion, and quality in the context of elementary education from the central focus which looks into the dimensions of location disadvantage, social exclusion, gender disparity, and special needs for children of other neglected groups.

Key Words: Elementary Education, India, Significances, Initiatives

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INTRODUCTION

Education plays an important role in the progress of an individual's mind and country. People are made aware of what is going on in the world and can understand these issues and take necessary measures, if they are educated. The India is well aware of the importance of ensuring universal basic education. In 1950, the Constitution had resolved in Article 45 under the Directive Principles of state Policy that the State shall endeavor to provide, within a period of ten years from the commencement of this Constitution, for free and compulsory education for all children until they complete the age of fourteen. There have been important Constitutional amendments as well that were intended to give a boost to elementary education. The 42nd Amendment to the Constitution in 1976 brought education, which was largely a state responsibility, into the Concurrent List and made universalizing elementary education the responsibility of both the central and state governments. In 2002, Government of India took another significant step by making elementary education a fundamental right through the 86th Constitutional Amendment. In 2009, India went further and passed the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act (2009).

ELEMENTARY EDUCATION:

Elementary Education has been given the highest priority since Independence of the country. In an attempt to fulfill this mandate several interventions and initiatives were undertaken in the past such as enrolment drives, community awareness campaigns

and incentive schemes. As per the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2012, 96.5% of all rural children between the ages of 6-14 were enrolled in school. This is the fourth annual survey to report enrollment above 96%. 83% of all rural 15-16-year olds were enrolled in school. However, going forward, India will need to focus more on quality.

Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan:

Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) is a comprehensive and integrated programme of Government of India to attain Universal Elementary Education (UEE), covering the entire country in a mission mode. SSA has been launched in 2001-2002 in partnership with the State Governments and Local Self Governments. The programme aims to provide useful and relevant elementary education to all children in the 6 to 14 age group by 2010. It is an initiative to universalize and improve quality of education through decentralized and context specific planning strategy. India has made long strides in the last 50 years in the field of education. The National Policy on Education 1986 and Programme of Action 1992 also accorded top priority for achieving the goals of Universal Elementary Education. A number of programmes / schemes were launched during the last four decades for Universalization of elementary education.

Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan is an attempt to provide quality education to all children through active participation of community. The major characteristics of SSA are:

1. A programme with a clear time frame for universal elementary education.
2. A response to the demand for quality basic education all over the country.
3. An opportunity for promoting social justice through basic education.
4. An effort at effectively involving the Panchayati Raj Institutions, School Management Committees, Village and Urban Slum Level Education Committees, Parents' Teachers' Associations, Mother Teacher Associations, Tribal Autonomous Councils and other grass roots level structures in the management of elementary schools.
5. An expression of political will for universal elementary education across the country.
6. A partnership between the Central, State and local government
7. An opportunity for States to develop their own vision of elementary education.

Major Areas of Interventions in SSA such as Education of out-of-school, Quality Improvement, Special Focus Groups, Research and Evaluation, Management Structure and Institutional Capacity Building, Community Mobilization, Civil Works, Monitoring and MIS, Financial Management and Procurement.

STRATEGIES FOR QUALITY IMPROVEMENT:

The goals of universal literacy and enrolment are laudable in themselves; the achievements in these areas would remain hollow without ensuring quality education. A qualitative improvement in the content and processes of basic education, in order to make them more responsive to the learning needs of individuals and the development needs of different socioeconomic sectors, continues to be a major challenge. The challenge for providing quality education at the elementary level involves improvements in the preparation, motivation and deployment of teachers, the quality of textbooks and of infrastructural facilities. It also involves making education relevant to society's needs and strengthening the management and institutional capacity of educational institutions especially at the state, district and local levels.

QUALITY CONCERN IN EDUCATION:

The aims of education reflect the current needs and aspirations of a society as well as its lasting values, and the immediate concerns of a community as well as broad human ideals. Locating the term quality in educational discourse is now a universal concern today. The quality dimension also needs to be

examined from the point of view of the experiences designed for the child in terms of knowledge and skills.

COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN ELEMENTARY EDUCATION:

Decentralization provides a clear correlation between the needs of people and the steps taken by the Government to meet these demands. Planning from below and contextualized resource allocation for basic services would not only be more cost effective and produce better results but will also ensure that the quality of the services is directly proportional to the degree of community control and supervision. People's participation in the provision of basic services can, as mentioned in the Mid-Term Appraisal of the Ninth Five-Year Plan, contribute to the achievement of four main objectives, i.e., effectiveness, efficiency, empowerment and equity. The thrust on decentralized planning and management came as early as in 1986, in the National Policy of Education, which had proposed decentralization as a fundamental requirement for improving the efficiency and effectiveness of educational planning and management and for evolving a meaningful framework for accountability. The Approach Paper to the Tenth Five-Year Plan has also reiterated that the mere establishment of schools and hiring of teachers will not lead to an improvement in education if teachers remain absent, as is common, especially in the rural areas. It is, therefore, essential that control over schools and teachers should be transferred to local bodies, which have a direct interest in teacher performance. Planning, supervision and management of education would have to be through local bodies at the district, block and village levels. Efforts should also be made for the social mobilization of local communities for adult literacy campaigns and for the promotion of primary education.

INNOVATIVE PROGRAMMES IN EDUCATION IN DIFFERENT STATES:

Several state governments have designed innovative programmes to improve the quality of education in schools as like mentioned below.

NALI KALI:

The Nali Kali programme in Karnataka was introduced in privately managed schools in 1999. Under the programme, learning takes place in an interactive situation in accordance with age-wise competency. Children are divided into groups and they master one level of competency, and then move to another group to learn the next level of competency. Children learn at their own pace and the move from one level of competency to another is not dependent on the whole group's learning achievement. All teaching-learning processes involve songs, games, survey, story-telling and use of educational toys.

GYANKALASH

The District Primary Education Programme in Himachal Pradesh, in collaboration with All India Radio, Shimla, has started a 15-minute bi-weekly programme called Gyankalash to provide academic support to primary teachers. The programme helps in improving the teachers' access to the knowledge, especially those in the remote areas as it is impossible to reach them through conventional means.

HEAD START

The Rajiv Gandhi State Mission in Madhya Pradesh has introduced a project on a pilot basis for using computers to improve the quality of teaching in rural elementary schools through indigenous customized educational software. The idea is to integrate the use of computers with classroom activities to improve the child's comprehension of difficult parts of each subject as well as to instill computer literacy. A syllabus mapping the difficult areas of learning has been developed and educational software on this for all subjects is being prepared for use in the academic year 2002-03. Started in November 2000, 648 Head Start centers were operationalized in middle schools that have a primary section and serve as Jan Shiksha Kendras or school cluster resource centres for primary schools in a radius of eight km. A total of 2,358 teachers have been given training in computer-enabled education.

LITERACY IN INDIA:

Elementary education is doing vital role for promoting educational sustainability in India. According to the Census of 2011, "every person above the age of 7 years who can read and write with understanding in any language is said to be literate". According to this criterion, the 2011 survey holds the National Literacy Rate to be around 74.07% Government statistics of 2001 also hold that the rate of increase in literacy is more in rural areas than in urban areas. Female literacy was at a national average of 65% whereas the male literacy was 82%. Within the Indian states, Kerala has shown the highest literacy rates of 93% whereas

Bihar averaged 63.8% literacy. The 2001 statistics also indicated that the total number of 'absolute non-literates' in the country was 304 million people.

ELEMENTARY EDUCATION AND THE NEED FOR ITS UNIVERSALIZATION:

The gains from universal elementary education can hardly be overstated. It has important advantages for the individual and the nation. It expands the realm of choices available to the individual in almost every instance. The benefits in terms of key demographic variables such as infant mortality rate and fertility rate

are substantial. Equally, it is important for the effective functioning of democratic institutions, the malfunctioning of which impinge on virtually every economic and social outcome. Elementary education covers the primary (6-11 years) and upper primary (11-14 years) age group. In most Indian states, this translates into the successful completion of prescribed educational requirements till Class VIII. The essence of the goal is for every 14-year old to have acquired foundation skills such as the ability to read and write with fluency, numeracy, comprehension, analysis, reasoning and social skills such as teamwork. Equally, elementary education should instill in children courage, confidence, curiosity, independence, resourcefulness, resilience, patience and understanding. While this is recognized by Indian policy documents, in practice, the formal elementary school system is often accused of not developing these skills in children.

UNIVERSALIZING ELEMENTARY EDUCATION IN INDIA:

Rehabilitated progress in education in India calls for strong and productive partnerships. The task is too large for any one institution or agency alone, and too important for a single perspective to hold influence. The government, the corporate sector, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), international agencies and local stakeholders need to forge strong partnerships within and across each other in a committed effort to ensure universalization of elementary education. These need to strengthen political will as well as build public understanding of the necessitate for educational change. In this context, one must rigorously analyze the short-term and long-term implications of various forms of action prior to acting. One must also endeavor to measure impact systematically and draw lessons from there. The two dimensions of access and efficiency, and identify elements in each which are likely to contribute significantly to universalizing quality elementary education.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

The education policy should shift its focus from enrolment to improvement in the functioning of schools as well as towards raising the quality of education outcomes. Special strategies are needed to improve the outreach of the school system to the disadvantaged and marginalized groups in the country. A more systematic school mapping exercise should be undertaken to provide these groups access to both lower and upper primary classes, for removing social barriers to education. Long-term goals are required to bridge the gender gap, which constitutes a key obstacle in achieving literacy in the country, along with measures to ensure universalization of elementary education among girls.

CONCLUSION:

Many positive developments have been recorded, especially after the 1990s. Demand for basic education continues to grow with increasing recognition of the importance of educating children among parents and guardians. Infrastructural facilities have improved over the past two decades, gross enrolment is almost universal, dropout rates have declined even for girls at the primary level, and many more teachers have been appointed. More school incentives have led to better outreach and coverage. Social and economic barriers, which slow down effective participation in the learning process, should be essentially removed if the thrust of the movement towards Universal Elementary Education has to be maintained.

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