

Reforming Elementary Education and Skill Development in India

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Paper Code : JCT-O18-SK

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.26703/JCT.v13i2-5>

Web Address : <http://www.jctindia.org/october2018/v13i2-5>

Archive : <https://ideas.repec.org/a/jct/journal/v13y2018i2p30-37.html>

[Http://EconPapers.repec.org/RePEc:jct:journal:v:13:y:2018:i:2:p:30-37](http://EconPapers.repec.org/RePEc:jct:journal:v:13:y:2018:i:2:p:30-37)



How to Cite: Kumar, Subodh. Reforming Elementary Education and Skill Development in India. Journal of Commerce and Trade, October 2018; 13 : 2; Pp. 30–37. <https://doi.org/10.26703/JCT.v13i2-5>.

Abstract

A nationwide sub-programme under the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, “Padhe Bharat Badhe Bharat” was launched in August, 2014 to improve language development by creating an enduring interest in reading and writing with comprehension, and to create a natural and positive interest in mathematics related to their physical and social world. Various steps have been taken by the States and UTs under this initiative by creating supplementary learning material and reading corners, providing activity kits etc. for children in early grades.

According to World Bank, about 13 million people enter the working age every year but only 3 million new jobs are created every year. The demographic advantage being predominantly in the rural areas, the need of the hour is to improve the skill set of the labour force such that they are productively engaged in the job roles emerging from Digital India, rural road connectivity, development of smart cities, expressways, Swachh Bharat-Grameen etc.

Keywords : Elementary Education, Skill Development, Smart City.

Classification-JEL : I 24, I 25, J 24

1. INTRODUCTION

A nationwide sub-programme under the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, “Padhe Bharat Badhe Bharat” was launched in August, 2014 to improve language development by creating an enduring interest in reading and writing with comprehension, and to create a natural and positive interest in mathematics related to their physical and social world. Various steps have been taken by the States and UTs under this initiative by creating supplementary learning material and reading corners, providing activity kits etc. for children in early grades.

Education is the most important tool for social, economic and political transformation and a key instrument for building an equitable society. A well-educated population, equipped with the relevant knowledge, attitudes and skills is essential for economic and social development in the twenty-first century. This holds true especially in India which has the world's highest number of 10 to 24-year-olds and who will lay the foundation of the country's future. Further, as 70 per cent of the Indian population resides in rural areas, the focus of any educational policy has to be on the rural areas.

2. GOVERNMENT'S POLICY FOR ELEMENTARY EDUCATION

With the formulation of National Policy on Education (NPE), 1986, India initiated a wide range of programmes for achieving the goal of Universalisation of Elementary Education (UEE). These efforts were intensified in the 1980s and 1990s through several schematic and programme interventions, such as Operation Black Board (OBB), Shiksha Karmi Project (SKP), Andhra Pradesh Primary Education Project (APPEP), Bihar Education Project (BEP), U.P. Basic Education Project (UPBEP), Mahila Samakhya (MS), Lok Jumbish Project (UP), District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) and the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) – the flagship Centrally Sponsored Scheme in partnership with State Governments for UEE across the country. This was further strengthened with the passage of the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act, 2009, effective since 1st April, 2010, which gave a legal mandate to provide free and compulsory elementary education to every child in the age group of 6-14 years. The norms of the SSA Scheme were aligned with the provisions of the RTE Act, 2009 to support States and UTs in the implementation of the Act.

The overall goals of SSA included universal access and retention, bridging of gender and social category gaps in education and enhancement of learning levels of children. SSA provided for a variety of interventions, including inter alia, opening of new schools, construction of schools and additional classrooms, toilets and drinking water, provisioning for teachers, periodic teacher training and academic resource support, textbooks and support for learning achievement. SSA was implemented across all districts of India and provided a wide but convergent framework for decentralized planning and implementation of all central and state government initiatives in elementary education. SSA was the single largest holistic programme in the country, addressing all

aspects of elementary education and covering over one million elementary schools, Education Guarantee Scheme centres and Alternate and Innovative Education (AIE) centres, and reaching about 200 million children.

3. PROGRESS IN ELEMENTARY EDUCATION

During the last decade, India has made enormous progress towards universalizing access to elementary education across urban and rural areas. Today, SSA has covered 19.67 crore children enrolled in 14.6 lakh elementary schools. The spread of SSA is majorly in rural areas as these areas account for 85.4% of all elementary schools and 74.5% of total enrolment at elementary level. Thus, it is evident that initiatives undertaken for elementary education have the most impact in rural areas.

There has been enormous progress in the major educational indicators across all States and UTs. As per UDISE 2015-16, Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) is 99.21% for primary and 92.81% for upper primary level, which indicates near universal enrolment at primary level. The Pupil Teacher Ratio (PTR) has improved from 32 in 2009-10 to 25 in 2015-16. The average annual dropout rate at primary level has come down from 6.76% in 2009-10 to 4.13% in 2014-15 as per UDISE, 2015-16. The transition rate from primary to upper primary has gone up from 85.17% in 2009-10 to 90.14% in 2014-15 as per UDISE, 2015-16. The Gender Parity Index (GPI) in 2014-15, indicating the gender balance in the total enrolment in schools at elementary level, has reached 0.93 for primary level and 0.95 at upper primary level.

There is no doubt that efforts made under the Scheme by States and UTs has resulted in enhanced access to schools but there have been concerns on the quality of education offered in these schools and whether children are 'learning' anything. This has enormous implications for the future generation as these children will grow to shape the course of

development of the nation.

4. RECENT INITIATIVES TAKEN BY CONTROL AND STATE GOVERNMENTS

Recognising the needed focus on the quality of education, the Central Government, in collaboration with State Governments, has taken various initiatives to improve the learning levels of children. The main among them are:

a) **Padhe Bharat Badhe Bharat** : Various research studies have proved that Classes I and II are the most important stages where children are introduced to the world of learning through language and numeracy. Children who fail to learn to read in the first two grades of school are likely to fall behind and have difficulty in learning other subjects as well. Thus, both early reading and writing with comprehension and early mathematics learning are critical to improve the quality of elementary education in the country. A nationwide sub-programme under the SSA, "Padhe Bharat Badhe Bharat" was launched in August, 2014 to improve language development by creating an enduring interest in reading and writing with comprehension and to create a natural and positive interest in mathematics related to their physical and social world. It is based on the premise that children need meaningful, and socially relevant engagement with books, along with various opportunities to actively and purposefully engage with a variety of print based reading and writing activities. Various steps have been taken by the States and UTs under this initiative by creating supplementary learning material and reading corners, providing activity kits etc. for children in early grades. This initiative is an effort towards helping children develop comprehensive basic

skills laying down a strong foundation for acquiring advanced competencies.

b) **National Achievements** : Based on these Learning Outcomes, a nation-wide National Achievement Survey (NAS), was conducted in 2017-18 across 700 districts in all 36 States and UTs for Classes 3, 5 and 8 in government and government aided schools. The learning levels of more than 20 lakh students from 1,10,000 schools were assessed making it perhaps one of the largest sample surveys of student learning achievement. A preliminary analysis has shown that children in rural and urban areas are at par in learning performance. District-wise and State-wise report cards have been generated and are available for public reference at <http://www.ncert.nic.in/programmes/NAS/Training.html>. The district report cards point out the specific class and subject-wise achievements in Learning Outcomes where the district needs improvement and targeted policy/pedagogy interventions are required. They give a valuable input in developing a strategy for effectively hitting the 'nail on its head' for improving quality. The State Report card also highlights the performance of the students in all the tested Learning Outcomes so that the authorities can plan teacher trainings and any requisite policy inputs to bridge the learning gaps. A detailed analysis of these report cards would provide crucial inputs in formulation of education policy, planning and implementation at national, state, district and classroom levels for improving learning levels of children.

5. SAMAGRA SHIKSHA ABHIYAN

The Central Government has now

decided to look at school education from a holistic perspective rather than a segmented vision at various levels of primary, upper primary, secondary and senior secondary levels. The Centrally Sponsored Scheme of 'Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan' has been initiated from 2018-19 with the objective of provision of inclusive and equitable quality education from pre-school to senior secondary stage. It envisages that each and every child progresses smoothly and continuously through various levels of schooling without any barrier.

The programme also focuses on improving quality of education at all levels by integrating the school administration, teachers and students through the use of technology. A 'paradigm shift' is envisaged to raise the performance of the school education sector with supporting interventions for school effectiveness and sustainable institutional capacity. The emphasis of the Scheme is to incentivize States towards improving quality of education with a special focus on educationally backward areas. The scheme also marks a transformation necessitating an equitable and inclusive learning approach with special focus on Children with Special needs (CWSN), girls and marginalized communities.

This integrated approach would enable exploration of new digital initiatives for strengthening in-service and pre-service teacher training and education with a focus on Creation of Digital Learning Material, Innovative Pedagogy and Capacity Building, etc. This would strengthen the quality of teaching in schools across all levels which would enable reaping the benefits of technology and widening the access of good quality education across all States, UTs and sections of the Society.

An educated society is an essential pre-requisite tool for a developed society. As a young India is rearing to progress, a strong foundation needs to be built with provision of quality education for its future generations. The various initiatives undertaken by the

Government are certainly a step in the right direction to empower rural India.

6. SKILL DEVELOPMENT IN INDIA

To capitalize on India's demographic advantage, the first National Policy for Skill Development was formulated in 2009. The policy aimed to increase the capacity and capability of the existing skill system to ensure equitable access to all, promote life-long learning, maintain quality and relevance according to the changing requirements create convergence between school educations, various skill development efforts of Government and between Government and private sector, enhance capacity of the training institutions among other objectives. The National Policy on Skill Development, 2009 set a target for skilling 500 million persons by 2022 involving all stakeholders including the concerned Ministries and Departments. The Policy also provided for a review after five years.

Accordingly, taking into consideration the changes in the skill ecosystem and from the experience gained through implementation of the skill development programmes, the new National Policy for Skill Development and Entrepreneurs was announced in 2015. This Policy aims to scale up skilling initiatives with speed, standard (quality) and sustainability. It provides for an umbrella framework for all skilling activities taking place in the government, industry and NGO sector and provides skilling for both wage and self-employment by bringing within its mandate entrepreneurship. The policy also aims for standardization of skilling standards across sectors by insisting on mandatorily accessing to the National Skill Qualification Framework. The Common Norms guidelines were introduced in 2015 to bring about uniformity in the skill development programmes being implemented across different Central Ministries/Departments. The guideline specifies the input standards, outcomes, funding norms, fund flow mechanism, mechanism for

monitoring & tracking, and empanelment of training providers and assessors. There are about Central Ministries/Departments providing skill training through more than 40 different schemes based on the Common Norms.

The institutional infrastructure for skill development consists of the National Skill Development Agency (NSDA), the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) and the National Skill Development Fund (NSDF). In 2014, these were subsumed under the newly created Department of Skill Development & Entrepreneurship later converted to the Ministry of Skill Development & Entrepreneurship in 2015. At the State level, the States are encouraged to set up the State Skill Development Missions to serve as the nodal agency for implementation of the skill development programmes.

The National Skill Development Agency (NSDA) has undertaken various activities like anchoring and operationalizing the National Skill Qualification Framework (NSQF), developing National Qualifications Register (NQR) which is a repository of all approved qualifications, develop a National Quality Assurance Framework (NQAF), create and maintain a national database on skill development including development of a dynamic Labour Market Information System.

The National Policy for Skill Development and Entrepreneurship, 2015 identifies the incremental human resource requirement across 24 key sectors as 109.73 million and the new entrants to the labour force as 104.62 million by 2022. About 298.25 million of the existing workforce would require Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), reskilling and upskilling and 104.62 million would require fresh skilling by 2022.

7. PRADHAN MANTRI KAUSHAI VIKAS YOJANA (PMKVY)

The Pradhan Mantri Kaushai Vikas Yojana, the flagship scheme on skilling was

launched in 2015 to provide industry relevant skill training to the youth to enable them secure a better livelihood. The scheme provides short-term training to the job seekers as well as Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) to the existing workforce through accredited and affiliated training partner/training centres and ensures placement. The scheme runs across 252 job roles related to 35 Sector Skill Councils. The PMKVY was first launched in 2015-16 and owing to its success the scheme was re-launched as PMKVY 2.0 for the period 2016-2020. In order to ensure quality and standardization in the training, various steps have been taken such as: one stop web-based solution for Centre Accreditation, Accreditation Standards Grading Metrics to benchmark the training centres across the country, evaluation of training centres for their continuous performance related, to monitoring standards such as placements, branding, infrastructure etc., mandating aadhaar based biometric attendance for trainees, trainers and assessors, incentivizing training centres for providing placement to trained candidates etc.

As of December, 2017 about 40.5 lakh candidates have been trained of which 27.76 lakh received short-term training and 7.76 lakh received RPL and 5 lakh are undergoing training. The scheme has placed special importance to placements which includes entrepreneurship. The scheme also lays focus on skilling women by providing travelling allowance of Rs. 1000/1500 per month for the trainees and post placement support at the rate of Rs. 1450 per month for two/three months depending upon domicile or outside domicile placement.

8. DAYAL UPADHYAYA GRAMEEN KAUSHALYA YOJANA (DDU-GKY)

The DDU-GKY is a placement linked skill-training programme to empower rural poor youth with employable skills and facilitate their participation in the labour market. As of October, 2017, the DDU-GKY has over 566 Training Centers in 674 Projects, in partnership

with over 310 Project Implementing Agencies conducting training across 39 sectors, covering 329 job roles spread across 28 States. Against a target of skilling 2 lakh candidates during 2017-18, over 83,745 candidates have already been trained, of which over 46,654 candidates have been placed in jobs. The Ministry has selected 12 new Champion Employers and entered into a MoU with them for high quality training and placements.

Under DDU-GKY, the youth are provided the option to register themselves for skilling through the app 'Kaushal Panjee' or Skill Register. This enables rural youth to remain connected with the Training Partners and Banks and be informed about nearby mobilization camps, training centres, job melas and start of new batches of training etc.

9. RURAL SELF EMPLOYMENT TRAINING INSTITUTES (RSETIs)

The Ministry of Rural Development has been implementing the Rural Self Employment Training Institutes (RSETIs) for the rural youth which seeks to diversify household income of rural poor. RSETI is a three-way partnership amongst Ministry of Rural Development, State Government and Banks. There are 31 participating banks, which have set up 586 RSETIs in the country. RSETIs provide training in agriculture, process, product and general entrepreneurship development programmes (EDP) courses to candidates leading to self employment/wage employment. Against a target of skilling 3.97 lakh candidates during 2017-18, 2.35 lakh candidates have been trained and 1.55 lakh have been settled, The Startup Village Entrepreneurship Programme (SVEP) helps the rural poor including artisans and weavers to set up enterprises at the village level in non-agricultural sectors. It is estimated that Start-up Village Entrepreneurship Programme (SVEP) has generated employment opportunities for 24,509 persons as on 31st December, 2017.

10. PRADHAN MANTRI KAUSHAL KENDRAS

The need for modernized training equipments that is on par with the industry needs is essential for providing skill training. The Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Kendras (PMKKs) are the model skill development centres that focus on building industry standardized skill development infrastructure, training and also placement. As of December 2017, 527 PMKKs have been allocated across 27 States covering 484 districts. Out of these, 328 PMKKs have been established.

11. INDIAN INSTITUTE OF SKILLS (IIS)

These are state-of-the-art Center of Excellence being set up across five regions of India on the lines on ITE Singapore. The construction for the first IIS is in Mumbai, in collaboration with Tata Group. The IIS will provide "hands-on" training in advanced courses such as energy efficient construction, industrial electronics and automation etc.

12. VOCATIONALISATION OF SECONDARY AND HIGHER SECONDARY EDUCATION

The Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship in collaboration with Ministry of Human Resource Development has taken a number of initiatives towards integrating skills and educatic Under the scheme, vocational education is provided National Career Service: to a large number of students in selected schools. UGC is offering Bachelor of Vocation Programmes in a number of colleges/universities. Academic Equivalence with 10th and 12th classes has been provided to ITI students through National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS) by means of credit transfer. In addition, Degree Apprenticeships has been identified as an alternative education route by dovetailing apprenticeship component within formal education.

13. NATIONAL CAREER SERVICE

The National Career Services (NCS)

project comprises of a digital portal that provides a nationwide online platform for the job seekers and employers for job matching in a dynamic, efficient and responsive manner and has a repository of career content. As of 31st March, 2018, 14.87 lakh employers and 4.24 crore job seekers were registered on the portal and 8.61 lakh job vacancies were mobilized. To enhance the reach and enrich the employment opportunities available to youth, 22 strategic MoUs have been signed with leading job portals, placement organizations and institutions of repute. Government of India has made it mandatory for government vacancies to be posted on the NCS Portal.

14. PRADHAN MANTRI YUVA UDYAMI VIKAS ABHIYAN (PM-YUVA)

The scheme aims to create an enabling ecosystem for entrepreneurship development through entrepreneurship education and training across the country in select institutes of Higher Learning (Universities, Colleges and Premier Institutes), schools, Industrial Training Centers (ITIs) and Entrepreneurship Development Centers (EDCs) for over a period of five years (2017-18 to 2021-22). Additionally, students will get easy access to a robust network of peers, mentors, incubators, funds and business services through an online platform. So far, 239 Institutes of Higher Learning have been empanelled to impart entrepreneurship education and entrepreneurship courses have started in more than 200 Institutes of Higher Learning. An end-to-end customized

entrepreneurship orientation module has been integrated under the Life Skill Course module of PMKVY Courses so that every candidate undergoing PMKVY skill training will receive orientation in Entrepreneurship. In ITI courses also, the module on Entrepreneurship is already integrated as a section in the employability skills.

15. WAY FORWARDS FOR SKILL DEVELOPMENT

According to World Bank, about 13 million people enter the working age every year but only 3 million new jobs are created every year. The demographic advantage being predominantly in the rural areas, the need of the hour is to improve the skill set of the labour force such that they are productively engaged in the job roles emerging from Digital India, rural road connectivity, development of smart cities, expressways, Swachh Bharat-Grameen etc.

16. CONCLUSION

India is on the threshold of a demographic dividend that is waiting to be reaped. For this dividend to be meaningful however, education, the basic right to which is now guaranteed by the constitution of India, needs to be supplemented with a skill development strategy that can ensure gainfull employment. An educated society is an essential pre-requisite tool for a developed society. As a young India is rearing to progress, a strong foundation needs to be built with provision of quality education for its future generations. The

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