

Issues and Concerns Towards Performance of Elementary School Students

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Abstract

MHRD annual report (2014-15) indicated that we are near to universalisation of elementary education. Only 2.97% children of India are out of school. The main goal to enrol the students is near to fulfil but findings regarding performance of students published by Annual Status of Education Report (ASER, 2016) presents a picture of poor learning achievement. Only enrolment is not sufficient to reach the goal. It is equally important that all children receive a good quality education. One of the key indicators of quality education is to understand whether children's learning achievement is improving over time in an equitable manner. To improve the learning achievement of elementary school students, MHRD launched different programmes and took appropriate measures. This paper highlights the learning gaps reported by ASER and NAS (National Achievement Survey). It also highlights the measures taken by MHRD in collaboration with NCERT to improve performance.

Key Words: *Quality Education, Learning Achievement, Performance*

Sixty years after independence, India adopted the constitution; Indian children finally got the right to free and compulsory education as indicated in its Directive Principles. The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act 2009 guarantees to all children within the age-group 6-14 years the right to education in proper schools with trained teachers. The Right to education act was implemented in April 1, 2010. This was a historic day for the people of India as from this day the right to education will be accorded the same legal status as the right to life as provided by Article 21A of the Indian

Constitution. Every child in the age group of 6-14 years will be provided eight years of elementary education in an age appropriate classroom in the vicinity of his/her neighbourhood.

RTE Act has the power to transform the lives of millions of poor Indian children who have so far been deprived of the opportunity to make their lives better than those of their parents. Free and compulsory education is the strength of act because the vast majority of the population, both rural and urban, send their children to government-run schools as they do not charge fees. However, given that the quality

of education in these schools is usually quite poor, the fast-increasing middle class families prefer to send their children to privately-run school due to poor quality of teaching, teacher absenteeism and infrastructure. Percentage of admission in private schools is growing every year. Number of admissions in private schools is increased from 23.7% to 30.8% (ASER, 2014). There Increment in enrolment percentage of private school is the result of poor quality of education in government schools. ASER(2016) presented recent trends that For the first time since 2006, private school enrollment has not increased - in fact, it has fallen marginally from 30.8% in 2014 to 30.5% in 2016. The enactment of 'The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education' (RTE) Act 2009, government is obligated in ensuring eight years of quality education for all children in the age group 6-14 years. MHRD stated in annual report (2014-15) that we are near to universalisation of elementary education. Only 2.97% children of India are out of school. High enrolment and diverse classrooms is a sign of healthy inclusion and participation in the education system. The main goal to enrol the students is near to fulfil but findings published by Annual Status of Education Report (ASER, 2016) presented a picture of poor learning achievement. Students

of fifth standard are not able to read second grade reading material. In case of mathematics, situation was very alarming; students of second standard were notable to recognise number 1-9 .Only enrolment is not sufficient to reach the goal. It is equally important that all children receive a good quality education. One of the key indicators of quality education is to understand whether children's learning achievement is improving over time in an equitable manner. Some organisations are assessing the quality of education. Findings of National Achievement Survey (NAS) in supervision of NCERT and Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) organised by Pratham Education Foundation are presented here.

National Achievement Survey (NAS)

NCERT on the recommendations of MHRD, conducted surveys to measure the achievement level of children studying in classes IIIrd, Vth & VIIIth. The learning levels were measured as Baseline Achievement Survey (BAS), Midterm Achievement Survey (MAS) and Terminal Achievement survey. The year in which it started and the classes for which it was carried out and the results of the same have entered in Table I.

Table I
National Achievement Survey

Survey Cycle	Class V	Class VIII	Class III
Cycle I	2001-05	2003-08	2003-07
Cycle II	2005-08	2007-10	2007-09
Cycle III	2009-12	2011-13	2012-13
Subject tested	Mathematics, Language, Environmental Studies	Mathematics, Language, Science, Social Science	Mathematics, Language

Table II
Performance Level of Class III, V, VIII

Class	Subject	Round -I	Round-II	Round-III
IIIrd	Mathematics	58.25	61.89	252
	Language	63.12	67.84	257
Vth	Mathematics	46.51	48.46	247
	Language	58.57	60.31	251
	EVS	50.30	52.19	249
VIIIth	Mathematics	39.17	42.58	245
	Language	53.86	56.50	247
	Science	41.30	42.72	251
	S. Science	46.19	47.90	247

Findings for class V indicated improvement in learning levels, but there are few areas of concern. Third round class V result shows that in Language there has been an improvement in learning achievement in 24 States/UTs, in Mathematics, 14 states have improved learning levels and in Environmental Studies, 24 States/UTs have shown an improvement in learning level. In case of class VIII results it has been found that in Mathematics average score of 33 states/ UTs was 245 with SE of 0.6. Uttar Pradesh students scored highest average score (278), whereas Meghalaya and Puducherry students scored lowest average score (227) in Mathematics. In reading comprehension Kerala students scored highest average score (277) but Jammu & Kashmir students scored lowest average score (217) in reading Comprehension. In Science the performance of rural students is significantly

higher than urban students in Science however in Social Sciences the Uttar Pradesh (267) was the highest and Meghalaya (226) was the lowest performing state.

Annual Status of Education Report (ASER)

Pratham education foundation is a private organisation which presents annual status of education. It has started an educational survey in 2005. First report was published in 2006. ASER is all about the health of education system in terms of infrastructure, teaching leaning and its material and specially performance of the students from Standard IInd to VIIIth. ASER published report of all India (Rural) Government school children for year (2010-16). Percentage of children in Std II who cannot even recognize letters increased from 13.4 % to 32.5%.

Table III

ASER (2016): Percentage of Children (All India rural) at different reading levels

Grade	Beginner	Letter	Word	Paragraph Std I level	Story Std II level	Total %
III	14.8	25.0	20.0	16.6	23.6	100
IV	8.4	17.5	17.9	18.9	37.3	100
V	5.7	12.8	14.3	19.1	48.1	100

Table III shows the performance of students of class IIIrd, IVth and Vth which is extremely poor only 16.6 %, 18.9% and 19.1% children of class IIIrd, IVth and Vth respectively were able to read the paragraph. Tables also show that percentages of children are increasing who are unable to read.

In mathematics a growing proportion of standard II children who do not know numbers 1 to 9 from year 2010 to 2016. In 2010 only 12% children were not able to recognise but in 2016 it is increased i.e. 23%. It means our school system is on deterioration. Similarly numbers of children in Std. III who do not recognize numbers till 100 is increasing. The variation is from 26% to 42% from 2010 to 2016.

ASER reported that only 25.3 % children of class III, 40.2 % children of class IVth and 50.5 % children were able to do subtract which is the basic skill of Std. II. ASER (2016) also reported the performance of Vth, VIth and VIIth grade students in relation to division, basic operation of mathematics. Only 26.1 % of Vth, 32.2% of VIth and 44.1% of VIIth grade students are able to do division sums. It means that more than 50 % children have not learned basic skills in arithmetic. Without basic skills in mathematics, it is difficult for children to sustain in further grade. Knowing numbers and operations is needed before tackling higher grade content. Therefore teaching from the grade level textbooks, leaves many children behind. There is a need of special focus, time and attention to help children in Std. IIIrd-Vth and Std. Vth-VIIIth in learning the basic and foundational skills in mathematics. With strong foundations they can progress further.

Findings of NAS are different from ASER regarding reading skills and arithmetic calculation. NAS shows improvement in learning achievement in reading skills and arithmetic calculation,

However improvement is very less. There is a gap between the report published by NAS and ASER. NAS shows some improvement in performance level whereas ASER shows deterioration in performance level. There may be many reasons behind this gap. One is population, ASER is taken only rural population whereas NAS has taken children from each corner of the country including urban and rural. Data collection of both organisations may be differed. NAS completed survey in three cycles, cycle I, II & III in different sessions in three classes i.e. III, V and VIII during 2001-2013 whereas ASER presented report of each year from 2006-2016 of classes II-VIII. Sampling technique may be differed for both organisations.

Increment in performance level presented in NAS Report is not too high. There is nearly 2 to 3 % increase in performance level of class IIIrd, Vth and VIIIth, which is not good enough. Nearly 50 % school going children are not able to perform well in reading and arithmetic skills. Goal of excellence of elementary education is not attaining if 100% children are not able to perform well. To fill this gap, MHRD has taken major initiative to improve performance level of government school going children.

Schemes and Programs Launched By 'MHRD' Towards Improvement in Performance Level

One of the major goals of RTE-SSA is to provide elementary education of equitable quality to every child. As such, the program aims to bring a broad shift towards improvement of what is happening schools including classroom process and build up systems that are child-friendly and inclusive, responsive to each child's needs and able to ensure their learning. Across the country, states are being supported to

design and implement 'Comprehensive Quality Improvement Programs' to bring about overall changes in their teachers training , curricula, learning materials, learning processes, learning outcomes, assessment and monitoring systems, in order to ensure that the quality of teaching learning is improved. In 2014-15 many measures were taken to improve performance level. This paper highlights the schemes and programs related to teaching and learning, evaluation, teacher training and academic support provided to teachers.

(I) Teaching & Learning

(i) Padhe Bharat Badhe Bharat: Major initiative of the Government of India is a nation-wide sub-programme under the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan called "Padhe Bharat Badhe Bharat" which has been planned in a twin track approach-(i) to improve language development by creating an enduring interest in reading and writing with comprehension (ii) to create a natural and positive interest in mathematics related to their physical and social world. The two tracks of Padhe Bharat Badhe Bharat are Early Reading and Writing with Comprehension (ERWC) and Early Mathematics (EM). The Objectives of this programme are to enable children to become independent and engaged readers and writers; with comprehension possessing sustainable and lasting reading and writing skills and achieve learning levels appropriate to the class of study; to make the children understand the reasoning in the domains of number, measurement and shapes; and enable them to become independent in problem solving by way of numeracy and spatial understanding skills and to associate reading, writing and early mathematics with the experience of joy and real life situation. An amount of Rs.397 Crores has approved for Padhe Bharat Badhe Bharat for 2014-15.

(ii) Focus on Method of Teaching: Specific steps have been taken to focus on programmes to improve learning levels of students. States have supported for initiatives to improving learning in foundational classes of school (classes 1 and 2) and specific initiatives to improving learning of maths and science in upper primary classes. These include a variety of programmes like Activity based learning in Tamil Nadu and Gujarat; specific programmes designed by states like Bihar and Jharkhand, bridging from home language to school language programme in Odisha.

(iii) Curriculum Reform: The National Curriculum Framework (NCF) 2005 prepared by NCERT calls for a significant shift in the education system towards schools that are more child-friendly and inclusive, and teaching learning processes that are more constructivist in nature. Each state has been urged to renew its own state curriculum in light of NCF 2005 recommendations, by bringing in cohesive changes in their curriculum, teaching learning material, pedagogy and assessment systems. States so far have renewed their curriculum based on NCF 2005, 10 States have followed the curriculum of NCERT, 3 States have followed the curriculum of neighbouring states, to make them more activity-based, child-friendly and sensitive to gender and marginalized groups.

(iv) Textbooks for children: All children are provided free textbooks up to class VIII. In 2014-15 provision was made for providing text books to 8.72 crore children. Concomitantly workbooks and worksheets are being provided by several States, to facilitate activity-based classroom processes and to supplement learning processes.

(v) Special Training for Mainstreaming out of-school children: The RTE Act makes specific provision for 'Special Training' for age

appropriate admission for out-of-school children. The SSA Framework of Implementation provides that the duration of Special Training may be flexible, varying from 3 months to 2 years, depending on the child's needs. At the end of the duration of Special Training for a particular child, the suitability of placing the child in a class may be reviewed. In 2014-15, a total of Rs. 569.22 crore has provided for Special Training to 14.77 lakh out of school children.

(II) Evaluation

Evaluation should be integral part of the teaching learning process, so that assessment does not become stressful or threatening to children.

(i) Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation: 34 States are developing their own module for implementation of CCE as well as modules for teachers training to implement CCE. Apart from said 34 states, two states are piloting CCE and planning to upscale CCE near future. To help states in their efforts, NCERT has developed an example CCE module and shared the same with the states.

(ii) Saransh: The CBSE Board has launched an on-line facility titled 'Saransh' on 2 November, 2014 for affiliated & CBSE schools. It helps the schools to look at their performance at an aggregate level and at the level of each student. All performance matrices are presented through numbers as well as in charts/ graphs for easy understanding. Saransh helps schools compare their performance vis-à-vis all CBSE schools at various levels.

(III) Teacher Training

Teachers are the backbone of education system. Teacher training institution is not providing high quality training to teachers due to so called reasons. Government has taken initiative

to empower them. MHRD has started a mission in (2014-15) for teacher training to improve the quality of education.

(i) Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya National Mission for Teachers Training

Teacher training to make environment child friendly is the goal of mission which was launched to create synergies among the various ongoing initiatives on teachers and teaching. The scheme will address all issues related to teachers, teaching, teacher preparation, professional development, curriculum design. Develop a strong professional cadre of teachers by setting performance standards and creating top class institutional facilities for innovative teaching. The scheme will also address the need to induct qualified teachers, attracting talent into teaching profession and raising the quality of teaching in schools and colleges.

(ii) Learning Enhancement Programs: 2% of the total SSA outlay for each district has been made available for 'Learning Enhancement Programs' that aims specifically at improving the quality of learning processes and learning outcomes. In 2014-15, 29 states have been supported for carrying out Learning Enhancement Programs focused on the primary level (especially for strengthening early reading and mathematics skills), and all the states have been supported for Learning Enhancement Programs with a focus on strengthening Science and Maths learning at the upper primary level. To support states in designing these subject specific programs, NCERT has launched a Reading Programme for the early primary grades, as an exemplar for states to build their own programmes for strengthening children's reading skills. This includes a prototype graded series of 40 early readers, a teachers' training manual, and a dossier of materials

on reading pedagogy. Similarly, NCERT has initiated a programme for strengthening the teaching of Mathematics at Early primary grades, which includes development of a prototype maths learning kit for Class Ist and IInd, and a teacher training manual with appropriate pedagogic strategies.

(iii) Availability: To meet the shortage of teachers in elementary schools, 19.85 lakh additional teacher posts have been sanctioned under SSA up to 2014-15. Out of this, 15.06 lakh posts are reported to have been filled up. It is leading to a sharp improvement in pupil teacher ratios (PTR) to a level of 26:1 in 2013-14. The average number of teachers per school for Government schools has also improved to 4.2 teachers in 2013-14. After RTE it is mandatory that teachers are appointed who cleared TET. Apart from these 2.43 lakh part-time instructors have also been sanctioned under Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA).

(iv) In-service Teacher Training: To upgrade skills of teachers, SSA provides for annual in-service training up to 20 days for all teachers and 30 days induction training for freshly trained recruits. In 2014-15, 30.14 lakh (at BRC Level) 26.94 lakh (at CRC Level) teachers have been approved by MHRD for in-service training, 0.89 lakh teachers for induction training. Also 2.53 lakh untrained teachers have been targeted to be trained under SSA. All training programmes cover pedagogical issues, including content and methodology, aimed at improving teaching learning transactions in classrooms and learning process in schools. Some of the major focus areas include guiding principles of NCF 2005, CCE, how children learn, subject-specific content or learning difficulties, activity oriented methods, use of TLMs or learning kits, etc. States are oriented towards improvement of training program through four regional workshops.

(v) Training of Headmasters: In order to orient the teachers in managerial skills the heads of the schools are provided training for 10 days in academic management, financial management and human resource management. During 2014-15, 900 RPs and 3200 Head teachers will receive school leadership training based on NUEPA School Leadership Framework.

(vi) Curriculum Upgradation: 12 teacher education courses have been revised and the curriculum upgraded and three new programmes have been approved and notified (4 years B.A./B. Sc. B.Ed., 3 years B.Ed.-M.Ed. and part time B.Ed. in vacations). Teacher Education Institutions has to obtain accreditation within a period of five years from NCTE recognized accreditation agencies (including NAAC).

IV) Academic Support System

Government is providing decentralized academic support, training and supervision to teachers and schools. For their academically improvement government has been set up 6,716 Block Resource Centres (BRCs) and 75,954 Cluster Resource Centres (CRCs) till September, 2014. There are subject-specific Resource Persons placed at each BRC and CRC who conduct training programs for teachers, and also visit schools to provide on-site support to teachers on pedagogic and content related issues. BRCs/ CRCs are also involved in academic monitoring of schools, classroom observations and development of resource materials for teachers and students.

Grant for Academic Support System

- Annual teacher grant of Rs 500 for developing contextual teaching aids
- Rs 500 for develop & use contextual teaching learning materials

- Rs 5000 for primary school and Rs 7000 for upper primary class for maintenance of school
- Rs 50 lakh to each district for strengthening computer aided learning to support enhancement of children's learning.
- DIETs and BRCs hold regular workshop and training programmes to develop subject and topic related low cost teaching aids. States have also issued guidelines to schools and teachers on optimizing use of such funds.

Suggestions

MHRD report 2014-15 shows that government left no corner to take initiative towards improvement, however some concerns regarding to improve quality of education are presented below in the form of suggestions.

Inclusion of Early Childhood Education (ECE): Several studies on early childhood have shown that 3-6 yrs. is the time when children need to be exposed to literacy-rich environment to enhance their literacy growth, and children who experience schooling for the first time at the age of 6 yrs. are clearly at a disadvantage. In the face of such evidence, it is necessary that RTE is enhanced to include Pre- School Education and its convergence with mainstream education.

Comprehensive Evaluation of Teachers: Government has directed to states that appointed only those teachers who have qualified Teacher Eligibility Test (TET). It is very appreciable decision but The State Education Departments and the MHRD should ensure that existing Teacher Eligibility Tests (TET) should be based on teaching competencies and not on information recall. The Government needs to make required changes in TET in consultation with academic bodies like NCERT, NUEPA and other academic institutions. It should be comprehensive in nature.

Teacher Career Development: The MHRD should establish policies and procedures for setting academic goals for teachers, providing formative feedback and summative performance appraisal. The State Education Departments should implement such policies while tailoring it to the local context.

Teacher Education and Support: The MHRD and State Education Departments should grant higher levels of autonomy and ensure competence at all levels of teacher education – SCERT, DIETs, BRCs. CRCs. The State should ensure that of qualified and competent staff are assigned to these posts and establish policies and procedures for setting goals and summative performance appraisal.

Measurement of Teacher accountability: Teachers in government are well qualified and taking handsome salary. But they are not fulfilling their duties. There should be some measures of accountability of government teachers. There should be a check on utilising on Grant of Rs 500 each provided for teaching learning material and aids.

Surprise Inspection: Everything is provided to improve quality but it is not achieved because there is no fear of government in mind of teachers and head masters. There should be a provision of surprise inspection to monitor the activities run in the government schools. If all the funds like teaching learning material and aids, computer learning, maintenance of schools etc are not utilising than it should be reversed.

Imposed Penalty on Teacher Absenteeism: Teaching is the backbone of any school. If a school is fully equipped with infrastructure without teachers, what will be the quality of education? Teacher absenteeism in government schools is chronically high because there is no provision

of dismissing. The law does not address teacher absenteeism. There should be some penalty on teacher absenteeism.

Relaxation from non teaching duties: RTE Act 2009 prohibits deployment of teachers for non-education purpose, except decennial census, disaster relief and elections. Teachers are overburdened due to indulging in non-educational duties like decennial census, disaster relief and elections. These tasks distract the teachers from their teaching. Teachers complain that they are busy in clerical work like record of scholarships, record of other materials provided from government under SSA. Teaching should be the primary and single duty of the teachers to achieve the target of quality education.

Provision of Reward: Government is providing many incentives and funds to schools but there is no feeling of competition among schools existed. There will be a change if government will make the provision of some reward regarding quality assessment and this reward will be distributed among head teacher and teachers.

Involvement of those directly affected: The involvement of those sections of the community that have a stake in a better education for their children, that is, the rural and urban poor, and dalits, needs to be mobilised. This may be supportive or confrontational as the local situation demands. The role of the community and community-based non-government organisations should be that of demanding the best possible education for their children, and ensuring that they get it. They should support government efforts by ensuring enrolment and attendance, providing assistance to teachers, contributing to the maintenance of school buildings, and keeping a close watch on the quality of education being provided to their children.

Awareness Program for Parents: Parents of government school going children are not aware of their right. They should be an awareness programme for parents. They send theirs wards in school for incentives and mid day meal. They should be aware of importance of education, teacher's role and quality of teaching.

Appropriate Grade Level: Many students are lacking in their achievement in reading and Arithmetic, there is need to start from the students's level and use appropriate methods to help them progress. Grouping by level & not by grade can make teaching efficient and effective for acquiring these basic skills quickly so that further progress can be made on the foundations that are built.

Creative inputs in curriculum design: The curriculum and pedagogy should be designed to fulfil local needs and demands within the larger mainstream. It should be creative and have a corner to exploration. On the solid framework of a core curriculum needs to be built a child-friendly, locally relevant structure that is welcoming and appealing for first-generation learners.

Conclusion

Apart from all these there is a strong need to motivate teachers towards professionalism because there is lot of difference between the zeal before and after getting job. For most of the teachers getting government job is equivalent to job security. But if they got job why they are not doing their task for which they are appointed? Why students taught by them are not able to read and write? There is a need to motivate teachers to put their 100 % efforts in teaching and try to elicit 100% potential out of their students.

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