

Addressing the Challenges in Primary Education: Enhancing Teacher Effectiveness

Ms. Neelima G. Jha¹

Research Scholar,

Department of Education, SHUATS, Allahabad

Prof. (Dr) Sr. Marion Mathew CJ²

Head, Department of Teacher Education,

Dean, Allahabad School of Education,

Sam Higginbottom University of Agriculture, Technology and Sciences (Shuats)

Allahabad. (Formerly Known as Shiats)

ABSTRACT:

Education is important and may be considered a prerequisite to other opportunities. In this regard primary education as the base of the educational ladder is all the more important as it serves as the foundation. Children are the future leaders and are the assets of the country. The development and future of the country rests on the type of education we are able to impart to our children. Issues of quality and quantity are central to education. Various efforts have been made by the government for providing access and maintaining quality at primary education. While India has been successful in enhancing or increasing enrolment to achieve the objective of 'Education for All' the challenge of dropouts and the inability of schools to retain the students in the classroom remains a challenge before us. Yet another challenge of primary education is the absence of quality teaching in the classrooms. Reports have revealed that students are unable to meet the required expected (learning) standards for the class in which they are enrolled. Some of the possible ways to address the lacuna may lie in the path of taking steps to improve school governance and working to increase teacher effectiveness. While the former lie in the domain of administration and entail a closer look at the details of day to day governance of education, the latter focus inside the classroom. The present paper addresses questions like- What role does the teacher play in this scenario? What is his/her role in retention of students and preventing dropouts? What is his/her role in maintaining quality teaching? How can teaching be made more effective? These are some of the questions this paper proposes to address.

Key Words: Quality teaching, Dropouts, retention, learning outcome, Teacher effectiveness.

Introduction:

In view of 'Education for All' concentration has been more on access or quantitative aspect of education. While it improved the quantity and number who were able to access education nevertheless the issues of retention and quality of learning remain a challenge. In this scenario it is important to shift our focus on teachers and help them in such a way that they will become well equipped to face these challenges and be more effective as a teacher.

It is well said, "Upon the education of people, fate of a country depends." The Preamble of the Constitution stating the objectives of Justice, Liberty, and Equality has no meaning apart from

providing education to the people. Education as one of the Fundamental Rights is the key to the development – economic, social and political of the citizens. In actual practice, Right to equality and Right to freedom are enhanced and strengthened by Right to education. In this regard Primary Education is the corner stone of the educational edifice in any country which forms a part of a longer cycle of general education.

National Policy on Education, 1986 laid special emphasis on quantity and quality at primary level. Two aspects were emphasised –

- Universal enrolment and universal retention of children up to 14 years of age
- A substantial improvement in the quality of education

Various initiatives by the government contributed to this and as a result primary school enrolment in India increased even in remote areas. Enrolment for the age group 6-14 reached 96 percent or above since 2009, this proportion increased from 96.7 percent in 2014 to 96.9 percent in 2016. Enrolment for the age group 15-16 has also increased for both boys and girls, rising from 83.4 percent in 2014 to 84.7 percent in 2016 (Pratham, ASER 2016). This shows that many problems of access to schooling have been addressed. Improvement with regard to infrastructural facility has been a priority to achieve this.

Challenges in Primary Education:

Dropout Rate:

In spite of these improvements there are two main challenges that primary education is facing and that is dropout rate and quality of learning. Statements like 'India has a high 40 percent drop-out rate in Elementary Schools' (Nov14,2013 India Today) and '47 million youth in India dropout of school by 10th standard' (Aug 17,2016 UNESCO) can be regularly seen in news papers showing the gravity of the issue. If on one side enrolment or access has improved, on the other side the dropout rates continue to be high. Nationally 29 percent of children dropout before completing five years of primary school, and 43 percent before finishing upper primary school. High school completion is only 42 percent.

In some states, the fraction of out of school children (age 6-14 years) has increased between 2014 and 2016. These include Madhya Pradesh (from 3.4 percent to 4.4 percent), Chhattisgarh (from 2 percent to 2.8 percent), and Uttar Pradesh (from 4.9 percent to 5.3 percent) (Pratham, ASER 2016). Even the students' attendance varies across the country. States like Himanchal Pradesh, Punjab, Uttarakhand, Haryana, Nagaland, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Kerala, and TamilNadu etc have above 80 percent attendance but states like Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh, Manipur, attendance rates range from 50 to 60 percent (Pratham, ASER 2016).

Quality of Learning:

Another major issue is level of learning or quality of learning. The overall learning level among Indian students is pretty disappointing. With regard to reading, the proportion of all children in class V who can read a class II level text (book) declined to 47.8 percent in 2016 from 48.1 percent in 2014. This means every other student is unable to read something meant for someone three classes below. In the same way only 32 percent children in class III could read simple English words and in class V only one out of every four students could read a simple sentence in English

(Pratham, 2016).

The two problems related to dropout rate and decline in quality could be due to variety of reasons like reluctance of parents, distance of school, poor economic condition, domestic compulsion, lack of interest etc. Their brief schooling experience consists frequently of limited learning opportunities in overcrowded classrooms with insufficient learning materials and under-qualified teachers (Alexander, 2008). Children of different ages and abilities are mixed together in single classrooms without proper adaptation of teaching methods to improve learning and to induce school engagement (Little, 2008). Such schooling circumstances, together with personal and family level factors such as ill-health, malnutrition and poverty, jeopardise meaningful access to education for many children. As a result, many children are registered in schools but fail to attend, participate but fail to learn, are enrolled for several years but fail to progress and drop out from school.

Apart from these there may be several other complex contributory factors for this situation but the teacher's role could also be a contributory factor. However effective classroom teaching and teacher's role in it plays an important part. Research suggests that, among school-related factors, teachers matter most. When it comes to student performance on reading and math tests, a teacher is estimated to have two to three times the impact of any other school factor, including services, facilities, and even leadership.

The Education Commission (1964) pointed out "the quality, competence and character of teachers to be the most significant factor influencing the quality of education and its contribution to National development."

It is a fact that teacher is in a strategic position to bring changes in teaching learning process and enhance students' performance. Even if all the elements of education i.e. standardized and planned curriculum, materials, administration and evaluation are in place but the teacher fails to transact the curriculum /deliver in an effective manner, there will be no change either in students' retention or performance in the educational system related to quality of education.

Studies by Dodeen (2013), Lavin et al. (2012), Williams et al. (2012), Catano and Harvey (2011), Oyoo and Bwoga (2009), Okoye (2008), Okpala and Ellis (2005), Deal (2005), reported on school and college going students' perception of an effective teacher and the students mentioned the characteristics like content knowledge, teaching skill, classroom management skills, caring attitude, communication, availability, problem solving, helpful, encouraging, devoted, understanding etc.

There is a general opinion that teachers are indifferent to their responsibilities and do not perform their task effectively even the time given for task is insufficient. Sometimes even well qualified and able teachers fail to perform well. It is possible that they are not motivated or encouraged enough to make efforts for qualitative outcomes. There are many things which have to be taken into consideration in order to enhance teacher effectiveness and reduce dropout rate and improve low level of learning outcome.

Building Quality:

There are three aspects/factors which may contribute to teacher effectiveness and improve quality of learning. They will help in overcoming the challenges of high dropout rate and low level of learning outcome:

- **Teacher Motivation:**

Ofoegbu (2004) revealed that teacher motivation is a vital factor for classroom effectiveness and school improvement. Improving the quality of education depends on first improving the recruitment, training, social status and conditions of work of teachers; they need the appropriate knowledge and skills, personal characteristics, professional prospects and motivation if they are to meet the expectations placed on them (Delors 1996). Studies have shown that good working conditions and open organizational climate encourage teachers to perform well. Thought should be given to ways of identifying and rewarding good teaching. Muralidharan and Sundararaman (2011) mentioned that rewarding good performance or performance linked incentive will motivate teachers in such a way that it will result in improvement in student learning. Long-term evidence over five years in Andhra Pradesh showed that rewarding teacher performance was 15 to 20 times more effective at raising student learning than reduction in pupil teacher ratio (Muralidharan 2012). Motivation of teachers will remove many issues like teacher absence which sharply lowers child's learning levels (Kingdon and Banerji 2009), low rate of attendance of enrolled children, high dropout rate and low level of learning outcome.

- **Pedagogy:**

A teacher when enters a classroom faces a group which is heterogeneous. Access to education has given opportunity to millions of children coming from a variety of sections-high class families and extremely poor, educated in convents and ordinary schools, rural and urban areas, from different parts of India and other countries, from different educational and social background and many of them as first generation learners, to come together to receive instruction in classes. Many of these students fail to get benefitted by the usual pedagogy and teaching practices which are geared to completing the allotted syllabus. With this limitation, in such situation a teacher can only be successful in translating curriculum into effective learning when he understands the level of different students and helps them as per their needs to come up to the level of others. This requires giving extra time to such students who are weak, have flexible approach to teaching, help them to understand the language especially English to understand what is being taught in class. This is not easy when there is a limited, pre decided schedule to complete the syllabus. But a motivated and encouraged teacher will be able to do so.

Banerjee et al. (2007), Banerjee et al. (2010), Lakshminarayana et al. (2012), Banerjee et al. (2012), Muralidharan (2013) have suggested that usual pedagogy can be improved by using remedial and supplemental instruction in early grades that are targeted to the child's current level of learning (as opposed to simply following the text book). This has a positive impact on students' current level of learning. According to Muralidharan (2013), supplemental instruction programmes using locally-hired short-term teaching assistants is cost effective and enhances the level of learning of the child.

At present as Teachers' training (B. Ed) has become a 2 years course and internship of prospective teachers for a period of 4 months has become a vital part of teachers' training during which they assist the regular teachers. If careful planning is done then these trainees' help can be enlisted for this purpose.

- **Supervision and Administration:**

Regular monitoring and feed back is also essential for making teachers more effective. This should be done in a constructive manner by guiding, encouraging and supporting the teachers to be well equipped in terms of skills/ competencies to be able to keep pace with the changing times. Inspections should be an opportunity not only to check the performance of the teacher but to maintain a dialogue with teachers concerning developments in knowledge, methods and sources of information. Guest lectures, short term courses, orientation programmes can be organised by the institutions in this regard. Opportunity for professional growth should be given. This will help the teacher to be emotionally attached to the institution and contribute towards the realisation of institutional goals. Schools are looking at various ways to attract the best teachers and use of incentives to improve effectiveness of teachers is helpful to some extent, but experts believe that such efforts will become ineffective over a period of time if school conditions and leadership issues are not addressed (Sawchuk 2009). Studies have shown that professional growth and autonomy (Adedoyin 2012), open climate (Raza 2010), collaborative culture (Snyder 2012) enhance teacher effectiveness which in turn results into better learning outcome on the part of students. The above three factors teacher motivation, pedagogy and supervision and administration are likely to strengthen teacher effectiveness.

Conclusion:

Keeping in mind the present educational scenario we can say that though infrastructural facility, material, standard curriculum etc. are certainly required but it is not enough to address the problems within India's Educational system specially dropout rate and quality. They have helped in the realisation of the goals of 'Education for All' to some extent but they do not sufficiently contribute towards learning outcomes. More important is that, which happens within the classrooms. For preventing high dropout rate and maintaining quality in education along with other things like infrastructural facility, material, standard curriculum etc focus should be on 'teachers' who transact the curriculum and facilitate teaching learning. Till then from schooling access to learning outcomes will remain an unfinished agenda.

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