

Policy Provisions and Grass Root Realities-A Macro Perspective

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DOI: 10.29322/IJSRP.9.11.2019.p9597
<http://dx.doi.org/10.29322/IJSRP.9.11.2019.p9597>

Abstract- This article explores government's educational policies focusing on quality improvement of children studying in school. Number of commissions has been undertaken by the government to look in to the structural problem of education in the country. Some of the crucial ones are education commission- 1964 which is also commonly called as Kothari commission, the National education policy 1968 and 1986 will be discussed in details in the below chapter.

The article will focus of the commissions and committees set-up in independent India and critically analysis the recommendations and its impact at grassroots.

Index Terms- National policy on Education, National framework for education, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, Right of children to free and compulsory education act 2009.

Some of the limitation of the commission was it could able to identify the gap in the university education system but did not suggest any concrete action to improve the situation. And another limitation was it has not gone deep into study the medium of instruction as it is a crucial factor of quality education even today.

The university education commission also identified that the country's secondary education remained the weakest link in the education system and needed urgent attention. Hence *secondary education commission was set up -1952-53 also known as Mudaliar commission*, to improve the existing secondary education for nation building. Some of the findings of the commission was it was bookish and examination orientation education very limited scope for extra-curricular activities and also there is gap in teacher-student communication. Another very crucial finding was the quality of teachers available in school. The major suggestion of the secondary education commission was reorganizing the secondary education and recommended for duration of seven years between the age group of 11-17 years. The curriculum should be adaptable to meet the need of different category of student. The curriculum should bridge the gap between school and the communities. The commission recommended on mother tongue based education through-out the secondary school but it did mentioned- "subject to that for linguistic minorities special facilities should be made available on the line suggested by central advisory board of education"

Few of the critic of the commission were the recommendation was the recommendation were given hastily which is a time taking task and even today it has not been able to implement these recommendation. This commission is very broad and no specific provisions made for marginalized communities including tribal and girls children.

National committee on women's education (1958-1959) headed by Durgabai Deshmukh was set-up to review the gap in girl's education and recommend ways to bridge the gap and explore possibilities for vocational education for women. As per the recommendation government of India set up national council for women's education in 1959 and created a special unit in the ministry of education to deal with the problem of girl's education and sponsored several schemes and provided large amount of fund for the expansion of girl's education. It was a right move in the policy direction but even today the women literacy rate is only 65.46 percent compared to men 82.14 percent.²

The *education commission (1964-1966)* also popularly known as Kothari commission, was set up to advice government

I. INTRODUCTION

Education as a tool for socio-economic development has been emphasized by various scholars and one of the earliest thinkers is Condorcet¹- he argued that education is an implied right in the constitution. He further stated, there was a need to make it as a right as it would increase the competence of the participant in the society, leading to better and more reasonable outcomes. He further believed that quality of inputs to the legislative process would improve if the quality of education is improved.

II. II. EDUCATION COMMISSIONS OF INDEPENDENT INDIA

In India since independence, there has been serious effort put in by government to improve the educational status of the country. The drawback of educational structure were reviewed by number of commissions and committees, particularly by the *University Education commission (1948-49) also known as Radha Krishna commission* the first education commission of independent India. The aim of the commission was to study the university education in India and suggest improvement for the development of university education in line with the socio-economic development during post independent India. The commission recommended revision of pay scale of teachers so that it attracts talent to improve the educational status at university level and also raise the standard of education as per international standard.

¹ Nicolas de Condorcet, French philosopher(1743-1794)

² Census report 2011

on “the national pattern of education and on the general principles and policies for the development of the education at all stages and in all aspects of education”. The major recommendation of the commission was the standardization of educational system on 10+2+3 pattern uniform to the country. It recommended a common public education system to be introduced and it should be vocationalized by introducing work experience as part of the education.

The commission also advised on days of instruction to be followed at all stages of education and reducing number of national holidays at educational institutions. Further linking of college to neighborhood schools were recommended and utilization of school space and facilities 8 hours a day throughout the year, establishment of book banks, identification of talents and provision of scholarships, setting up of day study and residential facilities and opportunities for students to earn while studying. The commission strongly recommended for free education up to secondary level. It also emphasized on promoting women education and government should set up state and central level institutions to administer it.

The commission recommended for a three language formula to be administered while designing the curriculum for lower primary to secondary school. At lower primary level the curriculum should have mother tongue or the regional language as one of the subject and in high school two language subject should be there apart of other subject on science and social sciences.

Another important aspect of Kothari commission was taking a strong note of the Dhebar commission³ recommendations to strengthening of primary education of tribal children across the country. As part of the Dhebar commission’s recommendation- “An intensive efforts have to be made among tribal to provide five years of effective education to all children in tribal areas. Initiate targeted intervention for tribal girl children to encourage them towards formal education. The teacher servicing in tribal areas should be conversant with the tribal language. The medium of education in the first two years of the schooling should be specially prepared in mother tongue. During this first two years the children should be taught by oral instruction in the regional language and their familiarity and command over it to improve. By the third year, the regional language shall be the medium of education. To attract children to school and retain them the school curriculum should be harmonized with the environment. Vacations and holidays should coincide with agricultural season and forest operations and socio- cultural festivities. The school hours should be fixed to suit the work schedule of a tribal household where children are required to support their parents. The introduction of work-experience and emphasis on art education would attract the tribal children as would the teaching of folk songs, stories and riddles which are very popular with the tribal. Tribal games and archery as well as tribal music and dances should be introduced as an extracurricular activity. In several tribal areas, the commission observed that there is a lack of rapport between the teachers and local population i.e. tribal community.” Hence the Kothari commission recommended there should be separate sub-cadres in which persons will be selected on the basis of competency and

aptitude for work with the tribal children with special incentives for their commitment.

This process of language transition from mother tongue to regional language was crucial and Kothari commission did took strong note of it but while recommending it only talked about three languages subject to be available for children to study as language subject and did not specifically mentioned on mother tongue based teaching learning in schools.

Based on the report and recommendations of Kothari commission, formulation of the first *National policy on Education (NPE) 1968*, was done by government of India. The NPE aimed in a radical restructuring and equalize educational opportunities in order to achieve national integration and greater cultural and economic development of the country. The NPE called for fulfilling compulsory education for all children up to the age of 14, as stipulated by the Constitution of India. Better training for teacher and selection of well equipped and qualified teachers was one of the major features. The NPE, 1968 stressed on increase of spending in education to six percent of the national income (GDP) from two percent.

In accordance with the NPE 1968, the government of India has formulated certain principles to promote the development of education in the country. These principles are:

Free and Compulsory Education: According to the Indian Constitution, education should be free and compulsory up to the age of 14. Steps should be taken to ensure that the child, enrolled in the school, should successfully complete the course.

Education of Teachers: The teacher is the most important person to determine the quality of education in the country. She should be honored in society. Her emoluments and service standard should be increased, with due regard to her responsibilities and qualifications. Proper attention should be given to quality teacher education. They should, also, get academic freedom to write, to study and to speak on national and international issues.

Language Development: The policy had, also, emphasized on the development of Indian, as well as foreign languages, in the country. The three language formula should be introduced, in which a student at the secondary level, should know Hindi, English and the regional language of his state. The language, Sanskrit, has been included as an optional subject, at the secondary level. Language education was seen as essential to reduce the gap between the Policy maker and general population.

Education Opportunity for all: Under this policy, every child of the country should get education, irrespective of caste, religion, region or whatever the case may be. Special emphasis should be given to backward classes, minority children, girls and physically challenged children to avail the education facilities.

Uniform Education Structure: The structure of education should be uniform throughout the country. It should be a 10+2+3 pattern from higher secondary to college level. During the course of study, each student should get to play sports and games. They should also develop the quality of work experience and should participate in programmes related to National construction and Community services.

³ Dhebar commission (1960-61) The scheduled areas and scheduled tribe commission

As per the principles outlined under NEP 1968, it also advised government to review the progress of education in the country in a regular interval and suggest remedial mechanism for future development of education.

Subsequently a *new policy on Education* was formulated in 1986, which incorporated the principle stated by the education policy 1968. Apart from the principles of education policy 1968, the new policy on Education emphasized on removal of disparities and to equalize educational opportunity, especially for women, Scheduled Tribes (ST) and the Scheduled Caste (SC) communities. To achieve such a social integration, the new policy on Education called for expanding scholarships, adult education, recruiting more teachers from the tribal areas, incentives for poor families to send their children to school regularly, development of new institutions and providing housing and services. The new policy on education stressed on child-centered approach in primary education, and initiated Operation Blackboard to improve quality education at all primary schools nationwide. The policy added to the Open University system with the Indira Gandhi National Open University, which was established in 1985. The policy also advised to establish rural university model, based on the philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi, to promote economic and social development at the grassroots level in rural India. Like the education policy 1968, the new policy on education also advised government of India to increase the spending on education from 2 percent to 6 percent GDP.

Hence to operationalize National policy on education 1986, Acharya Ramamurti committee- 1992 was constituted and formulated plan of Action for the policy. The National Programme of Action- (POA-1992) aimed to achieve the universal enrollment and retention of children and successful completion of education upto 14 years. The POA, outline for substantial improvement in quality of education to enable all children to essential level of learning outcome. It also suggested a decentralized planning and participatory governance in school, stressing on reaching out to marginalized communities, women and ensuring equal educational opportunities for all.

Taking it from the POA 1992 provisions, District Primary Education Programme (1994-2009) emerged as a response to various challenges faced by primary education sector in the country. DPEP adopts a holistic approach and has the essential ingredients required to universalize access to retention and improve learning achievement and reduces disparities among social groups. Adopting an area specific approach with district as the unit of planning, the key strategies of the programme was to retain the conceptuality and sensitivity to local conditions and ensuring full participation of the community.

The DPEP initiative has brought changes to enrollment, retention and learning outcome of children in government school but the decentralized management of school and community participation in school management was not actually materialized at ground level.

III. SARVA SHIKHA ABHIYAN

Sarva Shikha Abhiyan (Education for all movement) 2000-2001, aimed at the universalization of elementary education “in a time bound manner”, the 86th amendment of the constitution of the India making free and compulsory education to children between

the age of 6-14 years, a fundamental rights. The roots of SSA go back to 1994 DPEP which was also aiming for universalization of primary education. SSA provides the umbrella under which all the programmes of universalization of elementary education have been merged to provide access to all children in the age group of 6-14 years through formal primary education or alternative equivalent educational provisions. Completion of five years of primary education and eight years of elementary education and ensuring quality education has been one of the important aspects of SSA. To achieve the overall goal of SSA number of scheme were introduced nationwide. Some of the major schemes were:

1. Education Guarantee scheme and Alternative and Innovative Education.
2. National programme of Nutritional support to primary education(Midday Meal)
3. National programme for education of girls at elementary level.
4. Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya
5. Prathmik Shikha Kosh

SSA has been successful in enrollment of children, as per 2011 census 98.85 percent enrollment rate for boys and 101.43 percent enrolment for girls. It could able comply mostly with infrastructural standard. But it struggle with retention of children, nationally 29 percent of children dropout before completing five years of primary education and 43 percent dropout before finishing upper primary school. Below is the table highlighting the dropout rate in India:

Table: 4.1 Drop-out rate in percent:

Classes	Tribal Boys	All Boys	Tribal Girls	All Girls	Tribal Total	All Total	Gap
I-V	37.2	28.7	33.9	25.1	35.6	27	8.6
VI-VIII	54.7	40.3	55.4	41	55	40.6	14.4
I-X	70.6	50.4	71.3	47.9	70.9	49.3	21.6

Source: statistic of School Education 2010-2011

Even though there is a hundred percent enrollment of children at entry level in School but gradually the children dropout rate increases specially tribal girls dropout rate of the school. The common perceptions towards reason for dropout of children from school remain as economic condition and social background of the family. And some research studies also indicate poverty as a major reason of drop-out, other reasons are inadequate facilities, problem of medium of instruction, inadequate training to teachers and their indifferent attitude, lack of teaching and learning materials, absence of proper inspection and supervision of schools as the reasons of drop-out. J.Sarma (1998) conducted a study on ‘Problems and prospects of Disadvantaged groups of Assam with special reference to gender issues among scheduled castes and Scheduled Tribe children at primary level. The findings reveals that in spite of several efforts made by the government through SSA, a large number of SC and ST children of school going age group are still remained out of school in Assam. Dropout rates

were also higher in case of girls 54.05 percent of ST (hills rural) children never enrolled in any educational institution.

Curriculum and medium of Instruction plays a crucial role in quality education and one of the major reasons for dropout of children in school. The national council for educational research and training was established in 1961 by government of India to advise and assist government on policies and programmes for qualitative improvement in school education. NCERT is also a nodal agency for achieving the goal of universalization of elementary education. Hence the national curriculum framework is one of the four National curriculum frameworks published in 1975, 1988, 2000 and finally in 2005 by NCERT to contribute to achieve universalization of elementary education.

IV. NATIONAL CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK

I will be discussing only the National Curriculum Framework 2005, As per this policy document- provides the framework for making school syllabus, developing textbooks and teaching practices within the school education system in India. The NCF 2005 draw its framework from the document "Education as Learning without Burden" and national policy on education 1986. NCF stressed on learning through enjoyable and in a participatory way. The school curriculum should focus on holistic development to enhance physical and mental development in individual as well as with peer interaction. Learning should be enjoyable and should relate to real life experiences involving concepts and deeper understanding of the theme. Constructive learning should be part of the curriculum and student should be encouraged to interact with peers, teachers and communities which would open up rich learning opportunities for the children. To make the learning foundation strong and firm, School should provide sufficient space to explore and develop rational thinking and have knowledge of concepts, language etc.

The NCF recommended three language formula systems to be followed; medium of instruction should be home language. The first language to be studied must be the mother tongue or the regional language. The second language should be Hindi in Hindi speaking states and for non Hindi speaking some other modern Indian language or English. And the third language, in Hindi speaking state will be English or a modern Indian language not studied as second language and for non Hindi speaking state it will be English or a modern Indian language not studied as second language.

Some of the limitation of the National curriculum framework 2005 has been ignoring multi-grade teaching especially for primary schools. In India due to uneven distribution of teacher deployment and teacher unwillingness to relocate to rural and tribal areas there are single teachers school in these areas. Even through Government claimed to have 24:1 ratio at primary level⁴ but in reality there are 92, 275 single teacher school in India.⁵ There is a urgent need to come up with a clear framework on multi-grade teaching learning to ensure quality education taking place in school.

The three language formula stated by the NCF, has not been implemented effectively all over the country. Different states interpreted this formula in different ways and as a result its implementation has been uneven. In many cases, the formula has become 3+/-1 formula. For the speaker of linguistic minority the three language formula become four language formula as they had to learn their mother tongue, the dominant regional language, English and Hindi. In many of the Hindi speaking states Sanskrit become the third language instead of any modern Indian language. Whereas the non Hindi speaking states it operate like two language formula, In North Eastern states either English/Hindi. Even European languages were considered as third language. NCF should have recommended ways to implement three languages especially for linguistic minorities including tribal children. Below is one of the examples of experimenting with three language formula with tribal children.

In 2003, Government of India, under SSA approached states with substantial tribal population to introduce mother tongue based Multi-Lingual Education (MLE) for tribal children, the same year, Andhra Pradesh government decided to start an experimental pilot project to provide MLE in eight tribal languages in 1000 schools. To impart the MLE framework new curriculum, text books, teaching learning material and teacher training programme were also prepared. Under the programme teachers were trained extensively to deal with the issues of multilingual education. The tribal language was written in the script of the state or the regional language with some modifications to accommodate the linguistic features that were not common among the two languages. Then, special efforts were made to incorporate the cultural and daily life experiences of the children and indigenous knowledge systems, games, songs and stories from the tribal communities into the curriculum, textbooks, pictures and illustrations, teaching learning materials and children's learning activities.

The NCF 2005 has also not clearly spelt out on teacher training to implement three language formula. Unless teacher's pedagogies include the language practices of the learner, and unless all the learners are taught in a manner that is in consonance with their cultural and language practices, the education system cannot expect the involvement of the children in the learning process in the classroom and the objective of an active and aware learning process cannot happen.

V. THE RIGHT TO FREE AND COMPULSORY EDUCATION ACT 2009

Another Crucial step taken by government of India was The Right to Free and Compulsory Education Act 2009 (RTE), which describes the modalities of the importance of free and compulsory education for children between the age of 6-14 years in India under Article 21A of constitution of India. The RTE act provides for the rights of children to free and compulsory education till completion of elementary education in a neighbourhood school. It clarifies that compulsory education means obligation of the appropriate government authority to provide free elementary education and

⁴ Press release issued by Ministry of Human resource development –February 2017

⁵ Right to Education Act compliance report 2019

ensure compulsory admission, attendance and completion of elementary education to every child in 6-14 years age group. "Free" means that no child shall be liable to pay any kind of fee or charges or expenses which may prevent any child from pursuing and completing elementary education. It also makes provision for a out of school child to be admitted to an age appropriate class.

It specifies the duties and responsibilities of appropriate governments, local authorities and parents in providing free and compulsory education, and sharing of financial and other responsibilities between the central and state governments. The RTE act lays down the norms and standards relating to pupil teacher ratio (PTR) school buildings and infrastructure, School working days, teachers working hours and rational deployment of teacher and prohibits on deployment of teacher for non-educational work. The Act prescribes norms for appointment of professionally trained teacher with the requisite entry and academic qualifications.

It prohibits physical punishment and mental harassment of children, screening procedures for admission of children, collection of fee and private tuition by government school teacher. And also no detention of any child till they complete elementary school.

The act provides for development of curriculum in consonance with the values enshrined in the constitution and which would ensure the overall development of the child, building on child knowledge, potentiality and talent through a system of child friendly and child centered learning.

Section 29(2)(f) of the RTE act 2009 states that "Medium of instructions shall, as far as practicable, be in child's mother tongue". However the curriculum and evaluation framework are to be decided by the state governments and it is up to them to decide the medium of instruction in the school. Several states have taken appropriate steps to impart education to the child in their mother tongue. In Assam Bodo children have the privilege to learn in their own mother tongue.

However the RTE act 2009 has been criticized for being hastily drafted and not consulting groups actively working in the field of education, not considering on the quality aspect of the educational improvement and excluding children from 0-6 and 14-18 years of children. Many of the provisions were seen as continuation from Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan and District Primary Education programme.

As it has been widely discussed about the quality of education provided by government schools and its effectiveness, it suffers from shortage of well qualified teachers and infrastructural gaps. Several areas, specially tribal areas do not even have schools, to address this quality aspect RTE provisioned for 25 percent quota in privately run school but faced criticism of partly transferring its constitutional obligation of providing free

and compulsory elementary education of children to non state actors, while continue to collect 2 percent cess on the total tax payable for primary education.

Another criticism of complying with mother tongue based medium of instruction as the authorities lack competency in designing effective teaching learning and assessments tool for local languages which in turn hampers measuring of learning outcomes. If children are learning in multiple languages the assessment needs to take cognizance of the different pace of the kids in core skills such as numeracy, literacy and problem solving.

VI. CONCLUSION

While efforts put in by government of India over the past couple of decades has resulted in substantially increased in enrollment of children across the country through DPEP and SSA. But quality of education has not improved significantly, particularly in the early years of schooling. Children who do not learn to read in the first few years of schooling are more likely to repeat their classes and eventually drop out of school. This trend of children leaving school at early years leads to educational attainment gap between readers and non readers increases overtime.

It is equally important to note that a large proportion of children in our country in secondary schools do not acquire even the most basic competencies in Language. Because of lack of age appropriate learning at primary school, children at secondary schools lack critical abilities in language that not only hinder their ability to transact curricula but also over burden secondary schools to deal with the learning deficits.

To overcome this learning deficit, one of the recommendations will be to strengthen the school governance system through promoting active parent teachers interaction and Community's involvement in preparation of curriculum, textbooks and teaching learning material. The teaching learning materials should depict the local culture and daily live experience of children.

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