

3

Systemic Challenges for Primary Teachers

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Abstract

The quality of primary education is the most criticised and debatable issue in educational discourse. The teachers are the pillars of the education system. Often, they are blamed for poor quality of education. However, they are at the lowest position in the academic hierarchy. They have to perform several non-teaching works. It develops a dilemma in the mind of teacher, whether to perform teaching work or non-teaching works. Though, both the works are important but their main work is teaching. The article is an attempt to elucidate the problems of primary teachers. It can be concluded that the primary teachers have a dilemma whether they are teachers who have to perform some non-teaching work or they are administrative staff who have to do some teaching work.

Introduction

SSA interventions have undoubtedly improved the access and retention of school education, in general and primary education, in particular. Now, India has total 719257 government primary schools and 2009713 teachers, including 53% female teachers to cater to 28671045 total enrolled students, including 48% girls (DISE, 2012-2013). Moreover, we have 112087 private primary schools. So we have a comprehensive primary school system. Still, the

quality of primary education is one of the most criticised and debatable issues in educational discourse. Often, teachers are blamed for the poor quality of education. Common man and the media squarely blame the teachers – citing absenteeism, bad behaviour, and politicisation of teachers' unions and, most importantly, lack of professional ethics (Ramachandran, 2005). However, primary teachers are at lowest position in the academic hierarchy. The lowest position does not mean they are not

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responsible for the status of education. Definitely, they are responsible, but responsibility of other members of the academic hierarchy can't be discarded. Teachers work within a system and health of this system also needs to be checked.

Education is the subject of the concurrent list in Indian Constitution. It makes education as the joint responsibility of central, state and local government. Central, state and local governments have joint responsibility to organise the quality education for children irrespective of caste, gender, religion, race and place of birth. School system is governed by the government. So, only teachers cannot be blamed for the poor quality of primary education.

Quality of Primary Education

The government is a major education provider at primary level in India. Expansion of primary education in India is unprecedented in last decade. But quality needs improvement.

The national average instructional days in primary schools are 224 which is higher than the norms prescribed by RTE Act-2009, RTE Act recommends 220 instructional days for these schools annually. It varies from state to state. Nagaland reported 192 instructional days whereas Jharkhand reported 253 instructional days. Instructional hours are less than RTE Act-2009 norms in 16 out of 36 States/UTs (DISE, 2012-2013).

Karnataka State Quality Assessment and Accreditation Council (KSQAAC) in Karnataka, *Pratibha*

Parva in Madhya Pradesh, *Gunotsav* in Gujarat, *Sambalan* in Rajasthan, and *Shamiksha* in Odhisa are school quality assessment programmes. All of these programmes consider learning as an indicator of school quality. Thus, learning is the most important indicator of quality school education. Even after five years of primary education, less than 50% students could correctly respond to various questions in Language, Mathematics and Environmental Science in National Achievement Survey Class V (NCERT, 2012). Furthermore, reading and arithmetic skills of students are poorly developed (ASER, 2013). As well as student learning levels and trajectories are disturbingly low (Muralidharan, 2013). The quality of primary education is considerably low. A question arises here, who is responsible for this poor quality of education? However, teachers are blamed for this low quality. But they do have several unaddressed problems. In this paper I have discussed the problems of primary teachers.

Systemic Challenges

The teachers are the pillars of the education system. We require strong pillars for strong building. Teaching is challenging job especially at primary level. The system should equip the teachers to handle the challenges of this job. Teachers and consequently, teaching has to face political pressure (Ramachandran, 2005; Pitroda, 2009). There is need to develop a supportive

social system for them. However, primary teachers are trying to educate their students well. But they are required to spend time on non-teaching duties also (Pitroda, 2009; Raghavan, 2013).

The role of primary teacher becomes vital as they teach one class for the one academic year. Primary teachers in government schools are teachers of first generation learners. It is evidenced from the fact that 94 per cent parents' have qualification equal to or less than secondary education, including 16 per cent illiterate and 41 per cent just literate or with primary education (NCERT, 2012). This situation makes job of primary teachers more challenging. They need more time and support to interact with students so that they can become more helpful resource for their students.

Teaching and non-teaching are two important and complementary jobs in the school system. Non-teaching job facilitates the teaching job. Teachers have to choose between two i.e., teaching and non-teaching works. Quite often they have no choice but have to choose the later one, i.e., non-teaching jobs. But, frequently they are in a conflicting situation. It contracts interaction time between teachers and students. Furthermore, primary school teachers in India have no source of academic support whatsoever (Ramachandran and Bhattacharjea, 2009). Another challenge which primary teachers have in schools is heterogeneous students.

The heterogeneity is of higher degree in schools of cities like Delhi. The problems faced by primary teachers include non-teaching assignments, lack of academic support, first generation learners, political influence and heterogeneity.

The problems can be classified as i) Additional Duties, ii) No Administrative Staff, iii) Lack of Infrastructural Facilities, iv) Academic Support, v) First Generation Learners, and vi) Distribution of Midday Meal/ Welfare Schemes.

Additional Duties

The teachers have to do several additional jobs apart from their routine teaching job like election duties, census, etc. Average days for non-teaching assignments for a teacher are 16, it varies from six in Mizoram to 46 in Madhya Pradesh (DISE, 2012-2013) provided there is no Lok Sabha election during this specific period. So, on an average seven per cent of instructional days, teachers have to do non-teaching assignments (analysis of DISE data, 2012-2013). Such additional duties are time-consuming and keep teachers out of school. Consequently, students are out of the learning even though they are present in schools.

No Administrative Staff

Administrative support is minimum in primary schools. Even, municipal corporation, Delhi has no provision of administrative staff in its primary schools. So, teachers have to do all

the clerical/administrative jobs of the schools.

Lack of Infrastructural Facilities

Schools are lacking, even with basic infrastructure. Drinking water and sanitation facilities are in pathetic condition in schools. Nine per cent of schools have single classroom, whereas 14 per cent of schools have single teachers; 59 per cent of schools have a playground and 39 per cent schools do not have boundary wall; 15 per cent of girls' and 38 per cent of boys' school don't have toilets and 53 per cent of schools don't have electricity (DISE, 2012-2013). Schools still lack in these basic facilities.

Lack of Academic support

Primary teachers lack academic support. Primary school teachers in India have no source of academic support whatsoever (Ramachandran and Bhattacharjea, 2009). The quality of teacher training in India is not upto the mark (Blum and Diwan, 2007; Pitroda, 2009; Kidwai *et al.*,

2013). It seems training programmes are merely a formality by the department. The problems faced by teachers in multi-grade situations, where teacher-pupil ratios are high, are rarely covered in training programmes (Ramachandran, 2005). There is a gap between actual problems faced by teachers and training programmes.

First generation learners

Most of the students are first generation learners in Municipal Corporation schools of Delhi. Dealing with first generation learners is a difficult task as they rarely get any academic support from the family. Many first generation learners live in environments that do not encourage them to learn and continue their education (Create, 2009). The schools and their teachers are not equipped to cope with children who are first generation learners in their families or the children of families which are first generation urban residents (Banerji, 2000).

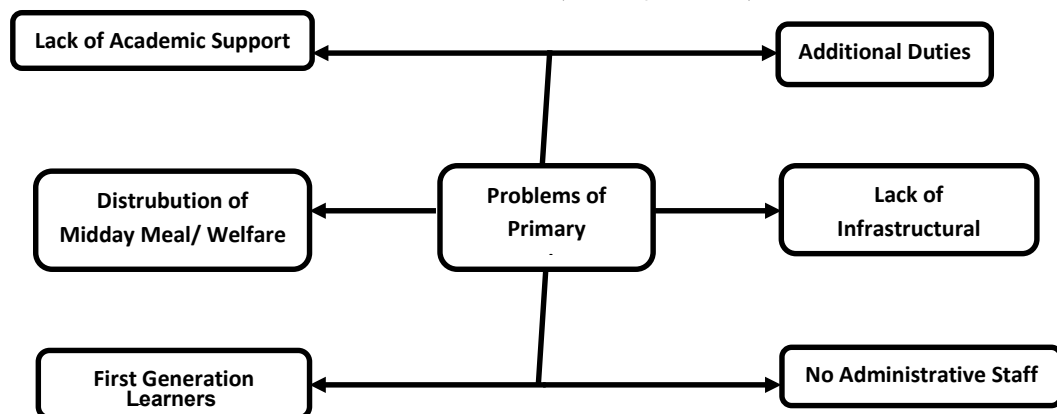


Figure 1: Problems faced by primary teachers

Distribution of Mid Day Meal/ Welfare Schemes

There are various students' welfare schemes in the school. No doubt every teacher accepts, these are very important and have a positive effect on primary education in relation to enrolment at least. But the engagement of teachers has no rationale. Teachers are forced to ensure midday meal (Raghavan, 2013). It wastes teaching and learning time.

Conclusion

It can be concluded that teachers too have problems with the system such as additional duties, no administrative staff, lack of academic support, lack of infrastructural facilities, first generation learners and distribution of mid day meal. Non-teaching jobs demotivate teachers. The non-teaching jobs keep teachers away from classrooms (Ramachandran, 2005; Pitroda, 2009). This adversely affects the teaching-learning process in the schools. If teachers are really motivated to teach, than they can teach well with all their secondary responsibilities.

They have a dilemma whether they are teachers who have to perform some non-teaching work or they are administrative staff who have to perform some teaching work. In spite of the dilemma, they can still perform well on teaching job and are performing well but they require systemic reforms,

more academic support and training on actual field-based problem.

Recommendations

Non-teaching works such as election and census can be given to teachers, but there must be some concern about school routine and examination schedules.

For small schools (enrolment less than 100) there should be at least one administrative staff and for comparatively big schools (enrolment more than 100) one welfare officer additionally in each school. The administrative staff should do all administrative activities of the schools as well as deliver all the students' welfare schemes, including mid day meal for small schools. For big schools administrative staff should deal with administration and welfare officer should provide his services for students' welfare schemes. Although they can work as a team and head of the school can distribute work accordingly. Role of teachers should be minimum in administrative works, so that they can dissolve their dilemma and maximize their efforts to uplift the quality of primary education.

Infrastructure should be strengthened in the schools to facilitate teaching and learning.

The academic support should be extended to teachers, so that they can better deal with the heterogeneity of the class, first generation learners, high pupil-teacher ratio, etc.

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