

Right To Education — A Precious Gift to Children

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Abstract

The implementation of 'Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act' (RTE) in the age group of 6–14 years from April 2010 is a welcome step and holds great significance in the history of education in India. What the Act means for children and various governments has been stated quite clearly. It has enormous implications for Universalisation of Elementary Education in the country. Now, each child whether he/ she is in school or out-of-school has the right to quality elementary education covering all aspects of his/her personality. The benefits of RTE will reach to all children only when the Act will be implemented in true spirit by all States and UTs with collaboration at all levels of implementation. To overcome challenges, effective monitoring will be needed right from the start. The present article provides a brief overview of some important features of the Act and challenges that need to be addressed by all the States and UTs of the country.

Right to Education Act–2009 is a significant legislation and has been dedicated to the children of India by implementing it from 1 April 2010. The implementation of RTE is truly a historic step for the education of all children so that they become productive and responsible citizens of India. While dedicating the Act to the nation, the Honourable Prime Minister Shri Manmohan Singh stated : *I am what I am today because of education. During my childhood, I had to walk a long distance to school and study in*

dim light of a kerosene lamp. He also stated that finance will not come in the way of implementing the Right to Education Act. It clearly reflects the sincere commitment of the government to make it a reality.

The decision taken by the Government of India for providing the right to free and compulsory education is like a revolution that will put all children between the age of 6 and 14 years in schools. The RTE Act stipulates that education provided to children will be of comparable quality. All round

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development of children will be emphasised. Both scholastic and co-scholastic aspects will be taken care of.

Now, a child who is working in some hotel or canteen, brick kiln or engaged in any economic gainful activity or even sitting at home helping parents, has the right to elementary education. We have to identify such children through different strategies. Through bridge courses or special need-based coaching, we have to mainstream them in the age-appropriate classes. The RTE Act emphasises that all children should be in schools irrespective of sex, caste, culture, community or economic status.

Once the children get enrolled, there will be a need to monitor them from time to time so that they continue to stay in schools till the completion of elementary stage. Still, there are 80,00,000 children in the country who are out-of-school and need to be mainstreamed along with other children in schools (*Hindustan Times*, Delhi, 02 April 2010). This figure is 4.6 per cent of total child population.

In the implementation of RTE Act, teachers and parents have to play a key role. The success will depend on the ability and motivation of teachers. The teachers are considered as agents of change in the society. The parents or guardians and community members too have a critical role to play having been assigned the school management responsibilities under the Act.

As per the RTE, the children will be evaluated on day-to-day basis. The education, which will be provided in schools, will not only depend on the marks or grades alone but it will include all aspects of child's personality. Rote learning in the schools will be discouraged. Till Class VIII, there will be Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation (CCE) of pupils. There will be no board examinations. Teachers will be empowered in the techniques of CCE. The children will not only be tested on the subject matter, but other aspects of their personality will also be assessed. The teachers will be required to continuously build the capacity of each child to absorb what is around him/ her. Let each child move forward, let each child explore the world around him/ her, let the child struggle to know more and more would be the approach to learning of children. This will happen only when the teaching-learning environment in schools is joyful and child-friendly. There will be close rapport between the teachers and children. The children should feel free to ask questions from their teachers.

Some Statistics Related to RTE

- A sum of ₹1,71,484 crore will be required between 2010–11 and 2014–15 for implementing the RTE Act.
- For now, Rs 25,000 crore has been provided by the Finance Commission to the States.
- Total 22 crore children are expected to benefit as a result of

the implementation of the Right to Education Act in the States and UTs.

- There are 1.29 million recognised elementary schools in the country at present.
- About 7 lakh teachers are employed in elementary schools, all over India. But, many of them are untrained.
- As per Census of India, 2011 (Provisional Population Totals), the literacy rate of India is 74.04 per cent (male 82.14 per cent and female 65.46 per cent).

What does the Act mean for the Children and the Government?

- Every child between the age of 6 and 14 years shall have a right to free and compulsory education in a neighbourhood school till completion of elementary education. For this purpose, no child shall be liable to pay any kind of fee or charges or expenses, which may prevent him or her from pursuing and completing the elementary education. Each and every child of this country has right to receive quality education.
- The government (Centre or State) as well as the local authorities are obligated to provide free and compulsory elementary education to every child between the age group of 6 and 14 years.
- No child shall be denied admission in a school for lack of proof of age.

- The authorities have to ensure compulsory admission, attendance and completion of elementary education of every child.
- The availability of a primary school will be ensured within one kilometre of every habitation. In areas where there are no schools, the authorities will have to set up one within three years of the commencement of the Act.
- The government must ensure that children from weaker sections are not discriminated against or prevented from completion of their education.
- Infrastructural facilities such as, school building, drinking water, toilets, classrooms, playgrounds and learning materials will be provided.
- Teacher-pupil-ratio will be 1:30 in the primary classes (I to V) and 1:35 in the upper primary classes (VI to VIII).
- All teachers will be trained within five years of the commencement of the Act.
- All private schools will have to reserve 25 per cent of the class strength at the entry level for children belonging to weaker sections and disadvantaged groups in the neighbourhood and provide free and compulsory elementary education till its completion. Government will reimburse them the expenses involved as per the norms.

- The local authority will be required to maintain records of all children up to the age of 14 years.
- No child admitted in a school shall be held back in any class or expelled from school till the completion of elementary education.
- There will be no capitation fee and screening or interview of the child or his/her parents. Any contravention by any institution would entail withdrawal of recognition. The fine for charging capitation fee will be up to 10 times the capitation fee accepted.
- Parents or guardians of children will be part of management committee of every school, half of which will be female members. The School Management Committee (SMC) shall monitor working of the school, prepare and recommend School Development Plan and monitor the utilisation of the grants received from government or any other source.
- No child shall be required to pass any board examination till completion of elementary education. Every child completing his/her elementary education shall be awarded a certificate.

The Way Forward

The successful implementation of the RTE Act in this vast country of multi-diversities is full of great expectations and challenges. The present need of the hour is how to implement it effectively.

Only then, we can ensure that the RTE works and the benefits reach to all children, irrespective of caste, sex, culture and economic background. Some of the challenges and the viable strategies are as follows:

- Collaboration at all levels of implementation.
- All the stakeholders need to be actively involved in all the States and UTs for the successful implementation of RTE.
- There is need for State specific interventions rather than 'one size fits all' approach.
- Lots of new strategies may be needed for the mainstreaming of out-of-school children from difficult circumstances. The approach to implement the RTE Act cannot be the same for every State. Issues, concerns and strategies may differ from place to place.
- Access to children from tribal, migrant and scattered population to be ensured. Effective strategies are needed for tracking children from such groups in all the States and UTs.
- Reaching out to working children, child labourers and drop outs, who are still out-of-school. Efforts are to be made for their mainstreaming in regular schools at the earliest possible through meticulously planned strategies to make the RTE Act a reality.

- Need for development of Bridge Courses by all States/UTs for the over-age out-of-school children, who are to be admitted in the age appropriate classes. Many States/UTs may not have Bridge Courses till now and will be required to develop them at the earliest. The Bridge Courses are urgently needed to prepare for the over-age children in a short span of time through special training, so that they may be admitted in the age appropriate classes along with other children of their age group.
- Improving infrastructure within three years – *pucca* school buildings, drinking water facilities, toilets, disabled-friendly ramps, playgrounds, etc.
- Making available trained teachers within five years. The training modules for both pre-service and in-service trainings should be in regional languages. All the existing teacher training programmes may need to be revised in the context of RTE Act. Capacity-building of all the trainers, resource persons, teachers and headmasters has to be made accordingly. The training modules at both primary and upper-primary levels should be quite flexible, relevant and need-based.
- The teachers will be expected not to engage themselves in private tuitions or private teaching. The concerned teachers have to take moral responsibility for improving the achievement levels of children through additional instruction. Necessary circulars/guidelines in this regard need to be issued by the SPO/DPOs to all schools up to elementary level.
- Use of corporal punishment and excessive use of criticism by the teachers need to be abolished completely. The children should feel free from any kind of fear, trauma and anxiety. They should be encouraged to express their views freely in the school premises. Any activity or behaviour of teacher which puts stress on the minds of children, should be avoided. This will not be helpful for the retention of children in schools and may ultimately lead to their dropouts.
- Necessary guidelines need to be issued to the Head teachers/Headmasters of all elementary schools by the State/districts on making classroom environment joyful and exciting for learning through a variety of activities, which may involve discovery and exploration in a child-friendly manner. The NCERT's advocacy materials on banning corporal punishment may also be utilised by the States and UTs.
- As per RTE, there will not be any board examination till completion of elementary education. Hence, there will be need for devising effective strategies for assessing child's understanding of

knowledge, and his or her ability to apply the same. The students performance will be judged from time to time so that the concerned teachers may take timely corrective measures. Teachers' capacity needs to be strengthened to use Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation for assessing children and providing them the required assistance in removing the learning gaps timely. All the teachers of elementary schools require orientation on the Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation.

- The Source Books on pupil assessment in various subjects developed by NCERT are in the context of RTE and emphasise Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation. The teachers need to be empowered on the use of Source Books by CRCCs, BRCCs and DIET faculty. They should be provided necessary guidance and support during school visits and in-service trainings. These Source Books on Assessment at primary grades have been developed on the basis of latest assessment techniques and principles outlined in NCF-2005. The Source Books emphasise spot assistance to children as per their needs. In order to ensure effective utilisation of Source Books by the teachers and other functionaries, these need to be translated in the regional languages at the earliest in all States/ UTs.
- Constitution of School Management Committees (SMC) in all schools is one of the most significant provisions of RTE. Now in each SMC, there will be seventy-five per cent members from amongst parents or guardians of children. All the SMCs have to be made functional through their active involvement in monitoring enrolment and attendance of children from the neighbourhood, monitoring the implementation of mid-day meal scheme, to see that the teachers are not burdened with non-academic activities and also monitoring accounts of the schools.
- Effective monitoring is needed by all States/ UTs for the management of quality at all levels of implementation. The NCERT has developed Quality Monitoring Tools (QMTs) taking into consideration several quality related indicators of RTE-SSA, such as student enrolment and actual attendance, pupil achievement levels, teacher availability, teacher training, classroom practices, academic supervision by cluster and block resource persons, community perceptions of school functioning, etc.
- The National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) has been designated as the monitoring authority for RTE Act. While MHRD will be the key implementing agency for the

entitlements under RTE, the NCPCR has been assigned the mandate to review and assess the implementation of safeguards and rights of children embedded in the RTE. The NCPCR has also the mandate to monitor all aspects of structural changes envisaged in the Act, such as maintaining the standards and norms of schools.

- The implementation of RTE Act is now a national endeavour. Effective coordination and collaboration is needed among all institutions and agencies at the state and national level, who are involved in the implementation of the Act and monitoring the provisions of quality elementary education to all children of the nation.

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