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## Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act-2009 and Quality Education

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### BACKDROP

*Since independence, the country has been making relentless efforts to achieve the goals of Education for All. The National Policy on Education (1986) envisaged that the country would achieve Universal Primary Education by 1990 and Universal Elementary Education by 1995. Later the achievement of the goal was shifted to 2000 (World Conference on Education held at Jomtien in 1990). The efforts for achieving the goal gained renewed impetus after the World Education Forum held at Dakar in 2000. The achievement of the goal was then shifted to 2015. The country has made major strides towards the attainment of the goal by launching programmes like District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) and Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA). However, in the light of the present scenario, the chances of attaining the goal by 2015 are bleak.*

*It was envisaged by all the stakeholders – teachers, teachers’ organisations, social reformers, child rights’ activists, educationists, politicians and policy makers that if the right to education becomes a fundamental right, the dream of EFA could be fulfilled. All India Primary Teachers’ Federation has launched the movement in 2002 to generate awareness among teachers, social activists, politicians, policy makers about the need and importance of education for all for the wellbeing of the people and economic development of the country.*

*The country enacted Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act in 2009. It reads as: Every child of the age of six to fourteen years shall have a right to free and compulsory education in a neighbourhood school till completion of elementary education. Millennium Development Goal-2 adopted at Dakar in 2000 specifies that each country would ensure that by 2015 children everywhere, boys and girls alike will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling.*

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## **Universal Participation in Education**

It is well recognised that the achievement of universal participation in education fundamentally depends upon the quality of education. If the quality of education is low, universal participation in education cannot be achieved at all. For example, how well pupils are taught and how much long they stay in school and how regularly they attend depend upon the quality of education. Furthermore whether parents send their children to school also depends on their judgement about the quality of teaching-learning in schools. In case they feel that attending school is not worth the time spent and expenditure they make on the education of their children, they would not send their children to school. In that situation they may even send their children for child labour or ask them to do household chores. The Jomtien Declaration in 1990 and more particularly, the Dakar Framework for Action in 2000 recognised that the quality of education as a prime determinant of whether education for all is achieved. India has achieved remarkable progress as net enrolment ratio in Class I have gone up to 97 per cent. But the dropout rate continues to persist around 26 per cent. As consequence, the right of every child. It affirmed that quality was at the heart of education – a fundamental determinant of enrolment, retention and achievement.

Country has not been able to achieve EFA so far. As mentioned earlier, the chances of achieving EFA by 2015 are bleak. Many factors contribute to the prevalence of this phenomenon. Low quality of education is the most important factor for this phenomenon. It is unfortunate that the country is laying greater emphasis on quantitative aspects of education in the recent years. The quality of education has taken a back seat. There is a need to shift the focus from quantity to quality of education. Enabling inputs for quality of education need to be made to achieve the goals of Education for All.

## **Indicators of Quality Education**

Notwithstanding the growing consensus about the need to provide access to education of good quality, there is much less agreement about what the term quality actually means. However, there are a few elements which characterize quality education.

Cognitive development is identified a major explicit objective of all education systems. The degree to which a system actually achieves this, is an indicator of quality education. The second element is that the education system should develop learners' creative and emotional capacities. The education system should produce good citizens, develop the attitude for building a culture of peace and democracy and pass on

the global and local cultural values down to future generations. However, compared to cognitive development, the extent to which these are achieved is harder to determine.

### **Concept of Quality Perceived by UNESCO**

The UNESCO first position statement on quality of education appeared in 'Learning to Be: The World of Education Today and Tomorrow' – the report of the International Commission on the Development of Education. The Commission identified the fundamental goal of social change as the eradication of inequality and the establishment of an equitable democracy. Consequently, it reported, 'the aim and content of education must be recreated, to allow both for the new features of society and the new features of democracy' (Faure et al., 1972).

More than two decades later came 'Learning: The Treasure Within,' Report to UNESCO of the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century, chaired by French Statesman, Jacques Delors. This Commission saw education throughout life as based upon four pillars. These are:

- Learning to know,
- Learning to do,
- Learning to live together, and
- Learning to be.

'Learning to know' acknowledges that learner's build their own knowledge daily, combining indigenous and 'external' elements.

'Learning to do' focuses on the practical application of what is learned. 'Learning to live together' addresses the critical skills for a life free from discrimination, where all have equal opportunity to develop themselves, their families and their communities. 'Learning to be' emphasizes the skills needed for individuals to develop their full potential. This conceptualization of education provided an integrated and comprehensive view of learning and, therefore, of what constitutes education quality (Delors et al., 1996).

The core objectives of education, laid down by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and expounded by the work of the United Nations Human Rights treaties. "Education should enable to develop child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential. It should promote knowledge, values, attitudes and skills conducive to respect for human rights and to an active commitment to the defence of such rights and to the building of a culture of peace and democracy."

It can be summarised that quality education is one which allows children to reach their fullest potential in terms of cognitive, emotional, critical and creative capacities.

### **Measures to Improve Quality of Education**

Suitable measures need to be taken to improve the quality of education. Some of these are highlighted in brief:

**(a) Enabling Inputs in Schools**

The quality teaching and learning is strongly influenced by the resources available in school to support the process of teaching. It is obvious that schools without an adequate number of teachers, textbooks or learning materials will not be able to realize fully the objectives of education. Resources are therefore, important for education quality. The main input variables are material and human resources. Improving the quality of human resources and governance are thus crucial factors to achieve the quality of elementary education.

- (b)** Material resources provided by government include textbooks and other learning materials and the availability of classrooms, libraries, school facilities and other infrastructure.
- (c)** Human resource inputs include managers, administrators, other support staff, supervisors and most importantly, teachers. Quality teachers are vital to the education process. Teacher-pupil ratio, teacher salaries and the proportion of education spending allocated to various items have indirect impact on teaching-learning.
- (d)** Enabling school-level governance concerns the ways in which the school is organised and managed. Examples of potentially important factors

having an indirect impact on teaching and learning are strong leadership, a safe and welcoming school environment, good community involvement and incentives for achieving good results.

**Improvement in Teaching and Learning Process**

Indirect enabling inputs for improving teaching-learning process have been discussed above. However, there is a need for direct inputs for improving teaching-learning process. Teachers need to be encouraged to use appropriate instructional strategies and techniques for transacting the curriculum in their context. If a learner is not learning the way the teacher teaches, the teacher should teach the way the pupil learns. For this, teacher needs to bring about modification in his/her teaching process.

**Overhauling the Content and Process of Pre-service and In-service Teachers Education**

The patchwork for improving the curricula for pre-service and in-service education of teachers would hardly be enough to improve their quality. Its overhauling is highly essential. This is because the quality of these programmes is presently quite low. Teachers produced by the colleges of education particularly from some self-financing institutions hardly possess requisite knowledge and skills to be good performer in

school. Therefore, the content of pre-service and in-service education of teachers need to be revisited and thoroughly revised in the light of social-economic changes taking place in the country. Over the period of last two decades, there have been advances in the field of pedagogy – Science of teaching children. Pre-service and in-service teachers need rich experiences in innovative instructional strategies such as co-operative learning, concept attainment, synectics, theory of multiple intelligences, etc. Trainers in these programmes need to provide experiences in andragogy – science of teaching adults.

### **Monitoring of Pupils' Progress**

The need for quality monitoring of pupils' progress in the scholastic, effective and psycho-motor domains is highly essential to help pupils to achieve their fullest potential. There is three types of monitoring – Compliance Monitoring, Diagnostic

Monitoring and Product Monitoring. The emphasis needs to be made on supportive diagnostic monitoring. Teachers should monitor pupil progress on a continuing basis and provide feedback in a supportive manner to help the pupil to progress to reach the goal.

### **Outcomes**

The outcomes of education should be assessed in the context of its objectives. They are most easily expressed in terms of academic achievement only. The assessment of creative and emotional development and as well as changes in values, attitudes and behaviour are rather being ignored. This is because these are not given any importance. Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation as provided in the RTE Act-2009 would greatly address the issues of quality and outcomes of education at elementary stage. Implementing CCE in its right spirit would be the key for quality enhancement.