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EDITORIAL

FREE AND COMPULSORY SCHOOL EDUCATION

BY 2030

All developed nations make provision for free school education for a stipulated period for their future citizens. Some nations also provide pre-school education. European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice (2016) mentioned that compulsory period of schooling in European nations vary from 9 years (Switzerland) to 13 years (Hungary...). Starting age of schooling varies from 3 years (Hungary) to 7 years (Estonia..) and leaving age varies from 14 years 5 months (Serbia) to 19 years 6 months (Macedonia). In UK, leaving age is 16 years for all its four regions, but starting age is 4 years for Northern Ireland and 5 years for other three regions-England, Scotland and Wales. While UK has a compulsory schooling for 11-12 years, will India be able to have at least 10 years of schooling (Classes I - X) by 2030, given the situation that it has yet to grapple with achieving compulsory school education for 8 years (Classes I-VIII)? In 1950, the constitution of free India, stated in its article 45 of the Directive Principles that “The State shall endeavour to provide, within a period of ten years from the commencement of this Constitution, for free and compulsory education for all children until they complete the age of fourteen years.” There was no mention of the starting age. In order to give a boost to ongoing efforts, the central government went for constitutional amendment to make elementary education a part of fundamental right for citizens of the country. As per the Constitution (86th Amendment) Act 2002 (MLJ 2002), Article 21 A states that “The State shall provide free and compulsory education to all children of the age of six to fourteen years in such manner as the State may by law, determine.” As per this amendment, Article 45 of Directive Principles, states that: “The State

shall endeavour to provide early childhood care and education for all children until they complete the age of six years”. A child of six years age is covered both in case of school education under Article 21 A of fundamental right as well as in case of ECCE under Article 45 of Directive Principles. Should Article 45 be modified to specify the starting age and leaving age and reduce upper age limit to five years, instead of six years, which is covered under Article 21?

MWCD (2017) mentions that Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) scheme of the Ministry of Women & Child Development, functioning since 1975 covers 0-6 years of age including pre-school education for 3-6 years of age. Should this scheme be modified to have upper age limit as 5 years and have its pre-school education for children of 3-5 years, instead of 3-6 years?

MLJ (2009, p. 5 - Section 11) states that

“11. With a view to prepare children above the age of three years for elementary education and to provide early childhood care and education for all children until they complete the age of six years, the appropriate Government may make necessary arrangement for providing free pre-school education for such children”.

Should this section be modified by making five years as upper age limit for pre-school education? Should this section regarding ECCE be deleted, as ECCE is being covered by ICDS?

Quality of teaching and learning at primary school stage depends on the quality of teachers, which in turn depends on teacher remuneration. MLJ (2009, p. 8- Section 23(3)) states that “The salary and allowances payable to and the terms and conditions of service of teachers shall be such as may be prescribed.” A national act for free and compulsory education may need to specify salary scales for various types of school teachers, to be followed by all State governments. Such a scale of pay may need to take into consideration number of years spent for acquiring

a teacher training degree: (a) Two year B. Ed. degree (5 years after +2) (b) B.A./ B.Sc. & B.Ed. degree (4 years after +2) and One Year B. Ed. degree (4 years after +2). The teacher salary varies from one state to another. Certain categories of teachers in government schools in a State get a monthly remuneration of Rs. 5,300/- (Five thousand and three hundred) per month. They continue to receive this amount for a specified number of years, after which they get full salary. In order to augment income, one low paid teacher was seen working as auto rickshaw driver in a nearby town. In certain non-aided primary schools, a teacher gets a consolidated amount of Rs.3,000/- (Three thousand) per month. If such a person is married and is having a family, how can that family be managed with this small amount of remuneration? This situation has compelled many low paid teachers not to teach properly in the class so that parents of children are compelled to send their children for private tuition given by the same teacher, before or after school hours at his/her residence or at the residence of the student. It is an interesting phenomenon that the amount earned by some teachers from private tuition is more than five times of their salary. The practice of private tuition makes all types of elementary school education provided in government schools also fee charging. The nation may need to carry out a survey of private tuition by school teachers to estimate the gravity of situation and reflect correctional measures in proposed new education policy.

MLJ (2009, p. 8 - Section 28) states that “No teacher shall engage himself or herself in private tuition or private teaching activity.” Should this provision be modified by inserting “getting appropriate salary as applicable to central govt. teachers on regular basis” after the word “teacher”? Private tuition is also known as ‘Shadow Education’, which according to Bray & Kwo (2014) runs parallel to formal system of education. OECD (2016a & b) reported results of latest PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment), in which, South East Asian nations dominated. Shadow education might have helped their students to perform better. Banning private tuition will not be effective as many parents arrange private tuition for their children so

that during evening hours children do not watch TV with parents. Pre-school children are also seen attending private tuition classes. There are also parents who send their children for private tuition to take care of learning problems of their children due to multi grade teaching or teacher absence. Again, if high fee charging schools and schools having air conditioned classrooms are to continue, there may not be any solution of issue of equity in education by banning private tuition. Rather in order to tackle menace of private tuition that may be reflected in advance knowledge of a few students availing private tuition, the schools may need to maintain a record of students attending private tuition classes or getting private tuition at their homes, so that school teachers become aware of type of student learning in private tuition classes and design their teaching strategies to handle these students appropriately in the classroom.

MLJ (2009, pp. 5-6 - Section 12) provides reservation for children belonging to weaker section and disadvantaged group in the neighbourhood. This provision is also applicable for admission to pre-primary class in a school. The act provides state reimbursement of expenditure. Govt. also spends for pre-school education for all through ICDS, which is a scheme of the central government. Hence, should the nation consider deleting provision for 25% quota for admission in pre-school classes, as it may amount to unnecessary doubling of govt. expenditure? The act provides that school “shall be reimbursed expenditure so incurred by it to the extent of per child expenditure incurred by the State, or the actual amount charged from the child, whichever is less, in such manner as may be prescribed.” This provision accepts the fact that government schools are inferior to the private schools. There are various reasons for growth of fee charging private schools. Preference for English medium education makes many parents go for private fee charging English medium schools. During colonial period, Govt. of Orissa had a Basic school in a village called Tudigadia. The villagers, interested in English medium schooling, started a private school. Both the schools continued for many years, even during post-independence period, having low student strength in each school.

Private schools are preferred as the class size is smaller and there are more co-curricular activities than found in case of government schools. Although in case of most of the non-aided private schools, teacher salary is much lower than the government schools, threat of punishment for poor performance of students, makes these low paid teachers work more efficiently than teachers of government schools. Should the government consider running English medium schools, if demanded by parents ? Should not the nation raise the quality of government schools so that parents do not opt for private schools?

MLJ (2009, p. 4 - Section 7 (6)) mentions that “The Central Government shall (a) develop a framework of with the help of academic authority specified under section 29”. MHRD (2009, section 29(2)) states that “ (2) The academic authority, while laying down the curriculum and the evaluation procedure under sub-section (1) shall take into consideration the following, namely: ... (d) development of physical and mental abilities to the fullest extent;..” Should the act be modified by adding “emotional, spiritual” in clause (d), after the word “physical”? Should the act be modified by adding another sub section which may be “(i) availability of teacher time per class”? This inclusion becomes necessary because of the fact that as per MHRD (2009 Schedule), there are primary schools with 5 classes (I-V) having (a) 2 Teachers (Teacher time 2/5 per class), (b) 3 Teachers (Teacher time 3/5 per class), (c) 4 teachers (Teacher time 4/5 per class) and (d) 5 teachers (teacher time Full 5/5 per class). If these types of schools are to exist, curriculum needs to be developed for each type of school. Dodging of this issue is enforcing private tuition on poor parents. In case, the nation is going to have national curriculum framework, there has to be same amount of teacher time per class be available for every school. A national / state curriculum presupposes that there is no double or triple class teaching by any teacher and there is at least one teacher per class / section, in every government and government aided primary school, even if, number of students is less than 30 in a class /section. In case of schools in locations accessible by road, it may be possible to have a school with 100 children by arranging a vehicle for transport and maintaining one teacher per class /section and have the state curriculum.

In case of segregated habitations in hilly regions, desert areas and islands, there may be residential primary schools having one teacher per class/ section.

MHRD (2010a) authorised the “National Council of Educational Research and Training as the academic authority to lay down the curriculum and evaluation procedure for elementary education, and to develop a framework of national curriculum under clause (a) of sub-section (6) of section 7 of the Act.” According to MHRD (2010b), “NCF, 2005 shall be the national curriculum framework till such time as the Central Government decides to develop a new framework.” As states differ in their school system such as number of classes in a middle school / upper primary school, should NCERT role be limited to developing national level benchmarks and standards for three categories of schools-Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalayas, Kendriya Vidyalayas (Central Schools), Sainik Schools? Should the act be modified to allow states develop benchmarks and standards for (a) residential schools exclusively meant for scheduled tribe /scheduled caste students, (b) schools for physically and mentally handicapped and if multi grade teaching is to continue, benchmarks for a five class/section primary school with (a) 5 teachers, (b) 4 teachers, (c) 3 teachers, and (d) 2 teachers? Since, there are slow learners, learners who do not attend classes regularly, but enjoy non-detention policy and go up the ladder every academic year, and there are schools, which are victims of teacher shortage, teacher truancy and multi grade teaching, should the nation consider empowering parent teacher body of each school to decide curricula, keeping in view state curricular framework?

MLJ (2009, p. 9 - Section 29(2)) mentions that

“The academic authority, while laying down the curriculum and the evaluation procedure under sub-section (i) shall take into consideration the following, namely-... (h) “comprehensive and continuous evaluation of child’s understanding of knowledge and his or her ability to apply the same.”

State education authorities vary in their understanding of strategies for evaluation. A few days ago, a school teacher informed that answer books of a school in a Block are to be examined by teachers of another block. In such a situation, what a teacher teaching more than one classes will do? Will s/he dictate answers to students and train students in malpractice? Should the act be modified by inserting the word “internal” before the word “evaluation”? MLJ (2009, pp. 4-5) states that “The appropriate government shall -... (h) ensure timely prescribing of curriculum and courses of study for elementary education;”. Should the words “and courses of study” be deleted ?

MHRD (2017) states that academic authority shall “... (c) prepare class wise, subject wise learning outcomes for all elementary classes. Should the RTE rules be modified by inserting the words “school category wise” after “subject wise”, and the word “outcomes”, be replaced by “standards and benchmarks”?

Physical education plays an important role in primary school education. The Twelfth Five Year Plan document (Planning Commission 2012, p. 78) states following strategies for physical education:

“School playgrounds of NVs and KVs will be opened up to neighbourhood schools. Local bodies would be impressed upon to extend support in earmarking open fields, sports stadia and community playgrounds for neighbourhood schools in urban areas, as many private schools and even some publicly funded schools do not have playgrounds within school campuses in many cities and towns. Such schools will be encouraged to adopt alternative sports and games activities that support physical development and nurturing of kinaesthetic intelligence.”

National Policy for Children 2013 (MWCD 2013a, Art 4.6-xvi) states that the State shall take all necessary measures to “Ensure that children’s health is regularly monitored through the school health programme and arrangements are made for health and emergency care of children.” National Policy on Education 1986 (With

modifications undertaken in 1992) (MHRD 1992, p. 41) gave stress on physical education including yoga education in the following words:

“As a system, which promotes an integrated development of body and mind, Yoga will receive special attention. Efforts will be made to introduce Yoga in all schools. To this end, it will be introduced in teacher training courses.”

National Curriculum Framework 2005 (NCERT 2005 p.57) states that:

“The more recent addition to the curriculum is yoga. The entire group must be taken together as a comprehensive health and physical education curriculum, replacing the fragmentary approach current in schools today. As a core part of the curriculum, time allocated for games and for yoga must not be reduced or taken away under any circumstances.”

Importance of yoga education has also been highlighted by UN. Since 2014, UN has started observing International Yoga Day on 21st June. The Secretary General of UN in his message for first International Day of Yoga observed on 2015 June 21 (UN 2015) stated that “Yoga offers a simple, accessible and inclusive means to promote physical and spiritual health and wellbeing.” Physical education teachers are trained in yoga as part of their course work. As this is not the case with general teachers, Mohanty (2016, p. 13) suggested that school teachers need be appropriately trained, if yoga is to be introduced for all. In order to provide education for development of body, should every elementary school have physical education every day including sun days and holidays in the afternoon, after giving snacks to every student? Should the schools be empowered to utilise volunteers from the locality to impart training in physical education? School health care is an essential element of physical education. Should the nation make adequate provision for at least one medical checkup for every student, every year?

MHRD (2010 c) authorised the National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE) “as the academic authority to lay down the minimum qualifications for a person to be eligible for appointment as a teacher.” It is also a fact that a large number of teachers follow the way they were taught by their own school teachers, instead of following the ideals taught in teacher training institutions (Schwille, Dembele & Schubert 2007). In US, since two decades, certain schools have been authorised to appoint persons of their choice and train them on the job. US: Office of Assessment, Research, and Data Analysis (2012, p. 2) states that:

“The requirements of alternative certification programs vary widely, but most programs are shorter, less expensive, and more practically oriented than traditional university-based programs. Pre-service preparation typically ranges from four to 12 weeks during the summer before new teachers enter the classroom. The programs usually include coursework in pedagogy and subject area knowledge, practice teaching, and continuing support for teachers once they enter the classroom in the form of mentoring and professional development.”

The Open University, UK (2013, p. 11), while mentioning different routes into teaching in England and Wales area of UK, stated about school centred initial teacher training as follows:

“These are training schemes provided by groups of neighbouring secondary and/or primary schools in England. The group of schools acts in the same way as an ITT institution and programmes lead to QTS and possibly a PGCE. Courses generally last one year and they allow graduates to complete almost all of their training in a school environment. Trainees are required to meet the same standards set for PGCE students.”

Both UK and US have school based as well as university based initial teacher training. School based training has been found to be more beneficial than university based teacher training. IIEP (2008, pp.13-14) states that:

“The greatest benefit of school-based training underlined by participants is the possibility of reducing the gap between what is taught in formal training institutions and the reality inside the schools. School-based training is therefore seen as a way to make the training more practical and reduce the effects of a possible ‘culture shock’ when beginning teachers are faced with a real teaching environment.”

In Indian situation, the quality of university based teacher training has been questioned. In order to take care of quality in teacher training, the central government instituted National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE). In 1998, NCTE brought out a curriculum framework (NCTE 1998) that recommended two year B.Ed. course. Two year B. Ed. courses were instituted in Regional Institutes of Education of NCERT. For 15 years, no State government started two year B. Ed. courses. There are instances of NCTE recognised government institutions running B. Ed. courses having majority of faculty members, who did not possess either a M.Ed. or a M.A.(Education) degree. Such a situation was reported by Attri and Chandel (2009). NCTE recognised B. Ed. courses are also going on in District Institutes of Education and Training, without having any Lecturer in Education. There are also instances of many teacher educators imparting training in teaching of a school subject that they have not taught in a school or have studied it at the degree stage. As it has not become possible for NCTE to ensure quality in initial teacher training even in government teacher training institutions and university departments of education and colleges of education, and a large number of faculty in university based institutions having neither previous nor current school teaching experience impart training in school teaching skills, should the nation allow selected schools or groups of schools to recruit individuals as teachers and train them with or without any support from university based teacher trainers? Advanced nations have induction programmes for new teachers. In Indian situation, instead of introducing such an induction programme, the nation may consider

devoting second year of two year B.Ed. programme for teaching practical in schools through appropriately selected mentors trained by appropriate central and state agencies..

Class size has been now considered as an element of quality teaching and learning. OECD (2016b, p. 202) states that

“Class size can affect learning in various ways. Large classes may limit the time and attention teachers can devote to individual students, rather than to the whole class; they may also be more prone to disturbances from noisy and disruptive students. As a result, teachers might have to adopt different pedagogical styles to compensate, and these, in turn, might affect learning.”

As large class size reduces the amount of teacher-taught interaction and forces non poor parents provide private tuition for their children. Should the Act be modified to specify maximum number of students permissible per class/section in a primary school and in an upper primary school?

All developed nations give stress on equity in education, especially at the stage of compulsory education. Gurria (2016, p.4) in Foreword to PISA 2015 Vol.2 stated that “Achieving greater equity in education is not only a social justice imperative, it is also a way to use resources more effectively, increase the supply of skills that fuel economic growth, and promote social cohesion”. In a study of situation in Latin America, UNESCO (2017, p. 27) stated that:

“students who attend rural schools are at a clear disadvantage: just 20% of them attend schools with sufficient access to drinking water or sanitation; only 22% attend schools with a sufficient connection to electricity or telephone; only half are in schools with appropriate academic spaces; 24% have schools with insufficient administrative spaces; and less than half (41%) attend schools with sufficiently equipped classrooms.”

OECD (2017, p. 51) stated that “PISA consistently finds that disadvantaged students perform worse than advantaged students, even if the strength of the relationship varies greatly across countries.” Internationally, in case of academic achievement, generally, students from disadvantaged locations and communities fall behind those from rich locations and communities.

In case of Indian situation, as per schedule in MLJ (2009, p. 14), the number of teachers to be provided in a primary school varies as per the norm: (a) 2 teachers for 1 to 60 students; (b) 3 teachers for 61-90 students - 3 teachers; and (c) 4 teachers for 91 to 120 students. As in a given time interval, the curriculum that can be covered by one teacher per class cannot be covered by one teacher covering students of two classes, in order to ensure equity, the nation may consider to provide at least one teacher per class/ section of 1 to 30 students. Certain nations have started yearlong schools / full day schools for children in deprived locations. In US, there is even a National Association for Year-Round Education. In India, it may be appropriate to have year-round schooling for schools in difficult locations by providing higher scale of pay to teachers posted in such schools. In case of schools in developed nations, there is non-detention policy as well as provision for remedial teachers to take care of slow learners. In Indian situation, if non-detention policy is to continue, remedial teachers may need to be posted in schools. MLJ (2009, p. 12) mentions provision of part time instructors for art, physical education and work education in a school having class VI to VIII and having a student strength above one hundred. The nation may consider removing minimum number of children in such a school, as teaching of art, physical education and work education is an integral part of the curriculum? Besides, the nation may consider having part time instructors for music and dance. The nation may consider to have part time teachers for art, physical education, dance, music and work education for primary schools. In addition, the nation may consider having club activities starting from class I. Forty years ago, the author had observed how a primary school in UK carried out club

activities were carried out with the help of volunteers from school community (Mohanty 1980). In Indian situation, club activities may be carried out with the help of appropriately selected volunteers from the community.

Even after 14 years after amendment of constitution that made elementary education a fundamental right and seven years after formulation of act to implement free and compulsory elementary education, there is talk about tackling non-school going children. The Act accepts the fact that all children of six years of age will not join school and makes various types of provision for education of drop-outs and left outs (MLJ 2009, p. 3 – Section 4 and p. 10 - Section 38 and MHRD 2013). Issue of special training will not arise, if the government can take measures to have a nation which does not have child worker, child beggar and child engaged in taking care of younger brother or sister at home, in the absence of their parents. The Times of India (2017 April 22, p. 6) reporting on child beggars in Chennai stated that “almost every other kid ill-treated to “solicit sympathy for higher earnings.” The nation may also consider having residential schools for education of children without parents and children whose parents cannot take care of them due to poverty or other reasons.

Funding is an important issue. States vary regarding classes taught in a school. For instance, in Odisha state, class VIII is generally part of high schools, which have classes IX and X and classes VI and VII are part of middle schools. Should the state that cannot ensure that a primary school teacher in a private school gets monthly remuneration that is more than the monthly remuneration paid to an unskilled labourer spend funds to transfer material resources pertaining to class VIII from high school to upper primary school? What should be the priority- shifting of class or remuneration to teacher? There may not be any problem for the purpose of statistical data by going for class wise data instead of stage wise data.

Quality of elementary education is an important issue. MLJ (2009, p. 4-Section 8(g) mentions that the appropriate government shall

“ensure good quality elementary education conforming to the standards and norm specified in the Schedule.” The schedule has not been able to specify standards in appropriate format. The Act may be modified to give details of standards and norms. Again, standards and norms may vary from one State to another and also from one category of schools to another. If the multi grade teaching will have to continue, it may be appropriate to develop quality parameters for each category of primary school, taking into account number of classes/sections taught by a teacher. There is also a need to specify quality parameters for various types of government schools: (a) special schools for handicapped, (b) residential schools for Scheduled Tribe and Scheduled Caste students, (c) Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalayas, (d) Sainik Schools, (e) Kendriya Vidyalayas, etc. as there is much variation in quality of intake in these types of schools.

CONCLUSION

While the nation is facing problems in providing free and compulsory education till class VIII, goal 4 of sustainable development strategy of UN as reported in UNESCO (2016, p. 20) has the target of providing (a) inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all, (b) by 2030, ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes and (c) by 2030, ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education. In order to achieve these targets, the nation may need to formulate a new act for free and compulsory school education.

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Sunil Behari Mohanty, Editor, JAIAER, Flat 1, Beatitude Apt.2, 61B Selvaraj Chettiar Street, Vaithikuppam, Puducherry-605 012
E-mail: sunilmohanty@gmail.com