



PITFALLS AND ISSUES IN IMPLEMENTING RIGHT TO EDUCATION: SOME RECOMMENDATIONS

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INTRODUCTION

The Right to Education Act, which came into force on 1st April, 2010 after 62 years of independence, has made free and compulsory education a fundamental right of every child in the 6 to 14 age group. Now India has joined the group of those countries who provide for a constitutional guarantee to free and compulsory education. The enforcement of this Right has made it a joint responsibility of Central and State Governments to provide free and compulsory education to all children by all means. The present paper begins with a historical perspective, outlines salient features of the Act, throws light on the challenges ahead and suggests ways to overcome them.

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES

At the time of Independence, India inherited an educational system which was not only quantitatively small but was also characterized by striking gender and regional disparities. Only one child out of three had been enrolled in primary school. Thus challenge was to provide elementary education to all its children within a stipulated period of time. Accordingly, universal education for all children in the 6-14 age groups became a constitutional provision by Article 45 of the Constitution. Special care of the economic and educational interests of the under privileged sections of the population also became a constitutional obligation. But these constitutional provisions still remain unfulfilled. Government's commitment to ensure elementary education for all children aged 6-14 years was later seen in its ambitious programme named '*Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan*'.

Free and compulsory elementary education was made a fundamental right under Article 21A of the Constitution in December 2002 by the 86th Amendment. In bringing this into action, the 'Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Bill' was drafted in 2005. This was revised and became an Act in August 2009, but was enforced on 1st April 2010.

The Right to Education Act will benefit about one crore out-of- school children and a large number of drop-out children. As per an estimate, out of 22 crore children in the 6-14 years age group in the country, 4.6 % children have no enrolment in any school.

THE SALIENT FEATURES OF THE RIGHT TO EDUCATION ACT

The Right to Education Act is a detailed and comprehensive piece of legislation which includes provisions related to schools, teachers, curriculum, evaluation, access and specific division of duties and responsibilities of all concerned. Main features of the Act are as under:

1. Every child from 6 to 14 years of age shall have the right to free and compulsory education in a neighborhood school till completion of elementary education.

2. Private schools shall provide 25 percent reservation for weaker sections and economically disadvantaged groups in the admission.
3. All schools except government schools are required to meet all specified norms and standards within three years to avoid cancellation of their recognition.
4. The Act calls for a fixed pupil-teacher ratio, i.e., 30:1.
5. The Act mandates improvement in quality of education.
6. Financial burden will be shared between Central and State Governments.

CHALLENGES AHEAD

1. State Governments' Apathy:

- Lack of Promptness / Commitment
- Poor economic conditions of the States

2. Availability of Infrastructure Facilities:

- Establishment of Primary Schools within one kilometer and upper Primary schools within three kilometer distance.
- Well equipped classrooms, library, laboratory, play ground, drinking water and toilet facilities.

3. Availability of Teachers and Required Pupil-Teacher Ratio (PTR):

- Five lacs new teachers are to be recruited and 5 lacs new classrooms are to be constructed to meet the required 30 : 1 pupil teacher ratio.
- There are seven lacs teachers in the recognized 13 lacs primary schools. Out of these, three lacs teachers are either untrained or under-training.
- In many states large number of teachers is para-teachers and many of them are untrained.
- As per a recent report by NUEPA, Bihar tops amongst the states having poor pupil-teacher ratio and Uttar Pradesh comes at second place.
- In about 35 percent primary schools in Uttar Pradesh, pupil teacher ratio is 60:1. Fifty one percent primary schools in Uttar Pradesh are having three or less number of teachers. Out of these, 38 percent are para-teachers.
- In the present circumstances, to maintain pupil-teacher ratio as per the Act, appears a distant dream.

4. Quality of Education:

- Quality of education depends upon the quality of teachers. Teachers' selection and training procedure and their conditions of work need a substantial improvement.
- Teachers' accountability to the pupils, their parents, the community and to their own profession needs to be determined.

5. Twenty Five Percent Reservation of Seats in Private Schools:

- What will be the identification, selection and verification of economically weaker and disadvantaged children?
- Would they be selected from the neighborhood or from the entire village/town/city?
- How the whole process will be monitored by the government?

RECOMMENDATIONS

In the light of the challenges discussed earlier, following are some suggestions which may be helpful to meet the challenges:

1. The state governments are required to show promptness for the implementation of the RTE Act. The states who have not yet released any notification regarding the Act must do it without any further delay. The Central Government should impose a time limit to release funds to the states. If any state government still shows apathy to release notification, then no funds should be released by the Centre to that state for the establishment of new schools. State governments should show full commitment for the implementation of the Act.
2. Primary schools with all minimum required infrastructure facilities should be established in the neglected areas on priority basis. Central government should release budget of its share to the states at the earliest. Facilities in the existing government schools should be expanded. To avoid the closure of unrecognized private schools for not fulfilling the prescribed recognition standards within three years, these schools must be helped to improve their facilities by resource support and providing linkages with financial institutions. To meet budgetary constraints, stress must be given on cost effectiveness and accountability at every level.
3. To meet the increasing demand of qualified and trained full time teachers, the teachers in required number must be recruited at the earliest. Pupil-teacher ratio must be maintained as per requirement. As more and more children move into the primary school age group, it becomes needful to build more and more schools and recruit more teachers for sustained improvement in the quality of education.
4. Primary schools need to be made aware of the provisions made for 25 percent reservation of seats for the economically and socially weaker and disadvantaged children and the role of school managing committees in this regard. The identification, selection and verification procedure of such children should be well defined and well informed. It should also be notified that how the whole process will be monitored.
5. There is need to streamline educational administration. The pace of implementation of the Act can become faster if bottlenecks in administration are removed. Altogether, it is essential to adopt an integrated approach and establish linkages between education and other related areas such as child care, nutrition and health. Each state should formulate a 'State Programme of Action' and each district and school should formulate a Programme of Action of its own by taking into account the State Programme of Action.
6. Teachers' performance is the most crucial input in the field of education. Well qualified and highly motivated teachers are the key to effective implementation of the curriculum. They give impetus to the teaching-learning process. Top priority, therefore, should be fixed for the improvement in the quality and content of teacher education programme.



7. While the Central and State Governments have their full share of responsibilities, it is community participation and involvement of NGOs which will make marked difference in meeting the challenge of implementing Right to Education Act.
8. To achieve the goals of Free and Compulsory Elementary Education, it is of upmost importance to develop curricula that is responsive to changing needs and facilitates the incorporation and integration of new content areas related to science, technology, population and the environment.

CONCLUSION

In order to meet the challenges and overcome the hurdles that stand in the way of implementing Right to Education Act, it is needful to concentrate all efforts with full dedication and commitment. Not only the central and state governments but the nation as a whole should take responsibility in this regard. Community participation and support can make marked difference in achieving this goal. There exists a need for greater coordination amongst different agencies and functionaries involved in this task. To overcome population pressures and budgetary constraints, cost effectiveness and accountability must be ascertained at every level. Efforts should be focused on qualitative improvement of the whole programme.

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