



THE LIMPING RURAL EDUCATION SYSTEM: PUNJAB'S DILEMMA

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Abstract

School education is a foundation or root of higher education for not only an individual but the society as a whole. The Government of India launched many flagship programmes promising Universal Elementary Education (UEE) in the form of free and compulsory education for all children. The present paper highlighted the issues which are responsible for the limping rural education system in Punjab State through both primary and secondary data. The findings of data indicate social, economic, cultural and political reasons are responsible for the low status of education in Punjab. In this paper infrastructure, reading learning achievement among students, school teacher's problems and other issues are explored.

Introduction

Free and compulsory and universal education is considered a strong pillar of democracy, not only because all citizens will have equal opportunities for all-round development of their personalities, but also because they will become creative and productive members of a democratic society. Education works as a lever not only in rising financial but also the social status of the individuals. With a view to enabling the children to discharge their responsibilities as citizens efficiently, universal primary education is a pre-requisite. Primary education is thus called, "people's education" as well as education for the voters.

The Constitution of India makes the provisions of Article 45 of the Directive Principles of State Policy that, "The state shall endeavor 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." Constitutional Amendment to make education a fundamental right that led to the 86th amendment in December 2002 which inserted the following articles in the Constitution:

1. Insertion of new Article 21A- After Article 21 of the Constitution, the following article shall be inserted, namely: - Right to education.- "21A. "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."
2. Substitution of new article for Article 45- For Article 45 of the Constitution, the following article shall be substituted, namely:-"Provision for early childhood care and education to children below the age of six years. The State shall endeavor to provide early childhood care and education for all children until they complete the age of six years." Amendment of Article 51A- In Article 51A of the Constitution, after clause (J), the following clause shall be added, namely:- "(k) who is a parent or guardian to provide opportunities for education to his child or, as the case may be, ward between the age of six and fourteen years."

Despite the constitutional provisions, education continues to be a neglected area at the policy level. After 70 years of independence of India total literacy remains to be a distant dream. The deadline for achieving total literacy is postponed year after year. Apart from overall low levels of literacy at the national level, disparities across regions, genders, social groups, etc., are of serious concern.

Even though enrolment increasing to near universal levels, critical grassroots issues continue to stare us in the face. These include teacher absenteeism, lack of quality teaching, and the deficit of parent-teacher interaction and, more importantly, lack of access for marginalized rural communities (women, minorities, Scheduled Castes & Tribes) at the elementary school stage.

Status of Education in Punjab

The various policies and programmes at the international level like sustainable development goals (earlier Millennium Development Goals), universal education, and sustainable development and so on are not possible without qualitative education at primary level. In India, a massive fund has been spending on UEE through Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan with international partners. In Punjab state, many problems like the low level of reading, learning among students, academic failure among secondary students, infrastructural problems in schools, lack of teacher recruitment, multi-grade teaching and so on constraints have been found.

Caste and gender gaps are also found in Punjab regarding enrolment in schools. As a class-wise composition of girl students enrolled for the year, 2015 was 45.36, 44.64 and 43.82 percent for primary, middle and senior secondary classes respectively. Enrolment of SC girls in the Primary, Middle and Senior Secondary Classes was 38.79 percent, 40.58 percent, and 36.13 percent respectively during the year 2015 (Economic Survey of Punjab, 2016-17).



Areas of Concern

Some issues are pertaining which continuously limping the education system of Punjab. Current challenges before the school education sector are to ensure universal enrolment and continuation of school education such that the objective of universal minimum education up to elementary stage is attained by all children belonging to various socio-economic strata and conducive academic environment is created so that upward transition to secondary and higher secondary school education is possible for every child. The question of 'quality of school education'¹ especially in the government schools forms the core issue today.

Punjab is yet to achieve 100% in performance indicators as per U-DISE 2016, shown in Table 1, like toilet facilities, kitchen shed, playground facilities, School Management Committees, boundary wall and computer facilities and so on in primary schools.

It was found that government schools are no more attractive due to the absence of infrastructural facilities and quality education. Therefore, there is mushrooming of unrecognized private schools with unchecked growth in Punjab. The absence of English medium in government schools is the biggest reason for distrust among parents for the state schools.

The Annual Status of Education Report, 2016 by PRATHAM that surveyed 561 government schools with primary sections in Punjab found only 40 percent of grade III children able to read grade II text. Only 65 percent of grade V children and 80 percent of grade VII children were able to read the text. In basic arithmetic, 44 percent of Class III children were unable to do Class II subtraction. Almost 30 percent of Class IV and 22 per cent of Class V kids could not do Grade II subtractions (The Indian Express, May 23, 2016).

The reason behind the low level of learning among the students is no fail/no detention policy (from class 1st-8th) as assumed by the school teachers and the society. Whereas in reality, "Why penalize the child, when the system is to be blamed?" as per Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (Amendment) Act, 2012, the motive behind the no detention was to avoid low self-esteem, possible delinquency, redundancy in repetition, and dropouts as central problems in detaining the child in the same class. Also, Section 16 of RTE do not mention about 'no evaluation' of students. However, school teacher supposed that no detention means 'no evaluation/examination.' Therefore, students cleared their elementary education without testing and qualitative learning approach. Thus a process of academic failure among 9th to 12th class students particularly in rural areas had been started.

Another area of concern is school dropout due to cultural constraints, poverty, and administrative failure. It has been found that in Punjab, there are out of school children (never enrolled and school dropout). School dropout strikes both the girl and boy child. For girls, the reasons are sibling care, household work, cultural norms, not valuing their education and secondary schools, not in every village. For boys, the reasons for dropout are poverty, child labour, rowdy behavior among boys, lack of role model, parents do not value education and peer pressure. The reasons are many, but dropout is a challenge before the Department of Education, Punjab because students find their school unattractive, teachers do not bring the absentee students back to school, poor infrastructure in schools, absence of separate toilet for girls, teacher absenteeism, poor monitoring by the officials, inspection monitoring and evaluation merely 'a paperwork' only to record the statistics, untimely grant for mid-day meal, uniforms, scholarships and supply of textbooks.

Moreover lack of propaganda by the school teachers, gram panchayat, Centre Head Teacher and higher authorities (Block Education Officer, District Education Officer, Sub District Magistrate and District Commissioner of the district) about the benefits of enrollment in the government schools (like free medical care, free books, free uniforms, scholarships, free bicycles to girls from 9th to 12th class and so on). Gram Panchayat also not participates in the functioning of the schools while Panchayati Raj Act explicitly mentioned their defined roles in various sectors including for their village schools. Parents of the students studying in government schools also not attended school management committees and parent-teacher meetings which further contribute to the lack of accountability of school functioning.

¹ *Quality education in terms of good infrastructure in school,; higher rate of attendance both among teachers and students; easy interaction between teacher-pupil; regular meeting of parents with teachers and higher learning and reading abilities among students.*



Table 1: Elementary Education Report Card of Punjab: 2015-16

S. No	Performance Indicators	%
1.	Single-Classroom Schools	3.0
2.	Single-Teacher Schools	10.0
3.	Schools Approachable by All Weather Road	99.6
4.	Schools with Playground Facility	97.1
5.	Schools with Boundary wall	98.4
6.	Schools with Girls' Toilet	99.8
7.	Schools with Boys' Toilet	99.6
8.	Schools with Drinking Water	100.0
9.	Schools provided Mid Day Meal	99.1
10.	Schools with Electricity	99.9
11.	Schools with Computer	9.2
12.	Schools with Ramp	91.4
13.	Schools with Kitchen-shed	97.3
14.	Schools with SMC	98.8
15.	Pupil-Teacher Ratio	23
16.	Student-Classroom Ratio	20
17.	Average Teachers per school	3.3
18.	Female Teachers	68.4
19.	Girls Enrolment	48.4

Source: U-DISE 2016

Some New Initiatives by the Punjab Government

- English as the medium of instruction will be offered as an option in government schools. On a pilot basis, English medium will be started in at least two primary, middle, high and senior secondary schools in each educational block from July onwards.
- The government also proposes to launch a programme--'Padho Punjab. Padhao Punjab'--whereby young NRI graduates and people from across India and the world will be invited to dedicate up to one year by way of volunteer work to assist in teaching in the schools.

Conclusion

Lack of infrastructure and lack of quality education was identified as the most significant barrier to achieving the UEE. Since the number of schools in the country has grown significantly in an attempt to keep pace with the fast-growing population. Indeed, the situation has changed enormously in the last 70 years. However, the task to achieve UEE remains significant. The biggest challenges seem to lie in tackling the problems of exclusion. The official statistics repeatedly indicates that the problem of dropout persists on a large scale. The administration should understand the nexus of poverty, social inequity and gender discrimination. Finally, it is not essential not only to assess the progress of education but also to refine strategies and programs to move towards UEE.

References

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