

Elementary Education in Rural Odisha: A Neglected Sector

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Abstract - This article aims to provide an overview report on elementary education of rural Odisha with relevance to physical facilities, and quality of education. Since independence, there has been a major thrust on elementary education in Odisha. To achieve the goals of Universalization of Elementary Education (UEE), Odisha being one of the poor states in India has been implementing the Right to Education (RTE) Act, right to education for free and compulsory education, and Sarva Siksha Abhiyan. There has been some progress only in terms of enrolment, retention, dropout but as far as ensuring the quality of education in terms of students' learning has one of the biggest challenges for the government of Odisha. Although the government of Odisha is providing more impetus towards its overall education growth due to various socio-economic factors, Odisha's education program continues to be up to no good. Of the biggest victims of the elementary education system are those living in rural areas. The Policies, programs and schemes being implemented, but the process in an effective way has been the lacuna of the entire system.

Education is the mirror to society and is the seed as well as a flavor of socio-economic development. The present situation of rural Odisha education is that the seeds of education are planted in the children in the schools, but it does not go much further than the school system.

The public in general and rural people in particular, often think of schools as a place for teachers to instruct children on reading and writing. Schools are not considered as places, where the students are taught many life skills that will help them succeed in their future endeavors.

Many enrolled children of rural Odisha are first-generation learners, who come from illiterate, poor, and poverty families. Thus, they have to single-handedly grapple with school life, mastering the language and cognitive skills without parental help and guidance.

One of the main problems that rural Odisha faces nowadays is that all pedagogical innovations that are being made are fit for improving the quality education of urban children but the rural learners, as well as their education, are largely neglected, with more than 80% of

people are residing in the rural part of Odisha, education deserves a lot more attention especially when it is having so many problems and challenges. To boost access to elementary education in a rural area of Odisha particularly for girls, scheduled caste, scheduled tribes, and the disadvantaged group is the most pressing challenge. The scale of operation of elementary education involved ensuring quality education for rural Odisha children is unique and also challenging. Elementary Education in Odisha witnessing a rapid transformation.

Above all elementary education in rural Odisha that Odisha is providing to its children aged between 6 to 14 years come from impoverished families proves to be a neglected sector.

Index Terms – Overview, elementary, education, relevance, physical, quality, independence, universalization, implementing, compulsory, enrolment, retention, dropout, challenges, impetus, system, lacuna, economic, instruct, endeavors, poverty, cognitive, unique, neglected, sector.

BACKDROP

1. Universalization of Elementary Education in India: India is one of the biggest, densely populated, and developing countries in the world. In the modern age, no nation can march on the road to progress without making its people educated. Because education is a great force and powerful means for the all-round development of a person. Education plays a vital role in the growth and development of the people of India and the nation as a whole. It is a cornerstone of economic and social development. Education has an immense impact on human society and is an essential instrument for the emancipation of humankind.

In India, we have elementary, secondary, higher secondary, higher education, vocational, and professional education. But it is the only elementary education that refers to the first phase of compulsory

education that children obtain during the few years of starting schooling. This education has specific goals that meet the special needs that children have. The benefits of this education cannot be underestimated. This education gets universally recognized. Therefore, elementary education is very essential and beneficial not only to children but also to the nation at large. It is the foundation of advanced learning and gaining basic knowledge without which the dream of children will become impossible.

In a conference of Mahabaleswar held on May 31, 1929, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, a prominent educationalist addressed that "The freedom of the spread of elementary education is the most dominating one. It needs to implement a compulsory act of elementary education". As such "Right to Education" and "Provision for early childhood care and education to children below the age of six years" have been incorporated under article 21-A and article – 45 into the constitution of India. The constitution (86th Amendment) Act, 2002 added a new article 21A after article 21 and made education for all children of the age of 6 to 14 years a fundamental right. It provides "The state shall provide free and compulsory education to all children of the age of 6 to 14 years in such manner as the state may, by law, determine". Following the principle of equality and liberty education is free and compulsory for all and sundry. There are no special schools. Every child irrespective of social status will go to the school situated in the proximity. In India, conditions are much different.

Children are the supreme assets of the nation. Today's children are key to the future. Their quality and personality will determine the kind of destiny that beckons the nation. Elementary Schools (primary and upper primary) provide children with safe environments to grow in, as well as equipping them with motivation and skills that enable them to handle individual circumstances. A school is a happy place for children where they can explore new ideas.

In 1993, the Supreme Court of India declared education up to 14 years of age to be a fundamental Right of children in India. Hence the elementary education became the compulsory component of education in India.

After sixty-three years of independence, the Government of India felt that the base of elementary is weak and realized the important thoughts of Dr.

B.R. Ambedkar and wanted to bring them into reality. Thoughts of Ambedkar on elementary education has been reinforced in the provisions of the right of children to free and compulsory education – RTE Act, 2009, which came into effect in India in April 2010, enshrining in law for the first time the rights of all Indian children aged between 6 to 14 years to free and compulsory elementary education irrespective of caste, class, gender, and religion, etc. This Act is referred as to RTE Act-2009.

India has 28 states and 8 union territories. Although education is under concurrent list (i.e. legislation about education could be made by both the union and the state), school education is mostly control by the states and union territories. To carry forward the constitutional commitment of strengthening the social fabric of democracy by providing equal educational opportunity to all, efforts to reach out were intensified through several schemes and programs being implemented in partnership with the state Government of India has accepted Universalisation of Elementary Education (UEE) as a national goal. Both central and state governments are making strenuous efforts to achieve this goal. But in our country Universalisation of Elementary Education is a dream which has not been fulfilled to this date. The various problems (poverty of parents, tremendous increase in population, lack of finance, illiterate and orthodox parents, small and scattered habitation, alienation of schools, the ineffectiveness of teachers, inappropriateness of curricular inertia in administrative and supervisory machinery, unemployment) are responsible for not achieving the goal of UEE. There are various remedial measures – No-formal Education (NFE), Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE), Operation Black Board Scheme, District Primary Education Programme (DPEP), Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), Mid-day Meal Programme (MDM), EGS, RTE Act-2009 are being implemented which can help in solving the problems of UEE. Over some time, significant efforts have been made to universalize elementary education, but the goal remains elusive and far a distant dream.

2.Universalization of elementary education in Odisha:

Education is state jurisdiction in India. Odisha is one of the states in India that is committed to the universalization of elementary education in the state to fulfill the constitutional obligation with the assistance and support of the Government of India. To achieve the goals of universalization of elementary education, in Odisha there has been the implementation of schemes and programs- National Education Policy (NEP), Operation Black Board (OB), Non-formal Education (NFE), Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE), District Primary Education Programme (DPEP), Right to Education Act-2009, Mid-day meal (MDM), Education Guaranteed Scheme (EGS), Sarva Sikhya Abhiyan (SSA), Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBV), free and compulsory education to the children in age group 6 to 14 years, etc. These schemes and programs have been implemented in the state of Odisha with the assistance of the government of India. For smooth implementation and management of these programs related to elementary education, the Odisha Primary Education Authority (OPEPA) came into existence as a registered society on 30th. January 1996 and have been functioning under the School and Mass-Education (S & ME) Department in the Government of Odisha.

Despite the implementation of the above schemes and programs for universalization of elementary education in the state of Odisha and the sincere efforts of the authorities, educators, and teachers when it comes to rural education, the present scenario and outcomes paint a grim picture.

In Odisha there are 35, 928 Primary and 20, 427 Upper Primary Schools to provide education at the elementary level. More 491 new primary and 490 Upper primary schools opened under Sarva Siksha Abhiyan (SSA) to provide schooling to unsaved areas. Around 66 lakh children of 6-14 years of age group are in school. Around more than 80% of children from rural areas are getting elementary education. To improve access to elementary education and to achieve 100% enrolment and to check dropout and retention, the government of Odisha has relaxed the norms of opening new primary schools especially in KBK Districts and tribal sub-plan areas, inhabitations having at least 25 children provided there is no primary school within one KM. of such habitations. Added to this

government of Odisha has open many seasonal hostels for the children in rural areas whose parents are migrants.

Outcomes of quality of education.

The Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) (Rural) – 2018 revealed that only around 58% of children studying in class V know class II texts. The report claims that 3.2% of students studying in standard V cannot identify numbers from 1 to 9, while only 13.8% of students can recognize numbers from 1 to 8, and only 33.1% of students can recognize numbers between 10 and 99. While only 24.5% of students in class V know subtraction. Only 25.4% of students can divide. Among class III students, the 2018 survey revealed that only 30.9% of students can do subtraction as compared to 33.9% in 2016.

The fact on the field is that a student promoted to class VII fails to read an odia book of class III properly. The students of class VI do not know English and do not know additions and deductions.

Affecting factors in elementary education in rural Odisha.

1. Basic Infrastructure:

In rural Odisha most of the elementary schools have a shortage of classrooms, do not have electricity, drinking water, playground, and toilet. In some schools, students of different ages are made to sit in one room. In some school primary schools, the schools have single/two teachers. It became very difficult to manage five classes. The upper primary schools in rural Odisha are also meeting the same fate.

Civil facilities in government elementary schools, Odisha

1	No Toilet	Girls	7497
.		Common	12364
2	No. Electricity		43386
3	No. Playground		41643
4	No Ramps		17060
5	No Drinking Water		1714
6	With Computer		3715

Source – DISE 2013-14

Elementary School Scenario

	PRIMARY	UPPER PRIMARY
GOVT.	33,996	17,598
SSD	468	826
LOCAL BODY	NIL	02
AIDED	285	1523
PVT. UNAIDED	600	1213
OTHERS	454	27
CENTRAL GOVT.	04	19
UN RECOGNISED	592	737
TOTAL	36,399	21,945

SOURCE – DISE 2013-14

At least around more than 9000 primary schools in Odisha have one classroom while more than 17,000 schools have only two classrooms. Hence there is a huge shortfall of classrooms at primary and upper primary schools.

However, in the context of Odisha, it is unfortunate that even after 72 years of Constitutional Governance we failed to ensure the basic infrastructure for our elementary schools where we are engaged in shaping the future generation.

2. Quality of education curriculum:

When it comes to the quality of education in rural Odisha, the outcomes paint a grim picture.

Children in rural Odisha continue to be deprived of the quality of education owing to factors like lack of competent and committed teachers, lack of teaching-learning materials, poor teaching quality, absenteeism of teachers, irrelevant curriculum, etc.

The rural primary teacher occupies the lowest position hierarchy. Apart from teaching, the teacher is expected to bear the burden of much national work. Schools having single/two teachers when going on leave or remain absent functioning of the school is affected, further discouraging children, who are in the absence of support at home, need much more attention.

Lack of motivation on the part of teachers who generally are academically low qualified and have chosen this profession as a last resort is a serious problem. Added to this the teacher is burden with an irrelevant curriculum, dismal working conditions, and lack of recognition of their efforts.

In rural areas, there has been more deterioration in the quality of teaching. The teacher-training institutes are not providing quality training. This is because the government of Odisha has a provision of Odisha Teacher Eligibility Test (OTET) but only

around 25% of aspirants could clear it. Therefore, lack of poor teaching quality is also a major concern in rural Odisha.

The absenteeism of teachers in rural schools has remained a concern in rural Odisha. Many criteria that influence teacher absenteeism include tenure at school, political, social involvement, etc. in comparison to a male teacher, the absenteeism rate of the female teacher is more.

In Odisha, many ad-hoc/sikshya sahayak teachers rather than permanent are appointed in the rural schools. They are paid very poorly. These issues make the teachers in rural schools dissatisfied with their jobs and the result is they leave these jobs and move to a permanent one. The consequence is the lack of teachers in rural schools.

Another major drawback is that the curriculum prescribed in the textbooks to great extent is found to be 'irrelevant to the closer lives of rural people. In the name of relevance, most of the context taught in the school is irrelevant to the prevailing situations of the rural children. In Odisha the elementary curriculum was teacher centered. In recent years, there have been attempts to charge the elementary curriculum to make it more child-centered, joyful, and activity-based. However, in most cases, there have been mere cosmetic changes accompanied by much 'song and dance' with no radical restructuring in the content and design.

In real fact quality of education for survival and sustainability in a rural environment is the need of the hour. It can enhance the standard of living, control migration to urban areas which leads to an organized labor sector and provide critical ability to diagnose and control the decisions affecting the lives of rural people.

SUGGESTION

- School supervision and inspection should be considerably strengthened in rural Odisha.
- In each primary and upper primary school, irrespective of roll strength at least five and eight teachers to be posted and appointed, respectively.
- Poverty eradication program to be adopted.

- Basic and good infrastructure facility to be developed for building a quality learning environment.
- Every village and habitation with primary/upper primary school in Odisha to be digitally connected.
- E-education can bring a revolutionary change in the elementary education system with its innovative and involving technology will go far ahead for bringing equity and equal opportunity to all the students.
- The government, the concerned authorities, and the teachers must have an obligatory duty to carry out the motto in letter and spirit.
- The government of Odisha will have to take a calculative decision about investment in education in the coming future time.

CONCLUSION

It is a fact that the rural Odisha having a large concentration of marginalized section still have a long way to go to quality education for its children. The poor outcomes show the negligence of the government, concerned authority, and teachers as well. Around 80% population of Odisha lives in rural regions and mostly a state of Odisha lives in rural regions and mostly in a state of poverty. Only education has a major role to play in helping the individual in the rural areas to cross the hurdle of the poverty trap.

If educational facilities are to be fully utilized by the target group of population (rural and marginalized people), they need the develop a qualitative school program with adequate human and materials resources is paramount, only then can appropriate outcomes be ensured.

Children are the supreme assets of the nation. Today's children are key to the future. Their quality and personality will determine the kind of destiny that beckons the nation.

Gabriel Mistral, the Nobel Laureate said:

" We are guilty of many errors and faults, but our worst crime is abandoning the children neglecting the foundation of life. Many of the things we need can wait. The child cannot, right now is the time his bones are being formed, his blood is being made and

his senses are being developed. To him, we cannot answer "tomorrow". His name is "today".

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