Elementary Education

Education is a lifelong process. Education makes people superior to other forms of living things. It develops the power for critical thinking and improves the power of rationality towards life. In fact, education makes people educated, acquaints them with some need-based skills and, finally, it develops in them certain level of efficiency in the performance of the work they do. Thus, education is a pre-requisite for the acquisition of knowledge, enhancing skills, developing attitudes and values etc. Therefore, as human beings, we need education because it provides us with knowledge and skills to lead a meaningful life. Actually, in today’s society there is an increasing demand for growing human capital and enhancement of manpower. Education creates the human capital for the benefit of the society or for the country as a whole. In this context, it is an urgent need to make education as accessible as possible to all the citizens of the country.

By realizing the importance and value of education, the government of India has made education a fundamental right and it has become a birth right for every one living in the country. In a democratic country like ours, we have access to human rights guaranteed by the Constitution. Elementary education is a ladder, on the basis of which learners are able to attain secondary and higher education. Therefore, this stage of education is called a period of basic foundation for all other courses in life.

Concept of Universalisation of Elementary Education

Already it has been mentioned that primary or elementary education is the foundation of the entire educational system. Children normally enroll in elementary education at the age of six. It is this stage where the child starts going to a formal institution and thus the formal education starts. The education the child receives at the elementary stage lays down the foundation for his or her physical, mental, emotional, intellectual and social development. This stage of education should be linked with the functional literacy that makes the people literate with the application of practical knowledge, which is the basic requirement for economic development, modernization of social structure and effective functioning of democratic institutions.

Education is considered the bedrock of all socio-economic developments of the country. In order to promote education to all children irrespective of caste, creed, religion, sex and others and also for realizing democratization of education as a birth right to all, the government of India has made several attempts from time to time to achieve the universalisation of education for all.

Universalisation of primary or elementary education basically involves three important things i.e. Universalisation of Provision, Universalisation of Enrolment and Universalisation of Retention.
1. **Universalisation of Provision** means that school facilities should be provided to all the children between the age group of 6-14 years in the country. The school should be easily accessible within the walking distance of a child.

2. **Universalisation of Enrolment** means that all children between the age group of 6 to 14 years must be enrolled. The provision has demanded to introduce the compulsory legislation act and under the legislation, parents can be finding for not sending their children to schools.

3. **Universalisation of Retention** retains a child who joins the primary school where he or she should remain there till he or she completes all 8 classes.

In order to make education accessible to all, various provisions have been made under the Directive Principles and Fundamental Rights of the Constitution. Whenever we are talking about the educational provisions in the Indian constitution, it has been seen that under the Directive Principles of State Policy in Article 45, states the following regarding the Free and Compulsory Primary Education: “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.” It means that free and compulsory elementary education can be accessed by all children before they complete the age of fourteen, where the target period was only for 10 years.

But after the Eighty Sixth the Amendment, 2002 (Article 21 A) of the Indian Constitution, education as a subject became one of the Fundamental Rights in PART III of the Indian Constitution from the Directive Principles of State Policy which is dealt with in PART IV of the Constitution. Thus education turns into a birth right for each and every citizen of the country. In our country the Right to Education Act came into the effect from 1st April 2010. The right to education is now a fundamental right for all children in the age group of 6 to 14 years. Thus, the government will be responsible for providing education to every child up to the eight standard, free of cost, irrespective of class and gender. It has paved the way for building a strong, literate and empowered youth of this country.

Keeping in view the mandate of the RTE Act, particularly the need to provide to all children of the country education of equitable quality, in the preparation of this report, the committee has been guided by the following principles:

1. **Holistic view of education**, as interpreted in National Curriculum Framework 2005 with implications for a systemic revamp of the entire content and process of education with significant implications for curriculum, teacher education, educational planning and management.
2. **Equity**, to mean not only equal opportunity, but also creation of conditions in which the disadvantaged sections of the society – children of SC, ST, Muslim minority, landless agricultural workers and children with special needs, etc. – can avail of the opportunity.

3. **Access**, not to be confined to ensuring that a school becomes accessible to all children within specified distance but implies an understanding of the educational needs and predicament of the traditionally excluded categories – the SC, ST and others sections of the most disadvantaged groups, the Muslim minority, girls in general, and children with special needs. This interpretation of access has been viewed by the Committee as an indispensable stipulation of the Act.

4. **Gender concern**, implying not only an effort to enable girls to keep pace with boys but to view education in the perspective spelt out in the National Policy on Education 1986 /92; i.e. a decisive intervention to bring about a basic change in the status of women.

5. **Centrality of teacher**, to motivate them to innovate and create a culture in the classroom, and beyond the classroom, that might produce an inclusive environment for children, specially for girls from oppress and marginalized backgrounds.

6. **Moral compulsion** is imposed through the RTE Act on parents, teachers, educational administrators and other stakeholders. Rather than shifting emphasis on punitive processes, the Committee has abided by this general tenor of the Act.

7. **Convergent and integrated system of educational management** is prerequisite for implementation of the RTE law. All states must move in that direction as speedily as feasible.

8. **Adherence to RTE stipulations** – even where it seemed difficult to adhere to the timeframe laid down in the RTE Law, the Committee worked to find practical solutions for adherence to the Act’s stipulations.

**Challenges taken into account**

After going through the various approaches of the Government in making universalization of elementary education let us have a look at the progress of the education system and also highlight on the various problems considering as hurdles in making the universalization of elementary education in India.

- In terms of literacy India has 74.4% literacy rate in Census 2011 whereas it was 18.33 in the Census Year of 1951.
- The Number of schools has significantly increased. In the year of 1950-51 the number of schools was 0.23 million which increased to 1.28 million in the year of 2005-06.
- The Gross Enrolment Ratio in elementary education increased to 96.62% in the year of 2005-06 whereas it was 32.1% in 1950-51.
- The gender gap in the literacy rate is slowly decreasing. In 1950-51, the Gender Parity Index at elementary level was 0.38 whereas it was 0.92 in the year of 2005-06.
In India, 99% of the rural population had a primary school within 1km in 2009-10.
In 2007-08, Gross Enrolment Ratio in 6-14 age group was 114.61 at primary level and 77.50 at elementary level.
The Pupil Teacher Ratio is 46:1 at primary level and 35:1 at elementary level and 10.22 lakh teachers were recruited by December 2009.
29.57 lakh children were identified as special children and from among them 24.77 lakh children enrolled in school by 2009-10.
11.19 crore children were covered by the National Programme of Mid-day Meals in 2009-10 at elementary level.

Hindrances
Although the target in accessing the elementary education to all is in progress yet the success rate is far from reaching the target. The objectives of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan regarding all children complete five years of primary schooling by 2007 and eight years of elementary schooling by 2010 have not seen come into reality. Still there are a significant number of drop outs at the elementary level. The following factors are cited as responsible for hindering the desired success rate:

- The rate of drop out has been found at primary level was 24.93% whereas it was 42.25% at elementary level in the year of 2008-09.
- Shortage of trained teachers will be one of the major challenges in implementing the Act. There are over 12.6 lakh vacancies of teachers across the country. Besides, 7.72 lakh untrained teachers constituted 40% of the total number of teachers in 1.29 million recognized elementary schools in the year 2010.
- 53% schools followed prescribed norms regarding the Pupil Teacher Ratio i.e. 1:30 under the Act in the year 2010.
- Separate arrangement of toilets for the boys and the girls is an important component for motivating the children in the school. But still in India 46% schools do not have such facilities and as a result some parents are not willing to send their children to schools.
- National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) conducted a base line survey all over the country and published its report entitled ‘Learning Achievement of Class V Students: A Baseline Study’ in 2006. This study tried to measure learning achievement of the class 5 students across the country. Three subjects like Environmental Science (EVS), mathematics and language were chosen for the baseline study. In all India average, the mean percentage of the achievement of Class V Students in the three subjects i.e. EVS, mathematics and Language was 50.30, 46.51 and 58.57 respectively.
- Many other challenges also create hurdle in making the universalization of elementary education. Parents in the low income group have the willingness to send their children to work for adding to
the family income rather than to school. Early marriages, migration of people for the sustenance, preferential attitude to the boys than the girls, taking care of the siblings at home, lack of infrastructure in schools, requirements of additional schools, single teacher school and finances are some other responsible factors for hindering the universalization of elementary education in India.

- Weak administrative policy is also responsible for wastage at the elementary level. In school the prescribed rules are not always strictly followed. Admission in school continues throughout the year. A large number of students leave schools in the middle of the session. Teachers remain absent from duty without prior information. The number of supervisors is inadequate and supervision work irregular and loose.

- Training is considered one of the most important interventions for smooth running of the education system and it can help realize the universalization of elementary education. The actual implementation in terms of training the teachers varies from state to state and region to region within the country. Even the recruitment procedure is also not uniform across the country.

1. **The Right of Access to Education**

Obligations to ensure the right of access to education:

- Provide free and compulsory primary education.
- Develop forms of secondary education that are available and accessible to everyone, and introduce measures to provide free education and financial assistance in cases of need.
- Provide higher education that is accessible on the basis of capacity by every appropriate means.
- Provide accessible educational and vocational information and guidance.
- Introduce measures to encourage regular attendance and reduce drop-out rates.
- Provide education on the basis of equal opportunity.
- Ensure respect for the right to education without discrimination of any kind on any grounds.
- Ensure an inclusive education system at all levels.
- Provide reasonable accommodation and support measures to ensure that children with disabilities have effective access to and receive education in a manner conducive to achieving the fullest possible social integration.
- Ensure an adequate standard of living for physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development.
- Provide protection and assistance to ensure respect for the rights of children who are refugees or seeking asylum.
- Provide protection from economic exploitation and work that interferes with education.
2. The Right to Quality Education
Obligations to ensure the right to quality education:

- Develop children’s personalities, talents, and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential.
- Promote respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and prepare children for a responsible life in a spirit of peace, tolerance, equality and friendship.
- Promote respect for the child’s, his or her parents’ and others’ cultural identity, language and values.
- Promote respect for the natural environment.
- Ensure the child’s access to information from a diversity of sources.
- Ensure that the best interests of children are a primary consideration.
- Promote respect for the evolving capacities of children in the exercise of their rights.
- Respect the right of children to rest, leisure, play, recreation, and participation in arts and culture.

3. The Right To Respect In The Learning Environment
Obligations to respect children’s rights in the learning environment:

- Respect every child equally without discrimination on any grounds.
- Teach respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, for difference and for life in a society where there is understanding, peace, tolerance, equality and friendship.
- Give primary consideration to the best interests of the child.
- Respect the evolving capacities of the child.
- Respect the right of children to express their views on all matters of concern to them and have those views given due weight in accordance with children’s age and maturity.
- Recognize the right to freedom of expression, religion, conscience, thought and assembly.
- Respect the privacy of children.
- Take all appropriate measures to ensure that school discipline is administered in a manner consistent with the child’s dignity and all other rights in the Convention on the Rights of the Child.
- Protect children from all forms of physical violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligence, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse.

To ensure the realization of the right to education for all children, States have three levels of obligations:

1. To fulfil the right to education by ensuring that education is available for all children and that positive measures are taken to enable children to benefit from it, for example, by tackling
poverty, adapting the curricula to the needs of all children or engaging parents to enable them to provide effective support to their children’s education.

2. To respect the right to education by avoiding any action that would serve to prevent children accessing education, for example, legislation that categorizes certain groups of children with disabilities as uneducable.

3. To protect the right to education by taking the necessary measures to remove the barriers to education posed by individuals or communities, for example, cultural barriers to education or violence and abuse in the school environment.

Creating a Supportive Political and Economic Environment

Education does not exist in a vacuum. Ensuring that every child has access to quality and respectful learning environments throughout his or her childhood necessitates action far beyond ministries of education. The right to education can only be realized in a political and economic environment that acknowledges the importance of transparent, participatory and accountable processes, as well as broad-based collaboration both across government and in the wider society. It needs a long-term strategic commitment to the provision of adequate resources, development of cross departmental structures, engagement with the energies and capacities of parents and local communities, and partnership with non-governmental organizations.

1. Political will and commitment

One of the most important prerequisites in realizing rights, especially those related to such global public goods as education, health or water and sanitation, is the presence of firm in-country political will and commitment. In many countries around the world, good policy formulations exist on paper but are not translated into action. Real decisions at the stage of implementation are taken at the time of preparation of action plans and projects or during budget allocations. States need to demonstrate the political will to follow up and implement such policy commitments on the ground.

2. Capacity-building and development

As a rights-based approach to education places the primary responsibility for ensuring good quality education on the state, consideration needs to be given to whether it has the capacity – in terms of managerial, human and financial resources – to analyse, organize and provide all the inputs necessary to make meaningful education a reality for those who are left out of the system. Many government programmes worldwide have tried to reach out to marginalized groups of children but have lacked the capacity to work simultaneously on several fronts – access, quality and respect. Thus, the role of capacity-building and development becomes crucial. While some States – for example, those in transition or just emerging out of conflict – require capacity-building such as teacher training or curriculum development, others may require capacity development in terms of
working with the state bureaucracy to train their officials to reform legal and regulatory frameworks, as well as the systems for implementing them.

3. **Good governance**

Factors relating to good governance – such as demanding accountability, ensuring transparency, access to justice and the rule of law, and enlisting stakeholder participation, through, for instance, devolution policies or in budgetary analysis – are essential ‘on the ground’ enabling conditions.

There are, however, core obligations for States under the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the Convention against Discrimination in Education:

1. Respect must be afforded to the freedom of parents and guardians to have the religious and moral education of their children in conformity with their convictions.

2. Education in the general history of religion and ethics is permitted if it is given in an unbiased and objective way that is respectful of freedoms of opinion, conscience and expression. However, parents must be provided with the possibility of alternative education that accommodates their wishes.

3. Indigenous children or those belonging to a minority shall not be denied the right to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practise their own religion, or to use their own language.

4. Members of national minorities are entitled to develop their own educational activities, provided so doing does not serve to exclude them from the culture and language of the wider community, and that the standard of education is not lower than the general standard provided for others.

5. Parents and guardians can choose other than public education for their children as long as the schools comply with the aims of education elaborated in article 29 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and minimum standards established by the government, including, for example, a prohibition on physical and humiliating punishments. Inspection and regulation systems need to be in place to ensure compliance with these standards.

6. Respect for the liberty of parents and guardians must not be allowed to lead to extreme disparities of educational opportunity between different groups in society.

7. Raising awareness on the right to education.

8. Promoting the value of education for both girls’ and boys’ future opportunities.

9. Ensuring sensitization as to the nature of disability and the capacity of children with disabilities to benefit from education.

10. Stressing the importance of play as part of children’s learning and development.

11. Providing information about available stipends, cash transfers or food-foreducation programmes.

12. Addressing parental concerns, such as violence when travelling to school.

13. Adapting school timetables to accommodate domestic labour commitments.
14. Highlighting the role parents can play in supporting and strengthening their children’s learning, including the importance of active engagement in the life of the school and the ways in which parents and communities can contribute.

15. Listening to children and engaging them as active participants in their own learning.

16. Promoting respect for children as learners and ending all forms of violence in schools. Education as a right for all children.

17. Elimination of discrimination.


22. Birth registration.

23. Participation rights.

24. Prohibition of all forms of violence against children.

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