

ENSURING FREE AND COMPULSORY EDUCATION IN INDIA: A FACT CHECK

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DOI: 10.46609/IJSSER.2023.v08i12.002 URL: <https://doi.org/10.46609/IJSSER.2023.v08i12.002>

Received: 28 November 2023 / Accepted: 10 December 2023 / Published: 16 December 2023

ABSTRACT

The notion of Education For All was launched in 1990, popularised by UNESCO to integrate international efforts to provide free and compulsory primary education to the children, without any kinds of prejudices and discrimination. The EFA goals which were finalised after several meetings and conferences found their representation in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and later in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The common goal to be achieved by all countries was the provision of free, compulsory and quality education to all the children along with the associated objectives of providing quality education through all means to the citizens; whether it be formal, informal or non-formal. India has a long tradition of educational history that revolve around the goal of provision of quality education for all. The present paper is an attempt to overlook all the efforts made by the Government of India towards achieving the goal of universal free education.

Keywords: Education For All, Sustainable Development Goals, quality education

INTRODUCTION

The pre British rule period had wide range of secular but class dominated system of education. The British era of colonisation brought a new system of education based on western ideologies and principles. This marked the beginning of modern education system in the country. The Macaulay Minutes (1835), The Wood's Despatch (1854), Hunter Commission (1882), Wardha Scheme (1937), Sargent Scheme (1944) etc were the main educational interventions in the country before independence.

The modern educational system called for equality in education and removal of all kinds of inequalities. Universal elementary education (UEE) became the central objective of the education system in the country. The underlying principle of both EFA and UEE is the same to

the core; no child should be discriminated on the grounds of religion, caste, gender, creed, race, region, colour, social status, economic aspect and cultural features. The UEE system as envisioned by India is in the same line that of Universal Primary Education later which became the second goal of the MDGs. Clear cut social interventions is the main weapon of the UEE programmes in India aiming at extending all support to the children to have a delightful learning experience. When the first Census was conducted in 1951 after independence, the literacy rate of India was 18.33%. The governments which later came into power continuously took measures for reducing the high rate of illiteracy in the country. Since the country is the largest democratic nation in the world, the country should be able to preserve and foster the guiding principles of democracy. Equality is one among them and since education is one of the strongest force for enhancing democratic principles in the country, co-education has been given top priority to remove all inequalities prevailing in the society.

I. Constitutional provisions safeguarding Education For All

The Constitution of India which came to effect on 26 January, 1950 itself proclaim sovereignty, socialism, secularism, democracy and republic form of governance in the country. Also the country follows federal form of governance. These features are crucial for a country to ensure equality, freedom and justice to its citizens. Education is such a component which require all of the above discussed features as pre requisites to establish itself as a basic right. Understanding this particular and peculiar aspect of education, several provisions were incorporated to the constitution.

I.1 Fundamental Rights

Part III of the constitution deals with Fundamental Rights of the citizens in which,

- ❖ Article 13 which ensures that the State shall not implement any law that take away the rights deliberated through Part III.
- ❖ Article 15 that prohibits discrimination of any kind on any grounds particularly against women and children.
- ❖ Article 21 (A) which was incorporated to the Fundamental Rights through 86th Amendment in 2002, the provisions of which came into force in 2010. This provided for accepting children's right to education as a Fundamental Right. This Article ensure free and compulsory education to all children of the age group 6-14 years
- ❖ Article 28 which prohibits any type of religious practice or forceful imposition of any religious beliefs or traditions on children in educational institutions.

- ❖ Article 30 that provide the minorities the right to start and manage educational institutions.

I.2 Directive Principles of State Policy

Part IV of the Constitution deals with the Directive Principles of State Policy in which

- ❖ Article 38 which states that the State should strive to eliminate all types of inequalities in status, facilities as well as opportunities.
- ❖ Article 41 which demand State intervention in ensuring the right to education in unusual cases like unemployment, sickness etc.
- ❖ Article 45 which mandate the State to ensure free and compulsory education to children until 14 years of age. It also prescribe the role of government in ensuring early childhood and care for children under 6 years of age.
- ❖ Article 46 which focus on promoting educational interests of the SC/ST and other weaker sections of the society.

I.3 Fundamental Duties

Part IV A of the Constitution deals with Fundamental Duties of the citizens in which

- ❖ Article 51 A which states that a citizen who maybe parent or guardian should provide opportunity of education to his/her child of the age of 6-14 years.

II. Commissions, schemes and programmes for promoting UEE in India

There were a number of committees, schemes, programmes and declarations in context of introducing and implementing UEE in the country.

II.1 Kher Committee, 1951

The first attempt by independent India to comply in lines with the Education For All movement was the constituting of a separate committee under the chairmanship of B.G.Kher in 1950 to analyse the education standards in the country and provide adequate suggestions. The committee submitted its report in 1951, in which it was stated that the goal should be to achieve universal, free, basic and compulsory education for the children of 6-14 years within 15 years. The committee had specific recommendations regarding the empowerment of local bodies in administering educational institutions and also about the provision of giving grants for meeting educational needs.

II.2 Kothari Commission, 1964

Popularly known as the National Education Commission, the commission chaired by D.S.Kothari, made significant contribution to the entire educational structure of the country. The committee endorsed for the introduction of a standardised national system of education right from the primary level. Clear ordering of pre-primary, primary and secondary education was fixed by the commission. Practical recommendations were provided by the commission regarding women's education, and difficulties faced by the weaker sections of the society. Vocationalisation of education, equalisation of educational opportunities, provision of scholarships etc were some of the recommendations which gained attention of policy makers and educationalists.

II.3 The National Policy on Education, 1968

The Kothari Commission report found its impact through launching of a National Policy on Education in 1968. It opted for a 'radical restructuring' of educational sector and equalisation of educational opportunities. The policy was able to provide legal recognition to the efforts for enforcing free and compulsory education and also for steering teacher training programmes. The NPE demanded for increasing the allocation to education sector at 6% of national income. The "three language formula" was also given recognition with focus on creating a better learning environment in schools.

II.4 Working Group on UEE, Ministry of Education, 1978

The goal of UEE found high priority in the Conference of State Education Ministers, 1977 which resulted in the formation of a working group to submit recommendations on drafting plans for extending quality education to all children of the country. The recommendations were significant in the sense that a national policy on non-formal education was framed after the proposal. The recommendations also included subjects related with problems faced by SC/ST sections, the weaker sections, women and possible policy solutions.

II.5 The National Policy on Education, 1986

The second National Policy on Education launched in 1986 had special provisions for equity in education, removal of disparities in education, development of educational institutions, scholarships for all deserving children, adult education, special attention on women and SC/ST children, incentives for children coming from poor backgrounds and special attention for early childhood care. The NPE called for a student centric approach in primary education and launched a new national programme named Operation Blackboard in 1988 which primarily

focused on improving the educational facilities in schools which will universalize the primary education.

II.6 Operation Blackboard, 1987

The scheme was launched in 1987 as a sequel to the NPE 1986, which aimed at ensuring minimum infrastructure facilities in schools and provision of adequate teaching learning materials to schools. The scheme had provisions for embarking quality and modern teacher training programmes. The scheme aimed for overall physical infrastructure development with some basic resources. The state governments were entrusted with providing all required facilities to schools according to their demand.

II.7 The Shiksha Karmi Project, 1987

Launched in 1987 the project got assistance from Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), the intention of which was to make effective interventions in backward and remote areas of Rajasthan, because of the serious threats the state was facing in terms of educational quality. Teacher absenteeism was a major headache in the state due to many reasons, the effect of which fell on students. The ShikshaKarmi Project gave training and empowered the local youth (known as ShikshaKarmis), who substituted teachers and were provided with proper supervision. Community participation experienced much heights through this scheme, since the village education committees were entrusted with maintenance and repair works in school. Around 800 villages were covered under this scheme with more than 2000 para teachers. Thus the goal of UEE found much momentum under this project.

II.8 District Institute for Education and Training (DIET), 1987

The main aim behind setting up of DIETs was to function as an institution to guide all educational institutions in the corresponding district by giving proper teacher training and co-ordinating government policies and programmes at the district level. DIETs turned out to be the source of academic and technical knowhow to teachers. In recent times the DIETs have been very much operational in imparting quality training programmes to teachers. Even though problems like shortage of administrative staff and multiplicity of tasks are affecting the performance, the DIETs still continue to function as the co-ordinating agency of ensuring UEE at the district level.

II.9 Mahila Samakhya Programme, 1989

Covering 11 states in the country and 42398 villages as of 2014, the scheme aimed at development and empowerment of women through providing basic education. The scheme

aimed to build up self-esteem and self-confidence in women and girl children which will automatically guide to empowerment. Sponsored by multiple agencies including World Bank and UNICEF, the programme made successful interventions in capacity building of women and girl children in the country. Over 1.5 million women had received benefits from this scheme. However the Centre had drastically cut the availability of funds to this scheme since 2016.

II.10 Minimum Levels of Learning (MLL), 1991

The MLL was highly operational in improving the quality of education in rural regions of the country. A combination of quality with equity, the MLL sought to ensure that irrespective of all differences, the children should be equipped with basic education. The scheme aimed at attaining learning competencies at each stage of elementary education. A competency based learning approach was introduced by the scheme with which the children shall be able to gain practical knowledge. At the end of each stage of education or the end of the term, each student is expected to have mastered the required learning competency, thereby adding significantly to the capacity building. The cognitive abilities and empirical reality experience of the children were assumed to develop at a higher level after successful completion of education. One of the significant aspects of MLL was that it gave top priority to environmental studies similar to language and mathematics in the curriculum. Thus the children were able to efficiently imbibe the goals of sustainable development too through the learning process.

II.11 Lok Jumbish Project, 1992

Peoples Movement for Education for All (known as Lok Jumbish Project), was introduced in 1992 by the Government of Rajasthan with the external support from Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA). Universal, basic education was the motto behind this project too. Extension of the decentralised form of governance to education sector was a major policy intervention of the project. More powers were assigned to local self-governments in effectually participating and co-ordinating various community interventions in the educational institutions. The concepts of school mapping and micro planning found its decisive role in the resolving the earlier discrepancies occurred in centralised planning procedure. Achieving the minimum levels of learning and teacher training were the two policy interventions envisaged by the project which aimed at improving the quality of education. The project however ceased to operate since 2003.

II.12 Yashpal Committee, 1993

The National Advisory Committee under the chairmanship of Dr.Yashpal was highly instrumental in reforming the school education according to the changes happening in the education sector. The main contribution made by the committee was the concept of "Learning without burden". It is regarded as the seminal document of Indian primary education system.

Reduction of pupil-teacher ratio, involvement of more teachers in curriculum designing, reduction in the number of textbooks and workbooks, increased usage of ICT equipment, measures for reducing the commercialisation of education etc were the main measures suggested by the committee.

II.13 District Primary Education Programme (DPEP), 1994

A highly influential programme on primary education, this signifies the role of decentralisation and local governance with support from community, in transferring quality primary education. The centrally sponsored scheme adopted an area specific approach that consider districts as individual units and thus the planners can look into the issues formed in individual district level. Universal access to education and improvement in learning levels; both were given equal importance in the programme. An externally aided project, the programme also made impact on the school curriculum and syllabus with positive repercussions on children. Through modifications made in the syllabus, and through adequate training programmes, the teachers were able to effectively transact the learning content to the students. Particularly in rural areas, the DPEP became a significant change factor in improving the enrolment rates and reducing the drop-out rates.

II.14 District Information System for Education (DISE), 1994

Also known as UDISE (Unified District Information System for Education), the setting up of this system was revolutionary in character. This became the most determinate policy intervention by the government to have a database regarding the facilities, requirements and performance of the schools both state wise and district wise. The details include the enrolment rates, dropout rates, infrastructure facilities, proportion of weaker sections studying, toilets etc. A highly informative and useful provision, the DISE help the government to understand the loopholes in educational development of the country.

II.15 Mid-Day Meal Scheme (MDMS), 1995

The National Programme of Nutritional Support to Primary Education (NP-NSPE) also known as the Mid-Day Meal Scheme is one of the visionary and successful programmes in the country. The goal of UEE in India got much momentum after the introduction of this scheme. It had a direct effect on the attendance rates, retention rates, and enrolment rates in schools. The children are given high quality cooked food which has got a positive effect on the effectiveness of primary education. The main effect of MDMS is on socially deprived classes as they get an opportunity to attend school with nutritious food. With effective monitoring and evaluation and community intervention, the scheme continue to supplement the children in adding to their learning capacities.

II.16 National Elementary Education Mission (NEEM), 1995

The NPE 1986 was modified to incorporate Programme of Action (1992) to strengthen the efforts to build a platform that supports all UEE measures taken in the country in a holistic manner. When DPEP was launched in 1994, the energies towards attainment of Education For All became synchronised which later got even accelerated through the launching of National Elementary Education Mission (NEEM), 1995. The NEEM envisaged for improved accountability and transparency at all levels of implementation. It had in its vision document, the /plans for achieving universal access and retention, improved levels of enrolment, and maintaining proper mid-day meals scheme that could be helpful in attaining the higher success in UEE.

II.17 Education Guarantee Scheme, 1997

The state of Madhya Pradesh has got a success story of its own in the form of Education Guarantee Scheme implemented during 1997. One of the striking features of the scheme was that if the panchayat forward the list of 30-40 children to the state government, who are denied of education due to lack of schools in their village within walkable distance, the government would set up a school within 90 days. Thus one of the significant domain of UEE i.e. universal access to education was fulfilled by the scheme. The scheme also ensured adequate academic evaluation and monitoring of student's progress. The scheme had separate measures for initiating teacher training programmes, reducing pupil teacher ratio and improving the syllabus. One of the focus points of EGS was reducing the out-of-school children. The efforts taken in that direction resulted in a sharp reduction of out-of-school children from 2,919,000 in 1996 to 774,000 in 2003 (Vimala Ramachandran, 2004).

II.18 Formation of Department of Elementary Education and Literacy under MHRD, 1999

A separate department was created in 1999 under the Ministry of Human Resource Development for taking up the challenges faced by the school education sector. The Department had its objectives while formation as to reinforce the integration between centre and states on issues related with school education, improve the standards of educational institutions, achieve the goal of UEE at the earliest. Thus the joint efforts of both centre and states in universalizing primary education gained special prominence due to the creation of the department.

II.19 Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, 2001

The flagship programme for implementing and achieving UEE in the country was the launching of SSA in 2001. It had a time bound vision plan of educating all children of 6-14 years by 2010. The goal could not be achieved by 2010 and the plan was extended indefinitely. The SSA

focuses itself on multi aspects related with school education among which infrastructure development, quality of teachers, teacher training, teaching learning materials, educating the most backward sections, bridging the gender gap in education etc. Active participation of community in educational institutions, availability of highly qualified teachers and teacher trainers, appropriate monitoring mechanism, availability of funds etc are the marked features of this scheme. The scheme has a fund sharing pattern of 60:40 between centre and states (the pattern is 90:10 for north east states and Himalayan states) from 2015-16.

II.20 The 86th Amendment, 2002

In December 2002, 86th Amendment was made which inserted in the Constitution, a new Article 21 (A) which made right to education, a fundamental right of the children. Thus the struggles and toils of government, inter-government departments, NGOs, educationalists, policy framers, academicians, etc got a legal provision. Access to free and compulsory education became the basic right of children and the amendment also substituted for Article 45, which states about the provision of early childhood care and education for all children till 6 years. In Article 51 (A) the clause that parents or guardians should provide opportunity to children for education was also added.

II.21 National Programme for Education of Girls at Elementary Level (NPEGEL), 2003

The NPEGEL was introduced to supplement SSA efforts to achieve UEE in the country. The special focus was laid on education of girl children, in the most educationally backward blocks of the country. All over the country around 3272 blocks were identified to be covered under this scheme. Provisions were made to look over the matters of girl children's drop-out rates, enrolment rates, retention rates, and out of school girl children. The scheme also plan of actions regarding gender sensitization and bridging the gender gaps in all levels of learning process.

II.22 Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya Scheme (KGBV), 2004

The scheme was introduced by the Government of India to address the educational backwardness of girl children in the country. In the educationally backward blocks, a huge proportion of girl children find difficulty to enjoy educational benefits offered by the government due to many social, economic and cultural reasons. To solve such issues the KGBV was launched to set up residential facilities for girl children to be a part of the UEE process. The scheme was highly beneficial for girls coming from backward backgrounds.

II.23 Right to Education Act, 2009 (RTE Act, 2009)

The RTE Act which was enacted on August 4, 2009 that was commenced on April 1, 2010 was a significant footprint in the efforts of government to move towards a right based framework for the UEE. The RTE Act provided for children's basic right to free and compulsory education. The Act had specific sections on the process of implementation and also the responsibilities to be borne by all levels of government. Through this act the country came into lines with international efforts of attaining the goal of Education For All.

The Central Rules to the RTE Act was amended in 2017 in order to include the reference on learning outcomes based on class wise and subject wise considerations. In all the subjects including the languages, science subjects, mathematics as well as social sciences, the learning outcomes were fixed and finalised and have been shared with all the states and UTs ensuring more possible mechanism for assessing the learning capabilities and achievement levels of the children.

Section 23(2) of the RTE Act was amended, according to which all the elementary school teachers, who hadn't received or undergone any sort of training programmes, should undergo proper training procedure and acquire the minimum standards of qualification by the end of March 31, 2019. The National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS) has been entrusted with implementing the D.El.Ed course from 2017 onwards.

In January 2019, the RTE Act got amended as The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (Amendment) Act, 2019, the major provision of which is the bringing back of the concept of detention and thereby abolition of no-detention policy followed in the country. This amendment was particularly focused on ensuring quality education, based on the strives taken in states like Kerala, Sikkim, Telangana etc. to improve the learning outcomes of the students and teacher quality in the public sector schools. Based on this amendment, the state governments can decide upon whether to detain students up to class VIII. The act provides for regular examination at the class level of 5th and 8th and if students fail in the exams, there will be a provision for re-examination with adequate remedial teaching. Even after this, if a student fails, the state government can decide to detain or not detain.

II.24 Padhe Bharat Badhe Bharat, 2014

Launched as a sub-programme of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan in 2014, this scheme aimed at tackling two issues faced by students in completing and fulfilling their learning outcomes; (a) solving the issue of reading and writing with comprehension and to create genuine interest in languages and (b) solving the issue of mathematics learning difficulties faced by the children by relating mathematics to the topics of real physical and social world.

II.25 Rashtriya Avishkar Abhiyan, 2015

The Rashtriya Avishkar Abhiyan (RAA) was launched by the former President Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam in 2015, with a sole aim to develop a positive attitude in the minds of students with respect to science, mathematics and technology. The scheme aim at improving the learning levels of students with reference to the above mentioned areas. Through effective teacher training programmes, the policy aimed at making the student group deeply enthusiastic and passionate about innovations, inventions and experimentation.

II.26 National Achievement Survey 2017

The NCERT has been undertaking efforts to conduct National Achievement Survey (NAS), 2001 onwards. The most comprehensive NAS was conducted in 2017 covering more than 1 lakh schools, and 2.2 million students, and across 701 districts all over the nation by including classes III, V and VIII. This was a serious effort by NCERT to understand and measure the learning outcomes and achievement levels of the children. Using multiple test booklets, and questionnaires for teachers, students and school administrative bodies, the survey was able to predict possible policy measures that could be of guiding principles in framing public policies on education.

II.27 Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan, 2018

Instead of separate programmes for elementary education (Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan), secondary education (Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan), and teacher education (Centrally Sponsored Scheme on Teacher Education) , the government decided to launch a new programme on education, Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan in 2018, enveloping all the three existing schemes. This was brought in order to ensure quality, access and equity in education for all children of the country right from ECCE till 12th standard. In addition to the above stated goals of the scheme, there is an improved focus on vocationalisation of education as well as teacher quality as per the new scheme. The tenure of the B.Ed. course has been increased to 2 years, whereas the B.El.Ed course is of four years.

II.28 National Education Policy, 2020

A total restructuring of the education system in the country happened in the year 2020 with the launch of the NEP. The main objective of the policy is to revamp the school and higher education with ultimate focus on making India a knowledge hub and superpower. In school education a new pedagogical structure of 5+3+3+4 covering the children of the age group 3-8 years, 8-11 years, 11-14 years and 14-18 years, has been implemented with the advantage of including the ECCE category too in the mainstream education programme. The NEP has

recognized the role of ECCE in the development of both physical and mental traits of children and therefore demand huge investment to be made in the ECCE. One of the striking features of the NEP 2020 is that of setting up of a National Curricular and Pedagogical Framework for Early Childhood Care and Education (NCPFECCE) which will be having two sub frameworks, one for the children up to 3 years and the other one for 3-8 years. The NEP suggests that investment made in the ECCE will have tremendous impact on the personality and character of the children which will in turn bring long run benefits, both for the individual as well as for the society. The NEP aims to achieve universal basic literacy as well as numeracy in primary schools by 2025. It has been found that due to the efforts of SSA, the enrolment ratio has been made better in the country for the lower grades but in the case of higher grades there is issue to be tackled. The 75th round of NSSO has revealed the fact that around 3.22 crore of children has become drop outs of the age group 6-17. There should be immediate policy measures which shall be reflected and realized on ground realities.

The NEP thus aims to focus on holistic development of children right from the foundational stage, i.e 3 years in anganwadis/pre-school and remaining 12 years in school. A massive change is being envisaged with respect to school governance, with the provision being made for a new independent authority to regulate and monitor all schools with improved accreditation framework. After the educational policies of 1968 and 1986, the NEP 2020 thus become a landmark in the much awaited development of educational system in India.

Conclusion

The development goal of Education For All had earned much priority in the formation of educational policies in the country because of which a large number of programmes were formulated and implemented. Among all these, the scheme of Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan gain special attention and care since the scheme is still continuing to achieve the goal of UEE. The SSA is highly operational through the interventionist approach it has, particularly in community participation activities and gender related matters. Continuous evaluation of SSA reveal the fact that it is not an easy task to accomplish the goals set by UEE, in cases like narrowing the gap of backward classes, bridging the gender gap, providing universal access, maintaining the quality of education, scheming the teacher training activities, managing the infrastructure facilities, shaping into new technology of teaching procedures, keeping up the quality of mid-day meals being provided, ensuring adequate teaching learning materials, and effectively preserving the learning atmosphere of the institution.

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