

Universalisation of Secondary Education in India

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Abstract

Secondary Education (S.E) serves as a link between the elementary and higher education and plays a very important role in this respect. Apart from grounding the roots of education of a child, secondary education can be instrumental in shaping and directing the child to a bright future. This stage of education serves to move on higher secondary stage as well as to provide generic competencies that cut across various domains of knowledge as well as skills. The recent significant development viz., Universal Elementary Education (UEE) being achieved through Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) and also the impact of globalization and rapid growth of new technologies have led to reassessment of India's preparedness to generate required technical manpower, develop new knowledge and skills, and remain competitive at global level, the time has arrived for taking proactive measures to plan and provide for universal access to secondary education and senior secondary education in a phased—wise manner.

Keywords: Universal, Secondary education, CAB committee, NCERT, Curriculum

Introduction

Education, the fulcrum of sustainable development, holds the key to 'social inclusion'. It is one of necessary conditions for advancing quality of life and freedom. To promote equity and active citizenship through a well-developed education and training system, therefore, needs to occupy the centre-stage of the development agenda in every society. In recent years, how/ever, while stakeholders continue to debate the nature and functions of secondary education, the need for its development has become apparent with the changing context of schooling. Besides its contributions to the formation of active citizens (Government of India, Secondary Education Commission, 1953; Kabir, 1955; Alvarez, 2000; Lewin and Caillods, 2001; Briseid and Caillods, 2004; World Bank, 2003, 2009), secondary education plays a critical role in addressing the emerging human development concerns in countries engaged in building knowledge societies for staying connected to the globalization process. There is, indeed, the need for changing the role of the school from an institution of knowledge generation and transmission to an institution, which can respond effectively to the skill requirements of the future world, i.e. making pupils communicate effectively in terms of culture, technology and language (Stromquist, 2002; Biswal, 2006).

Universal Secondary Education

With the universalisation of elementary education through SSA, there will be universal demand for secondary education. What is important is to make good quality education available, accessible and affordable to all the adolescents falling in the age group of 14-18 years with special reference to economically weaker sections of the society, the educationally backward, the girls and the disabled children residing in rural areas and other marginalized categories like SC, ST, OBC and Educationally Backward Minorities.

Curricular Structure and Course Offerings

The right to study and succeed in basic mathematics, science, social science and languages, including English, and other mainstream subjects is as much a fundamental right of a child as to have access to and complete secondary/senior secondary education. Keeping this in mind, the National Curriculum Framework—2005 has made several radical proposals to revisit the very character of knowledge, shift to a new pedagogic approach and change the entire examination system.

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Work and Education

The CABE Committee on USE expresses its deep concern with respect to “the exclusionary Accordingly character of education in general and secondary education in particular based upon the report(April, 2005) of the National Focus Group on Work and Education constituted by the NCERT as part of its exercise of National Curriculum Framework—2005. This is founded on the artificially instituted dichotomy between work and knowledge (also reflected in the widening gap between school and society). Those who work with their hands and produce significant wealth are denied access to formal education while who have access to formal education not only denigrate productive manual work but also lack the necessary skills for the same. Accordingly, the Committee recommends the following two-fold strategy for a major curricular reform: (1) Productive work (and other forms of work as well, including social action and engagement) may be introduced as a pedagogic medium for knowledge acquisition, developing values and multiple-skill formation.

Common Core Curriculum

A common core curriculum incorporating work-centered pedagogy initially until Class X and, within the foreseeable future, up to Class XII for all children, should be the objective. A set of work-related generic competencies (basic, inter-personal and systemic) may be pursued and also inform the redesigning of evaluation parameters as well as the assessment system, including the public examinations. Generic competencies will provide a firm foundation for building up a programme of ‘Vocationalised Education’ (to be distinguished from ‘Vocational Education’) at the secondary/ senior secondary stages. (2) Vocational Education and Training (VET) may be conceived as a major national programme in the mission mode and be structurally and administratively placed outside the school system.

Common School System

Common school system essentially means a national system of education which is based on the values and principles of the Constitution of India which provides education as a comparable quality to all children irrespective of their caste, creed, language, economic or cultural back-ground, geographic location or gender. This is the perspective articulated by the National Policy on Education— 1986 and further elaborated by the National Curriculum Framework-2005. Such a national system of education will be governed by certain minimum infrastructural, financial and curricular norms.

Three Language Formula

The three—language formula evolved out of a major political exercise and negotiations in the critical decade

of 1950S and the early years of 1960S in response to the rising tensions with respect to different language regions of the country and the question of related cultural identities. In essence, this outcome reflected the federal spirit of our Constitution and the commitment to sustain and promote India’s plural character. It is in this background that the 1986 policy made a commitment to implement the three-language formula “more energetically and purposefully.

NCF-2005 also reiterates this position and proposes to make a renewed bid to fulfill the commitment. While, as part of this formula, a crucial responsibility befalls upon the elementary stage of education to promote the mother tongue as a medium of education, it is the secondary/ senior secondary stage of education that becomes the real testing ground of the more challenging aspects of the formula.

Guidance and Counseling

As the secondary education system expands towards universalisation and boys and girls are facing a fast process of socio-economic and cultural change, and quite often the traditional institutional frameworks provided by the family and community are not adequate for helping the adolescent to cope with the demands made upon him/her, staff for guidance and counseling will be required to ensure that first generation school goers receive adequate coverage in terms of their psychological and personality related needs. Financial allocation necessary for making guidance counseling a common reality of every secondary school will need to be worked out, and institutional infrastructure necessary for making professional input for such a facility will have to be put in place.

Schooling Facility

There is a lot of disparity in schooling facilities in various regions of the country. There are disparities among the private schools, among private and government schools in the same state, between schools in central sector like Kendriya Vidyalayas (KVS), Navodaya Vidyalayas (NVS), Tibetan Schools, Sainik Schools, etc. Also, there are no specific norms for secondary schools. In view of providing universal quality secondary education, it is imperative that specially designed norms are developed at the national level and then disaggregated for each State/UT keeping in mind the geographical, socio-cultural, linguistic and demographic conditions of not just the State/UT but also, wherever necessary, of the Blocks. Also, the disparities among various categories of schools must be reduced. This will require planning of educational facilities, and management of educational services to be streamlined.

Current Reform Agenda And Development Interventions

The recommendations of the CABE Committee (2005)

largely shaped the development priorities in secondary education during the Eleventh Plan period(2007—2012). The 11th Plan, therefore, targeted to: (i) achieve universal access; (ii) raise GER at secondary stage to 75% by 2011/12; (iii) reduce substantially gender, social and regional disparities in enrolment, dropout and retention rates; (iv) improve Teacher-Pupil Ratio (TPR) at the secondary stage to about 25 & ensure availability of trained subject and other teachers by 2011/12; and (vi) introduce ICT in secondary and higher secondary schools.

Currently, several secondary education development schemes and programmes, including the recently launched Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA), are being implemented in the country to achieve the 11th Plan targets. RMSA aims at: (i) maintaining standards in secondary education by making schools conform to the prescribed norms related to physical facilities, staff and academic matters (ii) universalising physical access to all young people (taking a distance norm of 5 kilometers at secondary and 7 kilometers at higher secondary stages); (iii) improving participation and retention in secondary education (75% GER at secondary stage by 2013/14, 100% GER by 2016/17, and universal retention by 2020); (iv) Overcoming barriers to secondary schooling due to gender, socio-economic status, disability and other disadvantaged circumstances and (v) improving quality of learning outcomes.

Development Challenges and The Way Forward

Secondary education in India faces a number of development related challenges mostly due to the negligence over the year. This is due to relatively high political commitment for compulsory level of education and higher & professional education. The above challenges as faced by secondary education can be broadly grouped into two categories:

- Systems level challenges
- Challenges relating to implementation of development initiatives

The Systems Level Challenges are generally more dynamic in nature that try to deal with development issues related to aligning secondary education to larger socio-economic needs of society, which, among others, include issues such as:

- What is the appropriate secondary schooling model?
- How to have expanded access while maintaining quality and equity?
- What are the implications of uniform provisioning and mixed market providers in terms of coverage and equity?
- What kind of secondary curriculum would lead to high level of relevance and external efficiency?
- What should be the mode of financing secondary education that is sustainable and affordable?

Several factors have contributed to the inappropriate design and ineffective Implementation of Education reform programmes in India, which are:

- **First**, Lack of data and information is the critical development constraint in secondary education in India.
- **Second**, lack of related data and information has resulted in designing 'over ambitious reform programme's such as the RMSA, and very often, fragmented centrally sponsored schemes in secondary education.
- **Third**, low level of 'readiness to take off' in terms of pre-reform/project activities has invariably affected planning and implementation of education reform programmes in general and secondary education development programmes in particular.
- **Fourth**, 'decentralization' as a policy strategy has been considered a panacea for decades in designing and implementing education development programmes.
- **Fifth**, the education reform programmes in the country assign too much importance to resource allocation as compared to the resource utilization aspects.

At the functional level, critical areas of reform in secondary education relate to teacher management (i.e. deployment and management, professional development and support services, working conditions, and incentive structures); better school infrastructure; textbooks and teaching materials; progressive technology and examination reforms; and school based management and leadership development (IADB, 2000; World Bank, 2009; Lewin, 2008c; Briseid and Caillods, 2004).

Conclusion

To conclude, reforming secondary education in India from an elite system to an inclusive one is a huge challenge. This would require a new framework for articulating change in the secondary education sub-sector; a framework that connects the culture (of classrooms and schools) to conditions (of learning and teaching) and to 21st century competencies.

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