

**REFORM IN LEARNING AND CURRICULUM – AN INDIAN  
PERSPECTIVE**

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**ABSTRACT**

In recent times the importance of basic education has been globally accepted as indispensable passport to life. India with a rich cultural heritage of decentralized community-based learning system is one of the signatories of Universalization of Elementary Education (UEE) and Education for All (EFA) programme. Great men like Swami Vivekananda, Mahatma Gandhi, and Rabindranath Tagore conceptualized the reform of education on the basis of rural and mass consciousness. Lately the Non Formal Education (NFE) has been introduced as reform of learning with education for out of school and for non-school-going children of the country. The government and non-governmental organizations have designed various experimental and innovative Non Formal Education programmes. Curriculum development is an essential part of education for qualitative change in pedagogy. This paper deals with the experiment on Innovative Ideas on Elementary Education Programme (IIEEP) sponsored by Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India and implemented by Ramakrishna Mission Lokasiksha Parishad. The Parishad – a NGO is working in Non Formal and Adult Education field for the last four decades. The present project focuses on designing and implementation of an innovative learner friendly curriculum following the Minimum Level of

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Learning (MLL) prescribed by the National Council of Educational Research & Training (N.C.E.R.T) blending with local need and aspirations. The project reflects some specific component viz. on the preparation of curriculum its implementation strategies, evaluation programme, community mobilization, teachers training and mainstreaming of the NFE learners ensuring the replicability of this programme.

*Keywords: Education for All (EFA,) Innovative Ideas on Elementary Education (IIEEP,) Minimum Level of Learning (MLL), National Council of Educational Research & Training (N.C.E.R.T), Non Formal Education (NFE), Non Governmental Organization (NGO), Universalization of Elementary Education (UEE).*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Basic education is universally accepted as an indispensable key to life. The Directive Principles of India's Constitution directs the executive to provide compulsory education up to the age of fourteen (14) years to all its citizens. India is one of the signatories to the "Education for All" resolution at the Jomtein World Conference held in 1990 and the Delhi Declaration of E9 summit in December 1993, when the country reiterated its commitment to basic education. All possible ways are being explored to achieve the lofty goal of universalization of elementary education.

In India, three great thinkers – Swami Vivekananda, Rabindranath Tagore and Mahatma Gandhi conceptualized the forms and contents of education and learning on rural perspective. For Vivekananda, " Education is the manifestation of perfection already in man". The basic objective of education and training is character building, controlled expressions and realization of will and self help. Mahatma Gandhi thought of blending education with work. He suggested not to just pack the minds of the students with unwanted information. For him education is the blossoming of the inner capacities of body, mind and soul, and infusion of spirit of piety and formation of character, development of personality, inculcation of respect for civic and social duties. Rabindranath Tagore, the educationist of Shantiniketan-Srineketan fame, proposed to make the process of learning a matter of joy. He agreed with Gandhi to combine learning with development of productive skills. For both of them, learning is work cum joy cum development of mind and body.

The history of Indian education shows that various types of educational institutions were established in ancient India encouraged by her great tradition of diversity, tolerance, and humanism. Even in early

nineteenth century, India had an extensive community-based education system and almost all the villages had schools.

After independence from colonial rule, the learning system introduced in Indian school remained traditional and formalized and not matching with the rural Indian people's needs and aspiration. The Indian educationist researched on it and as a consequence " school education in recent times has emerged as an important segment of total educational system expected to contribute significantly to the individual as well as the national development process. India is a multicultural, multilingual and multi-religion society. Every state and religious group has its unique identity. Therefore the culture-specific pedagogy is needed. Hence instead of using one uniform, mechanistic way of teaching-learning process, cultural and creative activity practices (dramatics, puppetry, folk play, community living, public library practices etc) may become the strong basis of pedagogy. This cultural specificity should be evolved for the tribal/rural/urban and other ethnic groups of the communities. This would lead to transparent, flexible and need-based pedagogy, making learning joyful with the involvement of the schools with the local people, their festival functions and lifestyles.

It has been strongly realized that India needs to evolve her own educational approach according to her tradition, cultural plurality, and wisdom. This thinking calls for evolving an approach to curriculum preparation based on thinking, experiences, and innovation, rooted in its indigenous tradition. Besides, the knowledge and appreciation of folk cultures, songs, traditional dance forms, costumes and musical instruments must become part of the school curriculum.

### **MINIMUM LEVELS OF LEARNING (MLL)**

The following is the relevant excerpts regarding optimum level of learning in primary education from the “National Curriculum Framework For School Education” published by N.C.E.R.T (2001):

*“In order to ensure access to the education, to all learners, irrespective of caste, creed, tradition and sex, the concept of Minimum Levels of Learning (MLL) has emerged as one of the basic concerns. The need for identifying certain essential levels of learning and development of inherent basic skills and competencies for stage by stage in school education have been defined as Minimum Levels of Learning. The concept of MLL is holistic in nature, based on the elements of the mastery level learning, child-centered and activity based teaching, continuous and comprehensive evaluation, diagnostic and remedial teaching, differential treatment to optimize achievement levels of all and action research. All these elements need to be practiced to achieve the goal of quality elementary education for all”.*

### **INNOVATIVE CONCEPTS IN CURRICULUM DESIGNING, IMPLEMENTATION AND EVALUATION**

A multi-pronged approach of Universalization of Elementary Education (UEE) and Universal Adult Literacy (UAL) through NLM has been adopted for total literacy of the country. Implementation of various schemes (viz. Nonformal Education, Operation Blackboard, District Primary Education Programme, National Open School Programme, Alternative Innovative Education Programme, Education Guarantee Scheme), are the endeavours being attempted to improve the education scenario as collective exercise by the educationists/policy makers in the Government of India and

the States in collaboration with various NGOs at local level. Presently in India about five hundred NGOs are implementing Non Formal Education (NFE) programme. To address the need for considerable innovations and experimentation in the variety of modalities in many places, effective models of NFEs are developed and scaled up to provide experience for an alternative channel for UEE. Project PROPEL by Indian Institute of Education (IIE), Project DIGANTAR by JAIPUR, Project Open Learning School by Institute of Psychological & Educational Research (IPER), Project SAMAGRA SIKSHA by Majhihira National Basic Educational Institute (MNBEI), Project IIEEP by Rama Krishna Mission deserve special mention in this connection.

### **CASE STUDY ON CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK AND IMPLEMENTATION IN WEST BENGAL, INDIA**

Project “Innovative Ideas on Elementary Education” undertaken by the Lokasiksha Parishad is the study under consideration to focus on the experiences of an Indian NGO for conceptualization and implementation of new concept in curriculum framework and successful implementation in some specific regions of West Bengal, India. Targeting Universalization of Elementary Education support services, co-curricular activities and creating a new and vital programme facilitating curricular integration in its most specific situation.

#### **Profile of the Target Area**

The target area (Sonarpur Block) is about 168 sq. km and consists of 103 villages (mouzas) administered by 11 administrative units (Gram Panchayats) and also includes part of the Sonarpur-Rajpur Municipality.

Out of 2.96 lakh of total population about 1.20 lakh (40.54%) belong to scheduled caste and 3,232 belong to scheduled tribe. About 50% is indigenous population of scheduled caste/tribe along with a large Muslim Community and the rest are migrants from Bangla Desh (erstwhile East Pakistan). The main occupation of the population is cultivation and most of the land is under paddy cultivation. Being only 15 km south of Kolkata metropolis, different types of small scale and cottage industries have grown through out the study area. There are 103 primary schools, 24 secondary schools, 7 higher secondary schools, and one college. This statistics indicates that it is an educationally advanced region. However enrollment of only 75,000 children in 6-14 age group revealed that there is still a shortfall of 30% in enrollment according to 1991- census. Moreover the ground truth is more depressing. There is a huge difference between the enrollment and attendance resulting in constant increase in numbers of dropouts. The major lessons learnt from detailed studies and sample surveys are:

- Children shun formal schools because their parents do not feel the learning atmosphere relevant to their needs and aspiration;
- The fixed timetable of formal schools do not suit the working children and are at ease in NFE Center with their flexible timetable;
- Vocational education impart greater relevance to the parents of the working children
- Recreational and fitness curriculum attract the children making learning much more joyful and interesting;
- Multi-grade competency based teaching-learning process impart reading writing and numeracy skills more methodically;

- The examination-dominated formal schooling ignores the requirements of the first generation learners.

Ramakrishna Mission Lokasiksha Parishad designed the experimental Elementary Education Programme based on the above mentioned observations and enriched experience of implementing NFE and AE Programmes for the last four decades. The Ministry of Human Resources Development, Government of India, has sponsored this experimental programme. The total time span of this experiment was seven years. The main objectives were:

- To establish a model Non Formal Education structure for 6-14 years age group children which can be replicated elsewhere in the country as a real alternative to formal primary education;
- To integrate vocational training activities with academic courses as an innovative initiative in alternative education;
- To conceptualize a curriculum integrating recreational activities, sports, and cultural programmes with Non Formal Innovative Educational Structure to make learning attractive;
- To prepare teaching-learning printed materials compatible with the designed alternative curriculum for Non Formal Education Structure; and
- To achieve the goal of Education for All (EFA).

### **Programme Implementation**

*Curriculum:* With the intention to develop a learner's friendly learning curriculum reflecting community's ethos, needs and aspirations, a curriculum formulation committee was setup. The curriculum has also proposed to address problems of working children with a view to eliminate

child labour. The committee set out to revise the existing books published by the Lokasiksha Parishad for Non Formal Education Centres during the last decades. The committee members went around villages, consulted the children and parents, tried to find out broad linguistic framework of the area, and the general expectations of the local people regarding literacy. They also collected common linguistic input of the working children and trades in which they are normally employed. Finally the specialists designed the special curriculum assimilating these findings with the parameters of Minimum Level of Learning by National Council of Education Research & Training's (N.C.E.R.T) curriculum guidelines. Thus the special Teaching-Learning Material (TLM) named Srijoni (Innovative) was printed after thorough study of the learning capabilities of the learners. These learners, it was observed are mostly working children from very poor families. This newly designed curriculum has been well taken by the local people after its implementation.

**Activities:** Children are provided a package of primary/upper primary education, vocational training, recreation and physical fitness programme. The textbooks have been followed along with supportive materials in local context. Locally available low cost/no cost materials are used as TLM along with board-duster-chart, posters, wall pictures, and storybooks.

Regular teacher orientations regarding the use of TLM and teaching methodology is the most important aspect in this experiment.

Games, role-play, story telling, other experimental activities along with 3R's teaching create joyful teaching-learning atmosphere and helped in the advancement of the programme.

Vocational training on locally demanded trades have been introduced in correlation with 3R's subject teaching.

All activity implementations are closely linked with climate building by mobilizing the local mass through some cultural programmes by centrally arranged core group followed up by the local participation. Various meetings, close interaction with the villagers, and door-to-door survey remained the other strategies adopted for mobilization.

Evaluation is the integral part in the project activities targeting at uninterrupted progress of the programme implementation. It is unlike the formal evaluation system that focuses only on cognitive aspects and ignores the non-cognitive aspects, which are the vital component of the human persona.

Since 1995 the programme implementations have been monitored regularly and systematically for development of both cognitive and non-cognitive capacities. For this purpose, emphasis has been given to both formative and summative forms of evaluation. The formative evaluation has been conducted during the course of instruction with a view to improve learners learning for uninterrupted development. Summative evaluation has been arranged at the end of the respective course to promote the learners to the next grade. The formative evaluation may be described as monitoring the classroom activities that is done at times by the instructors and sometimes by the advanced learners as well.

For summative evaluation the following special steps have been undertaken:

- Preparation of the Question Bank
- Question paper editing and finalization
- Proper packaging, sealing and distribution in the centers

- Informal environment for oral test and friendly atmosphere for written examination
- Monitoring the evaluation programme
- Papers checking and preparation of mark sheets and result.

The grass-root level teachers prepare the question bank. A special expert committee sorts out the questions in the question bank and finalize the question papers. During the evaluation the Field Supervisors and the Programme Officer attend the programmes to provide necessary help and invigilate the total activity. Proper care is taken to maintain a harmonious and friendly atmosphere during the whole process. It should be noted that between 1996 and 2002 a total of 6,407 learners appeared for evaluation out of which 70% has been mainstreamed after successful completion of their studies.

***Achievements:*** The project presumed three vital components of elementary education such as access, retention, and achievement. The project stresses to encompass all these three areas by introducing the following innovative inputs:

- Curriculum made relevant to the learners;
- Vocational education and training were introduced making learning relevant to learner's needs;
- Introduction of recreational programmes within and outside the curriculum making the learning environment more enjoyable;
- Special coaching classes for academically backward helped in minimizing dropouts

- Aspirations of the parents in continuing education after primary level have been fulfilled with the introduction of upper primary section.

The entire project is community based. The community level committees overlook the day-to-day administration of the learning centers and provide feedbacks for taking periodic corrective measures. In this respect, all these stakeholders such as parents, the learners and community leaders were frequently taken into confidence to chalk out learning and recreational curriculum at every stage.

The success of the project has not been uniform in all the areas but introduction of vocational training programme has changed the perception of the parents. The formal elementary education system would be more popular if such curriculum designing are integrated in the elementary education courses.

The most important impact the project had on the local communities is heightening of their motivation about elementary education resulting in higher enrollment in all the formal schools situated near the project learning centers.

Introduction of recreational activities within and without curriculum resulted community based education and joyful learning.

With an installed intake capacity of about 2,000 learners per year in all the 50 education centers, about 7,000 learners have participated in this new learning process from 1995-2001. About 70% of these learners have been mainstreamed without any conscious efforts. The dropout rate of this area has been remarkably low. The parents of this educationally backward region have become conscious and alert about the need of education for their children.

Inspired by this successful experience, a new programme viz. Experimental & Innovative Community Learning Centre Programme (CLC) has been initiated in another area of West Bengal with the financial assistance from UNESCO. This indicates the possibilities of the success of replication of such project in other regions.

### **CONCLUSION**

The total framework of the programme reflects an honest effort to achieve Education For All goal. The reviewed case study shows that the programme experimented by Ramakrishna Mission Lokasiksha Parishad may work as a guideline/milestone for the Alternative Innovative Education Scheme (AIE) under the latest education reform strategy of Government of India, announced as Sarvasiksha Abhiyan (a programme of Government of India for Universal Elementary Education). The designing of learner friendly curriculum, composing and printing of teaching-learning material (TLM), special training module designing for teachers, successful implementation of the curriculum framework, organizing evaluation programmes, and finally the percentage of mainstreaming and community awareness for school education indicates that this model may be replicated elsewhere in the country.

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