

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY OF INSTITUTES OF HIGHER EDUCATION :CASE FOR ACADEMIC INTERVENTION(**)

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INTRODUCTION

Education is illumination. It plays extremely significant role in the lives of individuals by empowering them with various abilities, skills, competencies, modes of creative thinking and expression and thus paving the way for enhancing the quality of life. It is perhaps the reason that every society endeavours to make all necessary arrangements for ensuring best possible education of the next generation. Another important aspect of education is that it helps preservation, sustenance and enrichment of culture. Through education the human child who seems to be dependent for its activities at birth becomes the most competent and successful human being by attaining all round development of her/his personality. This transformation is neither accidental nor haphazard. It takes place in an environment wherein various institutions operate and leave their imprints on the personality. Again the basic individual differences get shaped as per the environmental exposure available to each individual.

EXPERIENCES AT HOME AND IN PRE-SCHOOLS

Education is the outcome of human-environment interaction that one experiences as a child, as an adult and as an old person. As such education is the life long process and each one of us gets opportunities for a variety of experiences. The quest for such experiences is an inborn quality. Every human child is compelled to seek to meet her/his basic needs which in turn takes the shape of human environment interaction result of which happens to be learning which continues throughout life.

The very first institution i.e., home (mother, father, siblings, etc.) leaves indelible impact on the lives of individuals. The age 0-5 years is very much impressionable when the development of brain takes place at much faster rate. Any distortions in this period prove to be irreversible and set the limits of human development and learning. So extra care needs to be provided to children during this formative and very sensitive developmental phase. It is in this period that foundation for formal learning and

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schooling is laid by providing pre-school experience in 3-5/6 years age group through age and development appropriate experiences. Now children become ready to learn in formal manner. The socialisation process coupled with physical, intellectual, emotional and moral development enable the child to build her/his self-esteem and self confidence to be able to cope up with challenges before them.

THE ELEMENTARY EDUCATION STAGE

The period of education in the age group of 6-14 years of age is generally titled as elementary education. The recent 86th Constitution (Amendment) Act 2002 has made elementary education the fundamental right of children. The basic purpose of education extends beyond the term all round development and should include:

- Capacity to realise her own potential by being aware of own strengths and weaknesses.
- Capacity to utilise this potential appropriately.

The competencies, which may be described as learning outcomes at the elementary stage of education, are as follows:

- Basic reading and communication skills.
- Basic writing and computational skills.
- Core life skills such as decision-making, problem solving, divergent thinking, independent thinking, etc.
- Skills, habits and attitudes and

values for improving the quality of life of self and the community.

The above mentioned outcomes find their reflection in the curriculum and syllabi at the elementary stage. They seem to be within reach of every individual as levels of intelligence also do not pose any threat in their accomplishment. Even if one considers I.Q. to be the important determinant, the above assumption appears to hold good. Because in a large population 68.26 percent individuals fall between ± 1 sigma who are known as average ones; another 15.87 percent falling beyond + 1 sigma are above average. Thus 84.13 percent human beings are endowed with average and above average intelligence levels. Also the other tail ending 15.87 percent have persons who are termed educable. As such 90 percent or so are born capable of taking full advantage of elementary education which pitches to achieve very moderate criteria aimed at turning out useful citizens for the society.

THE IMPORTANCE OF ELEMENTARY EDUCATION IN OUR LIVES

As the buildings rest on their foundations, we stand on our legs; the whole edifice of education is created and rests on the solid foundation of elementary education. Scientific studies reveal that the kind of grooming in linguistic, arithmetical and other competencies at elementary education stage contributes a lot in the subsequent academic and professional education courses. The learning gaps and inadequacies of personality

development pertaining to elementary education do constitute great personality disorders and social-professional hazards. It would be no exaggeration if we admit sincerely that a great and significant part of our happier lives owes to our equipments at early stage of learning during the elementary schooling. This is true not only with academic performance but other aspects of socio-emotional development, habits and skills which are helpful or otherwise in later life depending upon the experiences during very early grades.

ELEMENTARY EDUCATION: A MATTER OF COMMITMENT

It is a globally recognised fact that education and human development are very intricately linked phenomenon. Accordingly all awakened societies consider elementary education as a social activity. It is this area of ignorance and poverty which attracts attention of the whole world and the leaders make resolves to eradicate these using all the might at their command. The World Education Conference (Jomtein, 1990) is the living example where in assembly of nations of the world declared “Education for All” as the main goal and resolved to join together to achieve it. Again Dakar Summit (2000) reviewed the progress across the globe and reiterated the resolve by working out EFA strategies and Action Points. Further Millennium Development Goals (2006) confirm the world commitment to achieve Education of satisfactory quality for All

by 2015. Towing the same line India has expressed its commitment to universalise Elementary Education of satisfactory quality by 2010 through its Flagship programme of *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan* (SSA). This Indian effort is the outcome of various policy initiatives since independence. The National Policy on Education (1986) and Programme of Action 1992 had laid emphasis on quality Elementary Education and had suggested measures for improvement in the quality of education through reforms in content and process of classroom teaching, improvement in school facilities, provision of additional teachers, standardising levels of learning at primary stage and so on. As such we, in India, stand committed to the Universalisation of Elementary Education of satisfactory quality.

THE QUALITY CONCERNS UNDER SARVA SHIKSHA ABHIYAN

The *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan* (SSA) is a holistic and convergent programme attracting both primary and upper primary stages of education with the main focus on providing quality basic education within a clear time frame. The Specific Goals of the SSA include:

- All children in school, Education Guarantee Centre, Alternative School, Back to School Camps by 2003;
- All children complete five years of primary schooling by 2007;
- All children complete eight years of elementary schooling by 2010;

- Focus on elementary education of satisfactory quality with emphasis on 'education for life'.
- Bridge all gender and social category gaps at primary stage by 2007 and at elementary education level by 2010;
- Universal Retention – by 2010.

The term quality requires proper understanding in operational terms so that it does not convey different meanings to different people under different circumstances. The quality refers to high degree of goodness, worth or excellence in an object or system. When applied to education, it is viewed as an attribute of relevance, perfection and educational success among individuals. As such, major function of education is to promote capability to enable individuals for learning continuously and adapting to changes, and therefore, it helps individuals in facing the challenges of life. Many a times comparisons are made in individual performances over a period of time or against the set criteria laid down in advance in the context of the elementary education curriculum.

In the present scenario, the major factors influencing quality elementary education which are considered essential are as under:

- Basic Infrastructure and other Facilities
 - Learning Environment
 - Teacher and Teacher Preparation
 - Curriculum and Teaching-Learning Material
 - Teaching-Learning Process
 - Instructional Time (Teaching-Learning Time)
- Evaluation, Monitoring and Supervision
 - Community Participation and Support

The *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan* adopts a multi-pronged approach to ensure that the basic conditions, facilities and capacities are ensured to yield the desired quality of elementary education.

It is heartening to note that a great amount of success seems to have been achieved with regard to access to education by bringing schools and schooling closer to the children. However, great variations exist across the States and Union Territories. While no specific single most criterion of quality could be ascertained, the achievement levels of children at the end of the primary and upper primary cycles or within them continue to be considered as the important yardstick for measuring quality. Even on this criteria also the achievement levels of children are found to be low (National Achievement Surveys conducted by the NCERT). Also the percentage of children achieving more than 60% marks happens to be abysmally low. It is, therefore, a matter of great concern despite continuously increasing financial allocations for elementary education, introduction of educational cess for UEE and various large-scale efforts of District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) and *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan* (SSA) and various innovative experiments like Lok Jumbish, Rishi Valley Experiments of Andhra Pradesh,

Nalli-Kalli of Karnataka and many others, the situation is alarming.

QUALITY – A MANAGEMENT ISSUE

It has been proved with implementation of National and State level programmes that mere availability of funds, infrastructure, manpower, training, innovations and monitoring cannot ensure quality of elementary education, although these are the basic requirements and need to be there for effective utilisation of resources with a view to achieving targets. The reflection on the present scenario would suggest that larger issues of management are involved and need to be addressed on priority basis. The point raised, about making the system work, in the document 'Challenge of Education (1985)' has great relevance which states that 'Let Teachers teach and students learn.' These considerations provide the following insights:

- There have to be teachers in schools
- Teachers have to be adequate in numbers
- Teachers need to be professionally trained and committed.
- Proper need based context specific in-service training be organised on a regular basis.
- The District and Sub-District structures have to be positioned with specific Charter of rules and responsibilities.
- The basic infrastructure facilities, curriculum, textbooks and teaching learning materials need to be available in sufficient quantity and on time.

- There has to be a proper system of accountability with proper and holistic monitoring and inter-linkages.
- The horizontal and vertical coordination between institutions and personnel needs to be functional.
- Proper participation of community and other levels of educational institutions.

All these things taken together give rise to an understanding that the quality can be achieved if the elementary education is managed effectively.

The Role of Higher Education Institutes towards Enhancing Quality of Elementary Education.

Since elementary education is a matter of great social concern and there should hardly be any individual person or agency to feel less unconcerned about it. The elementary education, as stated earlier, is foundation of education for life, in general, and formal education in particular. The system cannot survive for long if the quality of elementary education is poor. The system of governance of elementary education has been entrusted to the concerned departments in the States and in the Central Government being helped by various institutions at State and National Level for convenience sake. The institutes of higher learning, which survive on the inputs of elementary education, are likely to degenerate in due course of time if the

elementary education continues to turn out inferior output. The institutes of higher education will have to consider, as users of elementary education, strengthening of elementary education in the country by providing support in a variety of ways. The inter-institutional support and also the public-private partnership with proper networking of institutions seems to be necessary if the commitment for quality elementary education for all is to be realised.

This will be an important landmark in the history of educational development in India, if higher education institutes come forward to support the cause of elementary education. This can be considered at the level of individuals, community and institutions.

A. SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY OF ELEMENTARY EDUCATION AS INDIVIDUAL

Each individual has to bear in mind that there has been a significant contribution of elementary education in her/his life and this obligation should be repaid in a variety of ways:

- When one acquires adulthood and becomes a household, she or he should give top priority to elementary education of her/his wards/children.
- One should look around the educational facilities in the vicinity and should feel concerned about them. In such a situation, one can

contribute himself or herself as a member of society or can bring to the notice of the responsible persons so that each single problem of elementary education is brought to the notice of one and all and is resolved at the earliest.

- In case some of the youngsters opt for teaching profession, they must do their best in seeing all children learn at the highest level.
- Some of the youngsters would eventually occupy positions in civil services or would become public representatives, they should exhibit their keen interest, involvement and commitment towards improvement of quality of elementary education.
- As individual citizens, each one of us has a right to see educational institutions functioning and may act as facilitator when opportunities are there.

B. SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY OF THE COMMUNITY

The elementary education institutions have direct linkages with the community. The community has a role in the governance of the schools. They are supposed to provide support in a variety of ways and also exercises control for the system to work efficiently. Here the community members need to reorient themselves about their contributing roles without interference.

- Community is supposed to ensure that there remain no out of school children
- Community should assume a role

- of monitoring the attendance of children and teachers.
- Community has to be in regular touch with the school teachers and authorities and assess the progress on a periodical basis.
- Community can play a pro-active role in supporting the activities of the school so as to ensure proper development of children in all aspects of their personality.
- Community may provide volunteer's possessing a variety of experiences to offer their services to the school system in the areas of need.

C. SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY OF HIGHER INSTITUTIONS

The higher education institutions are the real users of the product of elementary education on the one hand and providers of teachers and managers of education at the elementary stage on the other. In such a case, the higher education institutions have to play a very important role in strengthening elementary education and ensuring higher levels of quality.

The institutions may have certain sensitisation programmes for general awareness of the students under their charge so that the importance of elementary education is highlighted and an attitude for contributing towards elementary education is developed. The following action points are accordingly visualised.

- The higher education institutions may adopt some of the elementary institutions and may attempt for enhancing quality in their respective areas of jurisdiction.
- There can be some institutional complexes organised to allow interaction between institutions of higher learning and those of elementary education so that strategies for partnerships are evolved.
- Every student of higher education institute should undergo an orientation towards elementary education—its status and problems.
- Wherever possible, some field work or visits to elementary education institutions and project reports in the area of elementary education be prescribed.
- At proper levels, some students of higher education institutes may be asked to conduct case studies in the area of elementary education.
- The programmes like National Social Service (NSS) be focused towards elementary education.
- Engineering and Management students could be offered specialisation in elementary education.
- The higher education institutions may have seminars and conferences to enhance awareness about elementary education and discussing the role of every citizen in different capacities for ensuring quality education for all.

- The vocational training to students of elementary education could also be considered wherein collaboration of higher education institutes with elementary education institutes will be feasible.
- The management institutes could consider evolving courses on educational management put forward to principals and headmasters, educational planners and administrators, etc.

GOLDEN OPPORTUNITY FOR HIGHER EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTES

Ways and means should be explored for cooperation and collaboration of institutes of higher education, policy makers and planners of elementary education so as to help in improving the quality of elementary education. This will help generate greater awareness about elementary education, its contribution towards

higher education and mutual interdependence. It will also help to instill a sense of responsibility of higher education institutions towards elementary education not only as a matter of concern but also with gratitude. Higher education institutions can certainly strengthen the elementary education institutions by generating an atmosphere of trust, mutual cooperation, working together to improve quality of learning at all levels and contribute towards creating brighter and enlightened civil society. This should essentially be considered as a golden opportunity for higher education institutions to think in this direction, generate relevant literature, train the human resources evolve action points, garner support and provide opportunities of growth and development to one and all and eliminate the curse of ignorance and poverty from the country.

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