

Systemic Reforms in Education - A Strategy for Implementation of RTE Act 2009

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Abstract: *The major problems in education today are interrelated and as such, its true nature is multiple and systemic rather than isolated and specific. Therefore, the attempts to address these problems must also be structural and holistic. Systemic reform embodies three integral components: central, enabling and supporting factors. The Government of India endeavours to enhance quality education for all learners between the age group of 1 to 14 through the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), the designated scheme to meet the object of RTE Act, 2009. Systemic reforms have to be designed whereby the functions that schools are expected to do can be performed most effectively and competently. There is need for more effective and strategic approach to the allocation of resources to improve instruction which require greater overall financial investment in education and thus greater public commitment to the future.*

Keywords: Systemic reforms, RTE Act, Education, Curriculum

1. Introduction

Even after decades of reforms in the education system, it is being condemned as inadequate to realise the vision of society enshrined in the constitution of India. A number of National Commissions have been appointed to assess the prospects of our schools for providing “educational excellence”. They have examined the school situations and practices and many have attempted to present suggestions which will help the state legislatures, education agencies, school boards to modify the existing practices to better serve the educational needs of today’s society and students. The Indian Parliament has passed the Right of children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act, 2009 with the compliance of the 86th Constitutional Amendment Act.

The RTE Act with the mandate to provide accessible quality education for children, lays down norms and standards required for ensuring quality and accessibility; provisions for age appropriate admission for out of school children; deployment of teachers in the specified Pupil-Teacher-Ratio without any urban-rural imbalance; no form of discrimination based on gender, caste, class and religion; provides for development of curriculum that ensures the all-round development of every child; no detention until class VIII; formation of School Management Committees (SMCs) and is also backed by a grievance redressal mechanism (MHRD,2009).

The RTE Act, 2009 stands enforced with its detailed entitlements. However, in the field we find that its effective implementation is still blocked by various factors. We need to admit that we have been concentrating on the symptoms of the problem rather than on underlying causes. The major problems in education today are interrelated and as such, its true nature is multiple and systemic rather than isolated and specific. Therefore, the attempts to address these problems must also be structural and holistic. Systemic reform embodies three integral components: (1) the promotion of ambitious student outcomes for all students;(2) alignment of policy approaches and the actions of various policy institutions to promote such outcomes; and (3) restructuring

the governance system to support improved achievement [Smith and O’Day (1991)].

Quality assurance in education at the elementary stage is essential as it is foundational in nature, without which sustained and meaningful progress in education is difficult (Banerji R. and Walton M, 2011). Curricular vision needs to be supported with systemic reforms of institutions that foster practices supportive of children’s inclusion in school and their learning. Systemic reforms have to be designed whereby the functions that schools are expected to do can be performed most effectively and competently.

2. Why is systemic Reform Necessary?

The nation’s social and economic structure has tremendously changed. The changes in the traditional family structure, the inadequacy of social welfare and social welfare programmes and a decreased sense of civic responsibility are among the factors that are directly or indirectly placing new expectations on educators (Conley, 1993). Even after a radical change in the society and its needs, many outdated and ineffectual purposes and methods still remain to be retained by the educational system. Effective educational reform requires a fundamental change in the relationship between teachers, knowledge and students and the locus of educational reform needs to be within the classroom and centered around pedagogy (Elmore, 1996).

3. Dimensions of Systemic Reform

Moving over the educational landscape, we observe many impedimental proposed as problems which prevent the education system from achieving excellence. The problems cited ranges from inefficient teachers, inadequate school facilities, don’t care attitude of parents to the shifting of responsibility by the federal, state and local governments. No one agrees with anyone else as to what the problem is, but all agree that there is a „problem“.

The dimensions of educational restructuring can be grouped into the subsets- central, enabling and supporting factors. The factors that have a powerful direct effect on student

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learning are labelled as central. This group includes the learner outcomes, curriculum instruction and assessment. The learning environment, technology, school-community relations, time management etc make up the enabling factors. The supporting factors move away from the classroom but comprise crucial factors like, governance, teacher leadership, personal structures and working relationships.

1) Central Factors: The factors that have direct effect on student learning are

- (i) **Learner outcomes:** The outcome of learning should envisage development of child as a person, citizen and as a worker and application of what they learn in life.
- (ii) **Curriculum instruction:** It should recognise a wide range of individual talents, interest and abilities, encourage the acquisition of various scholastic and co-scholastic competencies, and view productive work as pedagogic medium for knowledge acquisition, developing values and multiple-skill formation.
- (iii) **Examination Reforms:** Evaluation, due to its pivotal role in deciding what the learners learn and what the teachers teach is acknowledged as a powerful means of improving the quality of education in schools. The existing text-based and quiz-type questioning, which induces an excessive level of fretfulness and pressure and promotes rote learning is to be replaced. Continuous and Comprehensive evaluation (CCE) needs to be used for diagnosis, remediation and enhancing learning.

2) Enabling Factors:

- (i) **Learning environment:** Proper infrastructure facilities, capable and socially sensitive teachers and appropriate and amenable learning environment have to be provided to ensure conducive socio-emotional conditions for the inclusion of all children in the learning process. Systemic reforms have to take care of the number of schools and the facilities required for the conduct of activity-based learning. For making logical connections, conceptualisation and application, schools must offer the possibility of conducting surveys, undertaking projects, library research and other individual as well as group tasks within the curriculum framework.
- (ii) **Learning Materials:** Schools and teachers should be encouraged and trained to develop their own visual and oral teaching-learning materials.
- (iii) **Technology:** Make use of technology to increase the reach of educational programmes
- (iv) **School community relations:** School should be integrated more with the local community. It should also remain as a resource centre for the local area, by providing its resources for good use to the public
- (v) **Time:** Flexibility in time schedule will be helpful for activity based learning and effective implementation of CCE.
- (vi) **Teachers:** Advocates of systemic reform propose to radically change instruction, and for that they must rely on teachers and administrators. Unless teachers learn much more about the subjects they teach, and devise new approaches to instruction, most students' learning will not change [Cohen,1995].
 - Appoint adequate number of trained teachers in the respective subject areas
 - Teacher-student ratio to be 1:30 (as per RTE norms)

- Ensure minimum standards with respect to entry level qualifications
- Pay attention to morale and motivation of teachers
- Adequate infrastructure facilities to be provided

(vii) Professionalization of teaching:

- Reform in policies governing recruitment: School's requirement to be considered while recruiting teachers, transfers to be less frequent and based on norms.
- Pre-service training: The emphasis should be both on pedagogy and the content. It should provide them with experiences in construction of curriculum, preparation of syllabi, learning material, choice of texts, construction and use of various assessment techniques, maintenance of records of scholastic and co-scholastic competencies.
- Provide ongoing academic support through in-service teacher training and favourable working conditions. Training should be on reflective teaching to ensure integration and inter-disciplinarity among the subjects.
- Provision for consulting experts in the respective fields and sharing of experiences with the peer group

(viii) Supporting Factors

- (i) **Governance:** Autonomy to be given to the school authorities and bureaucratic hassles to be lessened. It is important for individuals in the upper levels of an organization to demonstrate support for and understanding of the need for change (Barkley and Castle 1993).
- (ii) **Teacher leadership:** Autonomy to start different club activities
- (iii) **National Level institutions:** To render adequate support and create models.
- (iv) **Resource and finance:** The budget to be flexible enough to ensure autonomy to the school which will cater to the needs of teachers and children.
- (v) **Partnerships-school system, civic society, NGOs, teacher organisations:** These can help evolve norms to improve school functioning by using their influence over their teacher members and can also draw attention to the inputs and supports that are necessary for effective curriculum transaction, and act as constructive pressure groups on issues such as school resources, quality of teacher education and professional development.
- (vi) **Tackling the erosion of the teaching profession:** Measures have to be taken for boosting the morale and motivation of teachers. Various measures for teachers' evaluation- self, students, per, monitoring authority- is to be created. Teachers should not be assessed in terms of the marks of their students.
- (vii) **Administrative Guidelines:** To encourage flexibility in transacting textbooks, producing material, conducting examinations and for continuous assessment of children, proper and timely administrative guidelines are to be provided.

There is need for more effective and strategic approach to the allocation of resources to improve instruction. Our schools lack some of the very basic resources necessary for effective instruction: space for libraries, furniture, personnel,

computers and calculators and even classrooms. The challenges in implementation of the Act can also be met out with accountability and effective complaint redressal mechanism going hand in hand with awareness generation and assertion of rights (Haider, 2016). „Education for all“ with better quality require greater overall financial investment in education and thus greater public commitment to the future.

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