

Chapter 6: Conclusions and Recommendations

Right to compulsory and free elementary education for all children was provisioned consequent to enactment of the RTE act in 2010 in India. The Act mandates that all measures be taken by governments to identify and enrol the heretofore out of school children and also ensure their mainstreaming into elementary education. Section 4 of the Act provides for special training to all children to enable them to bridge the gap between their biological age and the academic age so that they can be mainstreamed in to an age-appropriate class. Special training (ST) includes scholastic aspects of children, number and quality of teachers and their training levels, availability and design of learning material, school infrastructure, etc. Besides these, effectiveness of ST would be influenced by socio-economic and cultural inequities.

Summary of Findings

The study finds that the policy and guidelines issued by MHRD in October 2010 incorporating aspects of the Bordia Committee Report and the National Workshop on Special Training were comprehensive. State governments, albeit, issued similar or identical guidelines with only little modification. Funding has been adequate over the years. But the spending rate of the states have been around 60-70% only. Hence, it can be assumed that the ST process was not adversely affected by lack of funds. However, based on the experiences of the last five years, there is need to review some policies. Good practices need to be widely circulated for emulating by all.

The numbers of out of school children have been reducing over these years from 2010 to 2016 presumably due percolated awareness and renewed impetus at all levels- government, NGOs and private bodies. Yet, over 15 lakh children are estimated to be out of school in 2016-17. The trend is persistent and hence special training will continue to be relevant in future too. The problem of large numbers of OOSC gets further complicated by

dynamics of geography, demography, socio-economic factors and literacy. Wide age-differential between the biological age and the academic age, and the mandate to admit the OOSC to his/her age-appropriate (AA) grade compounds the problem further.

The enormity of the age-differential, on one hand, increases the complexity of the ST and on the other reduces the overall time for delivery of the ST. Dropping out after enrolment makes the children out of school again. It further widens the gap that needs to be bridged by the ST to mainstream these children into an age-appropriate class. On one hand, duration of ST to bridge the gap increases and on the other the time available to administer ST decreases -a case of double jeopardy for such children.

Quantum of schools that conduct ST has increased over the years and hence the capacity to deliver the ST. Given that the fund utilisation on account of ST falls short of the target implies that the states indeed have a residual fiscal capacity which can be used for more ST. ST in non-residential mode within school premises seems to be a favourable option and given its ease of implementation must be maximised wherever feasible. Residential ST due to its greater focus seems to result in better mainstreaming and reduced drop-outs. It may be worthwhile to maximise this option specially for the remote areas. Participation of private bodies has been decreasing over the years. In modern times, PPP enables capacity building and hence should be maximised, of course without compromising quality.

The numbers of educational volunteers (EV), including serving school teacher, has been increasing and seems to be adequate. However, there is a need to measure the quality of ST they administer. Throughputs of the ST centres and the EVs there in, if measured and monitored, will enable assessment of ST better. The learning material designed by the state SCERT has been in use for about three years. Its efficacy also needs to be assessed

and review undertaken, if required. The usual norm of government, to review policy only after review only after longer periods needs to be telescoped to three years since the time is running out for the OOSC.

Not only the number of schools that provide ST has increased considerably, the throughput of schools providing ST has also increased. This seems to be induced by better enrolment. This increased throughput may also be due to the increased number of EV and adequacy of funds. Norms of the pupil teacher ratio (PTR) for ST has not been increasing. Hence, overall it appears to be a case of genuine capacity building. Yet, there is a shortfall between the numbers that were imparted ST and those actually got mainstreamed. This may be a good measure of the efficacy of the ST. The real shortfall will widen if numbers that were mainstreamed but did not attend an age-appropriate class despite ST. It is seen that the shortfall is considerable and is worthy of further rigorous analysis. Statistical analysis has shown that the correlation between number of schools and the total number of children completed ST was high where the ST was imparted by specially engaged teachers, NGOs, better availability of TLM and private bodies in urban areas. Even though the correlation was high, the statistical significance value was negligible.

The findings from one of the districts of Delhi were interesting. Notwithstanding the age differential, most students were also able to achieve the competence to mainstream into classes as high as 6, 7 and 8 merely with 12 months of ST. Something which is hard to accept. Further research is needed to validate the findings. Moreover, some really fast learners from the STC, analysed by the study, were mainstreamed into senior classes like 7 and 8 with less than eight months of ST. Notwithstanding the scepticism, these OOSC need to be reckoned as genius in their own accord and hence this national resource should be nurtured as such. Somehow, the STCs too did not maintain child level learning

outcomes of the mainstreamed OOSC for follow up. Measuring the effectiveness of ST would continue to remain a challenge in future too, unless policy corrections are made.

Anxieties arising from the socio-cultural and economic trepidation, the lack of academic competence of the mainstreamed child may further distress the child and result in eventual drop-out (Anil Bordia, 2012). On the contrary, good competence will reassure the OOSC and inspire him to complete the education. Special training can thus be a very important instrument in bolstering the right to of elementary education the OOSC. Hence, quality of ST becomes paramount.

Way ahead

The study has found out that special training to mainstream the OOSC is not in the conscious mind of the stakeholders and activists, private public alike. Researched literature and data is scanty and where it does exist the research is limited to the mainstreaming of the OOSC and does focus on learning outcomes after the mainstreaming. Thus assessment of the effectiveness of the special training opens up avenues for research. The study convinces that delivery of the special training is a complex issue, more complex than school education system. The ST process can be seen as a feeder process for the school albeit to even senior classes like 6, 7 and 8. There are indications that merely one year of ST has the potential to mainstream some fast learners into upper primary levels, a silver lining in the dark clouds. These brilliant scholars could be reckoned as national assets and nurtured. To that extent the OOSC and their mainstreaming should be seen as an opportunity. Notwithstanding the enormity of the numbers of OOSC, each child's learning outcomes especially after in Classes 9 and beyond, need to be monitored digitally, analysed statistically and then researched to enhance the effectiveness of the ST.

After all public money is being spent on the ST. Besides, an ineffective ST will render the mainstreamed child unable to cope with academic rigour in the main school resulting in his dropping out and eventual violation his/her right to elementary education, in some ways abetted by the State. The time is running out for the OOSC and the nation alike.