

Chapter 1: Introduction

Webster's defines education as 'knowledge and development resulting from an instructive process', or more specifically, the act or progression of acquiring or imparting knowledge. Most people think a good education is the result of completing a specific number of years in a formal instructive discipline, such as higher education acquired in colleges and universities in a specific field of study. It also defines schooling as 'the process of being taught, such as in a school'. 'Schooling' is often thought to occur in the lower grades, where children are taught the basics which enable them to continue learning at the higher educational institutions. 'Schooling' is also thought to be accomplished in a particular vocational skill or trade, such as a 'mechanics' or 'beauty' school.

India enacted the right to education through 'The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act 2009' (RTE). Notably, the right of the children is towards 'education' and not merely to 'schooling'. The act stipulates that the appropriate government (Centre and State governments) shall provide free and compulsory education to every child. The term compulsory education means the obligation of the appropriate government to provide free education to every child of the age six to fourteen and ensure compulsory admission, attendance and completion of elementary education by every child of the age six to fourteen years. Section 4 of the Act provides that "children above six years, who have either not been admitted to any school or, having been admitted have not completed elementary education and have dropped out, the right to be admitted to a **class appropriate to his or her age for completing elementary education**". Here in lies the debate.

Statement of Problem

This provision in Section 4 of the RTE Act enables these out-of-school children to be admitted to an **age-appropriate class** and complete elementary education. The overall

objective of age-appropriate admission for these children is to save them from the humiliation and embarrassment of sitting with younger children. When older children are forced to sit in a class younger than their age, they tend to be teased, taunted, suffer lower self esteem, and consequently drop out. Special training is the set of process and systems that have been provided for in the RTE Act to ensure that the out of school children are mainstreamed into an age-appropriate class and thereon complete their elementary education.

Numerous factors determine the efficacy of the delivery of the special training such as the extent and complexity of the age differential between the biological age and the academic age; the capacity of school to deliver the special training and the socio-economic aspects before and after the child is mainstreamed. The success of mainstreaming depends on the success of the special training (ST). Thus, effectiveness of the ST plays a key role.

Rationale and Justification

The RTE Act facilitates a child admitted to an **age appropriate class to be given Special Training** to enable him or her to be at par with other children. Given the varied life experiences of these children, it is recognised in the field of education that their mental capabilities are higher than that of entry level 6-year old children, and that they are indeed **capable of accelerated learning**. At the end of the Special Training, the child will be assessed and his/her suitability for being placed in a particular class will be reviewed. For example, if a 10-year old child was admitted to class IV, and received two years of Special Training till age 12, an assessment may be made as to whether the child could cope better in class V or VI in the formal school, and the child appropriately placed. If such child is found suitable for class V, she/he will be placed in class V, rather than mechanically being placed in class VI – because if she/he is mechanically placed in class VI, she/he might again drop out, and that would defeat the whole purpose of this provision. That is the

rationale for the provision that allows the child to be provided free and compulsory education even beyond age 14. Even after a child is appropriately placed in the formal school she may continue to receive special attention by the teacher to enable her to successfully integrate with the rest of the class, academically and emotionally (MHRD, Clarification, 2010)¹.

The obligation under section 4 is on the schools established by the State Government and local authority. Private aided and unaided institutions have no obligations under Section 4 of the Act.

The **academic-age and the biological-age** of a child who did not attend school earlier or has been a drop-out are bound to be different. Though, a mechanism of ST (Special Training) has been mandated it is felt that a lot more needs to be done to bridge this gap. The debate about the age-appropriate classes, its determination and thereafter administering special training is a challenge faced by numerous state government schools.

One may be motivated to believe that the aforesaid gap is a temporary phenomenon and will resolve itself as time passes. Owing to socio-economic conditions and the wide-spread poverty in rural and urban India, the numbers of out-of-school children will continue to be high and hence this phenomenon is likely to persist for long.

Thus, there is a need to investigate into the factors that impact the effectiveness of the ST, such as the school level factors and the special training related aspects and the inter linkages thereof.

Objectives

The research attempts to:-

¹ Clarification on Provisions : THE RIGHT OF CHILDREN TO FREE AND COMPULSORY EDUCATION ACT, 2009

- Identify the extent and complexity of the gap between the academic age and the biological age of children between six to fourteen years.
- Analyse effectiveness of Special Training imparted to OOSC mandated by the act to enable their mainstreaming.
- Suggest methods for enhancing effectiveness of Special Training including through Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) and Self-Help Groups (SHG).
- Formulate policy guidelines and options for enhancing effectiveness of Special Training.

Research Questions

The study proposes to examine the following issues with a view to assess the adequacy of the present modes of special training and recommend process and systems to enhance it, if feasible. Thus the research study attempts to answer the following questions:-

- What are the complexities imposed by the age differential, between the biological age and the academic age, on the planning and conduct of special training of the OOSC?
- Are the present systems and processes of the special training effective in bridging the said gap and thus enable mainstreaming the OOSC into an age appropriate class?

Limitations and Delimitations

Although the study is well thought out, it still has some limitations. The number of the units of analysis in the study was large enough and has significant relationships to school level parameters that impact special training. The sample size is not a limitation. However there are other limitations:-

Lack of reliable data - the raw data from the secondary sources such as District Information System of Education (DISE), National University of Education planning and Administration (NUEPA), Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), National Council for Educational Research and Training (NCERT) etc though obtained through matured instruments of data capture, given the comprehension and biases of schools staff, unintentional errors may were expected. An attempt to overcome these was made by testing its veracity with other parameters. However, the data cannot be assumed to be error free.

Lack of prior research studies on the topic - citing prior research studies which form the basis of literature review to lay a foundation for understanding the research problem has been a challenge. The provision for special training to OOSC is a relatively new concept in India. Though special training in many other forms like residential bridge courses and camps have been run by NGOs and governments in the past too. But the conduct of ST has not been mandated prior to 2010 when the RTE act was enacted. NGOs, who otherwise seem willing to critique government policy implementations, also confessed that this area has not been researched by them. This limitation can serve as an important opportunity to identify new gaps in the literature and to describe the need for further research.

Lack of granular (or de-aggregated) data of OOSC- the school level metrics has been assessed well since school level data in raw form was available. However, learning outcomes data has been aggregated to a class level and not de-aggregated to student level which weakens the statistical treatment. Even in the case of data in the child tracking systems, the monitoring of the learning outcomes of OOSC was not separable from the class outcomes. The child identification and subsequent monitoring has been a big challenge mainly because the unique identifier of each child remains unascertained.

Access - access to government officers and their limited availability for focussed group discussions on policy and strategy affected some insights.

Further the study delimits itself from rigorous statistical treatment of the correlation of various modes of delivery of the special training to assess which model will be more effective for which target group of OOSC based on demographic and socio-economic diversity. This too opens up avenues for future research.

Chapterisation Scheme

The study is laid out in the following chapters:-

- a. Chapter 1 - Introduction.
- b. Chapter 2 - Literature Review
- c. Chapter 3 - Research Methodology
- d. Chapter 4 - Analysis
 - i. Section 1 - Analysis of Out of School Children (OOSC) in India
 - ii. Section 2 - Complexity and Estimation of Age-Appropriate Grade
 - iii. Section 3 - Analysis of Designing, Conduct and Effectiveness of Special Training to Out of School Children
- e. Chapter 3 - Results and Discussions
- f. Chapter 3 - Conclusions and Recommendations

Besides the aforesaid, other parts of dissertation are the Acknowledgements, Table of Contents, Bibliography, Tables of Figures and Tables, and Index.