# Chapter 1 : Objective and Research Methodology

## 1.1 Statement of the Problem

Despite the foundation of modern education having been laid in India by the British over a century and a half ago, India continues to score dismally in most literacy indicators, not just relative to the developed world, but also in most cases with respect to other developing countries. What is worse, when one starts to dig beyond mere quantitative indicators into issues of quality, one uncovers morass entrenched so deep in the system that decades of governmental intervention have not been able to address it so far.

While the gravity of the problem has been long recognised, this happens to be the most opportune time to launch a concerted effort to tackle the issue. Primarily because we are at a stage which is just right at which course correction must necessarily be applied to what must surely be the most momentous and (at INR 2.31 Trillion) most heavily financed governmental intervention in Indian education till date – the Right to Education Act.

The Right to Education Act itself came about as a result of recognition in the corridors of power and politics of the importance of and the fundamental role of education in the overall development paradigm, and the growing incongruence between our claims to emerging superpower status on the one hand and a mass of statistics reflecting stagnation in vital human development indicators on the other.

It has also been widely appreciated that, vis-à-vis developed nations and also several other developing nations, the rural-urban chasm runs much deeper and wider in India. Not only can these starkly visible claims not be denied, but also we can no longer afford to concentrate on growth driven by a few high-tech sectors in predominantly urban settings to the exclusion of the much larger population and landmass that rural India occupies, and the untapped growth opportunities that it presents. Hence the importance of concentrating our efforts on rural education in India.

This much is indisputable – in the target year of its fruition, the Right to Education Act's lofty ideal of free and universal education for all 6 to 14 year olds is yet to be realized. While primary enrolment has been steadily rising and, at 96 percent, is close to the target, and female enrolment also shows a corresponding improvement overall, it is observed that a large number of states lag behind significantly, and have been unable to make much progress on getting the most vulnerable group of 11 to 14 year old girls to school. Moreover, only three-fourths of those rural children who enter primary school complete it. Entry into school continues to be late, and progress on early child education continues to be slow, with more than 35 per cent 3 year olds

reported as being out of school. In any case upper primary schools continue to be in short supply.

Moreover, progress on bringing school infrastructure up to Right to Education (RTE) Act norms has been mixed, and poorer in case of primary schools. Almost 35 per cent of schools are not in *pucca* buildings, close to 13 per cent have either single classrooms or none at all, and very large numbers are in need of repairs or renovation. Dismally low levels in certain RTE Act parameters, such as electrification, teacher: pupil ratio and access to computers, present cause for alarm. 11 per cent of schools have either a single teacher or none at all. All of this certainly owes much to the tardy disbursal of RTE funds.

Less measurable, but nevertheless readily discernible, is the steady erosion in quality of education which is an even more worrying factor than lack of proliferation, most starkly documented in the Annual Status of Education (ASER) reports brought out by the NGO Pratham. For instance as per their report, the number of children in Standard-II who are unable to recognise letters in 2014 is almost two and a half times what it was in 2010. Such decline has been observed all over the country, even in states with better overall standards. Even private schools, whose performance standards are better by a steadily increasing margin than those of government schools, have not proved immune to this decline.

The worsening quality of government schools, in absolute as well as in relative terms, can be directly attributed to the fact that India has the dubious distinction of having the highest teacher absenteeism in the world, on which account alone it dissipates an estimated 22.5 per cent of its education funds.

All this has made it evident that it is high time that we rid ourselves of the hypocrisy surrounding free universal education, look at setting up lighter and cost-efficient structures that are sensitive to market needs, and focus on learning outcomes rather than on completing the syllabus.

## 1.2  Aim of the Study

The study aims at looking at practical objectives that recognise the need for private participation, look at bringing in synergy between the government, private players, and NGOs in a coherent strategy funded and regulated by the government, but not controlled by it to be able to arrest the cumulative decline in rural education standards.

## 1.3 Objectives

The objectives of this paper are as under: -

- Critically evaluate the existing rural education system in India through examination of the current state of Rural Education Indicators.
- Carry out a critical examination of the RTE Act's reception and impact in the rural context.
- Identify challenges to universal quality education in Rural Areas.
- Identify major stakeholders and their strengths
- Suggest a future course for implementation in letter and spirit.

These objectives will involve examining the entire spectrum of education, ranging from the pre-primary through the primary, secondary to the higher secondary for the Rural Education System. At each stage, the study will try to identify the principal stakeholders, and their unique strengths, identify past and present practices that have worked best, and identify ways to achieve synergy and focus of effort.

## 1.4 Research Questions

The fundamental research question that this paper shall seek to answer is : what exactly plagues the country's rural education system, how to get rural children to school, and how to provide them quality education, which will help them and help the country's economy. This, in turn, would translate into answering the following questions:-

- How to maximise enrolment and retention?
- How to improve the quality of teachers and ensure that they do their job?
- What are the strengths and capabilities of non-state actors?
- How to synergise the efforts of all the stakeholders?

## 1.5 Methodology

The methodology will be combination of desk reseach and empirical field findings, based on qualitative and quantitative analysis. The following will be the methodology employed: -

**Desk Research**

- Critical evaluation of archival sources, encompassing reports published by government agencies as well as independent NGOs working in rural education, and study of books, news articles, and reports related to rural education.
- Study of best rural education and development practices that have been implemented by various agencies in India, as well as some of the successful models that are there in other countries, and their applicability to rural India in the present context.
- From the preceding study of literature, positive impacting factors will be isolated and identified, including: -
  - o Strengths of NGOs, Funding Agencies, and Corporate ventures that have intervened or exhibit inclination and capability of intervening in rural India.
  - o Models of decentralisation, cost-efficiency, and wider outreach that have worked elsewhere.
  - o Models of rural contextualisation, including the impact and potential of garden-based learning, market-sensitive Technical and Vocational Education (TVE), and self-sustaining Higher Agricultural Education (HAE).

**Empirical field findings**

- A questionnaire will be designed for carrying out a qualitative as well as a quantitative survey to arrive at/ confirm existing findings.

## 1.6    Chapterisation Scheme

Based on the above approach, the following scheme for chapterisation is proposed: -

- Chapter 1 titled "**Objective and Research Methodology**" deals with the statement of the problem, objectives, research methodology, research questions and the chapterisation scheme.
- Chapter 2, tilted "**Literature Review**" carries out a comprehensive review of the available literature on the subject of rural education in the world with specific focus on the provisions and innovative models and schemes that can be applied to India.
- Chapter 3, titled "**Education and Development in the Rural Background : An Introduction**", will lay down the fundamental theoretical construct for defining rural education and provide a brief overview of historical initiatives.

- Chapter 4, entitled "**State of Rural Education in India**", will present results of research of statistics about quantitative as well as qualitative aspects of the rural education in India, at pre-primary, primary, secondary and higher secondary levels.
- Chapter 5, entitled "**Challenges to Rural Education**", will identify unique economic, socio-cultural and socio-demographic factors that have contributed to low enrolment and retention rates and poor quality of rural education in India.
- Chapter 6, entitled "**Right to Education Act**" will summarise provisions of the act, and present the popular as well as academic reception of the act, including specific criticisms levied against various features of the Act, as reported by the media and gleaned from papers on the issue by various stakeholders.
- Chapter 7, entitled "**Role of Non-State Actors in Rural Indian Education Sector**" will identify NGOs and other non-state actors already impacting rural education in India, and present their basic achievements.
- Chapter 8, entitled "**Innovative Models for Basic Education**", will deal with various initiatives for an alternative approach to education outside the formal educational system, which have had notable success.
- Chapter 9, entitled "**Rural Contextualisation Models**" will study the once-popular concept of "Garden-Based Learning", and examine whether it has a place in today's environment in Rural India. The chapter will also study various schemes that have attempted to involve rural students intimately with problems and solutions relevant to the societies that they live in, generate off-farm employment by absorbing rural youth into industries relevant to the rural environment, and reforms undertaken in higher agricultural education institutes to make higher agricultural education relevant, cost-efficient, and self-sustaining.
- Chapter 10, entitled " **Empirical Research Findings**" will discuss the responses to the questionnaire designed as a part of the study to corroborate the secondary findings of the various authors as well as to get a public perspective on the issues connected with the rural education and to collate some out of the box suggestions by the common but educated members of the society.
- Finally, Chapter 11, entitled "**Recommended Policy Responses**", will present a framework for private-partnership models in rural India, define the government's regulatory role in these models, and propose financing solutions to develop the infrastructure required by Indian rural education.