



The Neglect of ECCE in RTE-2009

Ms. Rita Chowdhury, MA(Eng), M.ed, Assistant Professor, Department of Education
Guru Nanak College of education, Delhi

Abstract: *Child's mind grows at an extra-ordinary pace during the initial six years of their life and lays foundation for life long development. This important aspect of education has been neglected by Right to Free and Compulsory Education Act-2009, which was a revolutionary step taken by government of India. The present article aims at reflecting upon the necessity to review Section 11 of Right to Free and compulsory education act-2009 and bring necessary amendments for the successful realization of universalization of elementary education.*

Keywords: *RTE-2009, ECCE, Neglect, Uniformity in structure*

Introduction: Education is neither a need nor a privilege but a necessity for the exercise of all other human rights. Education brings about blossoming of mental faculties and transforms a raw unlettered human being into an accountable member of society.

India is the largest democracy in the world with over one billion population but the resentful truth is that millions of children remain deprived of necessary educational opportunities. In this direction, a revolutionary step has been taken by the government of India in August,2009. The parliament of India passed the historic RTE-2009 Act which was formally implemented from April,2010. The act entitle all children between the age of 6 -14 years to an education based on principles of equity and nondiscrimination. This step was historical as it was the first time an act on school education passed by central legislation. While RTE-2009 ensures universal education to all children upto the age of 14 years but there is a line between the age groups 0-6 years and 6-14 years resulting in the neglect of Early

Childhood Care and Education which is evident from the statement

“With a view to prepare children above the age of 3 years for elementary education and to provide early childhood care and education for all children until they complete the age of 6 years, the appropriate government **may** make necessary arrangements for providing free pre-school education for such children” RTE-2009.

Why ECCE is important?

Many researches show that the period of 3-6 years is a crucial phase for complete development of child's brain. It creates base that helps in the formation of attitude and values. A child who does not undergo pre-school programme faces difficulty at primary level and may end up either being a slow learner or drop out of school education programme. Many critic believe that “lack of school readiness” among children is the main reason behind drop out of children at primary level. Hence, school readiness can be culminated if good quality of pre-school education is provided to the



children. The statistics of Ministry of Human Resource and Development says 39% boys and 33% girls dropped out before completing elementary education in 2013. The data clearly depicts that there is need of ECCE, which act as a strengthening factor for child development as well as for enrollment and retention of children in primary school. Another interesting fact in this direction is that first chapter of NCERT class 1 Hindi textbook expects children to write small words and name. It is already assumed that children have knowledge of alphabets. Similarly first chapter of mathematics textbook assumes that children already have number knowledge. There is a huge learning gap among students who entered grade 1 without pre-schooling. It is reflected every year in PRATHAM'S ASER 2014 Survey. Around 50% of grade 5 children cannot even read grade 2 text. Although the government is trying to frame regulations but how much of it is implemented is a matter of study.

Therefore neglect at this stage can lead to negative consequences. ECCE provides experience for all round development and school readiness. It is a necessary component of education as learning at this stage is directed by the child's interest and contextualized by his/her experience. Even the Charter of Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) describes the pre-schooling as a significant input for providing sound foundation for a child's development but also as a contributing role in the universalization of primary education. So in order to achieve the goals of RTE-2009, universalization of ECCE should be a pre-requisite.

Present Scenario of ECCE: The nurturing of young children is a

combined responsibility of family and society where parents, teachers, school and government are stakeholders. It is interesting to note that our country where Right to Education has been declared a fundamental right but it is dilemma that there is no uniformity regarding minimum age for admission to class 1. The minimum age for admission is 5 and 5+ year in twenty states (viz. Andhra Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Chhattisgarh, Goa, Gujarat, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Manipur, Odisha, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand and West Bengal) and in 6 Union territories (viz. Andaman and Nicobar, Chandigarh, Dadra and Nagar Haveli, Daman and Diu, Delhi and Puducherry) whereas the minimum age for admission to grade 1 is 6 and 6+ years in Bihar, Maharashtra, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Punjab, Sikkim and Tripura, UT of Lakshadweep. Another noteworthy fact is that age is not prescribed for preprimary level of education in most of the states except for Andhra Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Kerala, Meghalaya, Tripura, Chandigarh, Daman and Diu, Lakshadweep and Puducherry (selected information on school education (2011-12) government of India, MHRD, Bureau of Planning, monitoring and statistics, Statistics division). The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan was implemented as India's main programme for universalization of elementary education. But the uniform structure of school education throughout the country should have been an important agenda before declaration of Right to Education as a fundamental right. There is ardent need to make amendments in article 21A on the right to free and compulsory education for 6-14



years old children and Article 45 to urge states to provide ECCE for all children until they complete the age of 6 years. The government of India approved the National Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Policy in 2013. The policy framework also includes the National Curriculum Framework and quality standards for ECCE. But still it is not recognized as a compulsory provision by RTE-2009. Despite the recognition of the importance of ECCE by government of India, the challenges in implementation still persist. The nodal department for ECCE is the Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD). MWCD is responsible for the ICDS (Integrated Child Development Service) programme, which is a centrally sponsored and state administered ECCE programme, covering around 38 million children, still the huge drop out rate is an enormous matter of concern. The Ministry of Human Resource and Development also took cognizance of the importance of ECCE as an important factor in promoting retention of children in pre-primary schooling, which is evident from District Primary Education Program. It aims at strengthening existing provisions for ECCE through the ICDS by strengthening their linkage with primary schools. Also Law of Commission of India on 27th August 2015 has submitted its Report No. 259 titled "Early Childhood Development and Legal Entitlement" to the Union Minister of Law and Justice. As per the commission, "during a time when the world is debating the Post 2015 sustainable development goals, which include the guarantee of early childhood development, the time is ripe to position the rights of young children within the development agenda and create appropriate entitlement with respect to ECD"

Hence, it can be said that government of India has recognized its importance but more concrete and fast action need to be implemented towards this direction in order to achieve long term effect on future social adjustment and economic success of children.

Conclusion

Early Childhood Care and Education is an integral part of Indian Education System. It should be made a compulsion on the states of India to provide free and compulsory ECCE and bring uniformity regarding age of admission in pre-school and grade 1 throughout the country. In order to achieve this agenda, Section 11 of the Right to Education Act-2009 should be made mandatory and should read as "With a view to prepare children above the age of three years for elementary education and to provide early childhood care and education for all children until they complete the age of six years, the appropriate government **shall** make necessary arrangement for providing free pre-school education for such children.

References

Law Commission of India, Report No. 259, "Early Childhood Development and Legal Entitlement".

"Selected Information on School Education", 2011-12 (Government of India, Ministry of Human Resource Development, Bureau of Planning, Monitoring and Statistics, Statistics Division, New Delhi, 2014).

The Right of Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009

Annual Status of Education Report, 2014: Facilitated by Pratham