

A Study on Concept, Importance and Problems of Elementary Education with reference to India

Enjapuri Ramesh

M. Sc. (Mathematics), M. Ed., NET in Education

Faculty in Education, Almadina College of Education, Nalgonda., Telangana State

Early childhood development has proved to be very beneficial and very cost-effective in societies where this is been tried. So let's not confine ourselves to primary education. Let's think of early childhood development and education as a whole.

Aung San Suu Kyi

Abstract

Elementary education refers to the first phase of compulsory education that children obtain during the few years of starting schooling. This education has specific goals that meet the special needs that children have. The period taken to complete this primary education differs from state to state, for instance in countries like Canada and the United States, elementary education goes for a period of six to seven years once children have begun schooling. In India Elementary education goes for a period of six to fourteen years once children have begun schooling. In spite of the fact that this education is compulsory, it can be offered at home by parents. The benefits of this education cannot be underestimated and all efforts are directed at ensuring that this education gets universally recognized.

Key Words: Education, Concept of Elementary Education, Problems of Elementary Education.

Introduction

The UNESCO quoted “Every Child has the Right to Learn” A child’s right to education entails the right to learn. Yet, for too many children across the globe, schooling does not lead to learning. Over 600 million children and adolescents worldwide are unable to attain minimum proficiency levels in reading and mathematics, even though two thirds of them are in school. For out-of-school children, foundational skills in literacy and numeracy are further from grasp. This learning crisis the rift between the levels of learning children receive and those they, their communities and entire economies need – hit a global scale even before brought education systems to a halt. Around the world, children are deprived of education and learning for various reasons. Poverty remains one of the most obstinate barriers. Children living through economic fragility, political instability, conflict or natural disaster are more likely to be cut off from schooling – as are those with disabilities, or from ethnic minorities. In some countries, education opportunities for girls remain severely limited. Even in schools, a lack of trained teachers, inadequate education materials and poor infrastructure make learning difficult for many students. Others come to class too hungry, ill or exhausted from work or household tasks to benefit from their lessons. Compounding these inequities is a digital divide of growing concern: Some two thirds of the world’s school-aged children do not have internet connection in their homes, restricting their opportunities to further their learning and skills development. Without quality education, children face considerable barriers to employment and earning potential later in life. They are more likely to suffer adverse health outcomes and less likely to participate in decisions that affect them – threatening their ability to shape a better future for themselves and their societies.

Education can be considered to be the most vital asset that the society has because knowledge is the priceless wealth that people will never mislay under any circumstances, and the further the knowledge gets shared, the further it will advance. Therefore, elementary education forms the foundation for gaining basic knowledge without which the dream of children will become impossible. Elementary education can be compared to the first stride that a person takes in life, it is impossible for people to run without first learning how they can walk (Long, 2000). Elementary education offers children an opportunity to have a group that is stable to interact. Usually, when children stay away from familiar faces, they tend to suffer for parting anxiety. However, with time and as the children start to attend preschool, they interact with similar faces daily and regularly. This results to attachment with other children of their age, an aspect which is very vital in the growth and development of a child. Therefore, elementary education offers children a stable peer group interaction, playing, and sharing, whereas, adults who are associated with elementary education assists to develop the essential traits in children of trusting older people besides their grandparents and

parents. Therefore, elementary education enables children to make friends who facilitate acquisition and development of vocabulary as children attend preschool. As children converse with their peers, they also learn how to make personal decisions, as well as choices. They are also able to participate and enjoy various activities and games with their friends. When in school, their listening ability develops; they also acquire the concept of sharing.

Concept of Elementary Education

Already it has been mentioned that primary or elementary education is the foundation of the entire educational system. Children normally enroll in elementary education at the age of six. It is this stage where the child starts going to a formal institution and thus the formal education starts. The education the child receives at the elementary stage lays down the foundation for his or her physical, mental, emotional, intellectual and social development. This stage of education should be linked with the functional literacy that makes the people literate with the application of practical knowledge, which is the basic requirement for economic development, modernization of social structure and effective functioning of democratic institutions. Therefore most of the educationally advanced countries of the world have made elementary education as one of the most important stages compared to other stages of education. It is imperative for our country in providing the free universal and compulsory elementary education to all the citizens without any kind of discriminations. Education is considered the bedrock of all socio-economic developments of the country. In order to promote education to all children irrespective of caste, creed, religion, sex and others and also for realizing democratization of education as a birth right to all, the government of India has made several attempts from time to time to achieve the universalization of education for all. Universalization of primary or elementary education basically involves three important things i.e. Universalization of Provision, Universalization of Enrolment and Universalisation of Retention. Universalisation of Provision means that school facilities should be provided to all the children between the age group of 6-14 years in the country. The school should be easily accessible within the walking distance of a child. Universalisation of Enrolment means that all children between the age group of 6 to 14 years must be enrolled. The provision has demanded to introduce the compulsory legislation act and under the legislation, parents can be finding for not sending their children to schools. Universalisation of Retention retains a child who joins the primary school where he or she should remain there till he or she completes all 8 classes. In order to make education accessible to all, various provisions have been made under the Directive Principles and Fundamental Rights of the Constitution. While implementing provisions for the citizens, the responsibilities are shared by both the Centre and the State governments. India being a federal state, the relation between Union and States is of vital importance and both the Centre and the states are equally responsible for conducting a programme whether it is under the plan sector or non-plan sector in a state. Education is a subject where both the Centre and the States have the joint responsibility for running smoothly the education programmes in a state. Whenever we are talking about the educational provisions in the Indian constitution, it has been

seen that under the Directive Principles of State Policy in Article 45, states the following regarding the Free and Compulsory Primary Education: —The State shall endeavour to provide within a period of ten years from the commencement of this constitution, for free and compulsory education for all children until they complete the age of fourteen years. It means that free and compulsory elementary education can be accessed by all children before they complete the age of fourteen, where the target period was only for 10 years.

Importance of Elementary Education

Elementary education refers to the first phase of compulsory education that children obtain during the few years of starting schooling. This education has specific goals that meet the special needs that children have. The period taken to complete this primary education differs from state to state, for instance in countries like Canada and the United States, elementary education goes for a period of six to seven years once children have begun schooling. In spite of the fact that this education is compulsory, it can be offered at home by parents. The benefits of this education cannot be underestimated and all efforts are directed at ensuring that this education gets universally recognized (Cohen & Malin, 2010).

Education can be considered to be the most vital asset that the society has because knowledge is the priceless wealth that people will never mislay under any circumstances, and the further the knowledge gets shared, the further it will advance. Therefore, elementary education forms the foundation for gaining basic knowledge without which the dream of children will become impossible. Elementary education can be compared to the first stride that a person takes in life, it is impossible for people to run without first learning how they can walk (Long, 2000).

Elementary education offers children an opportunity to have a group that is stable to interact. Usually, when children stay away from familiar faces, they tend to suffer for parting anxiety. However, with time and as the children start to attend preschool, they interact with similar faces daily and regularly. This results to attachment with other children of their age, an aspect which is very vital in the growth and development of a child. Therefore, elementary education offers children a stable peer group interaction, playing, and sharing, whereas, adults who are associated with elementary education assists to develop the essential traits in children of trusting older people besides their

grandparents and parents. Therefore, elementary education enables children to make friends who facilitate acquisition and development of vocabulary as children attend preschool. As children converse with their peers, they also learn how to make personal decisions, as well as choices. They are also able to participate and enjoy various activities and games with their friends. When in school, their listening ability develops, they also acquire the concept of sharing and turn taking. In addition, when children receive recognition and encouragement from their teachers, it helps them to develop self confidence and set personal goals.

Elementary schools provide children with safe environments to grow in, as well as equipping them with motivation and skills that enable them to handle individual circumstances. Moreover, by children being in school, they are in a better position of being able to explore new ideas, as well as allowing them the chance of spending more time with their peers who help in developing their personality and individual skills. Furthermore, children who successfully grow during their elementary education become socially and emotionally healthy. They become eager to pursue new tasks and challenges with the energy and firmness that children are known to possess. As a result, these children become more serious with their schoolwork and they keep progressing in their academic development. They not only advance in academics, but also socially since they learn to sympathize with others and in the process, they form genuine friendship relations with their peers (Harmon & Jones, 2003).

Elementary education promotes rapid development of fine and gross motor skills in children as they do numerous activities and plays. This includes singing of songs and saying of rhymes that provide children with a sense of direction and space. On the other hand, elementary education enables children to enhance their reading abilities and math skills. However, the quality of the education they get depends on the school chosen; therefore parents and guardians have to look for quality which is an important factor. Furthermore, this education is a lifelong treasure since it determines the future that a person will have. It shapes a person into an effective member of the society because the knowledge obtained at this level is like a form of wealth.

When children are in school, it gives mothers an opportunity to be away from their children thus, enabling the children to develop independence. Mothers on the other hand become stress-free as they entrust their children to schools and are not constantly worrying about their children's welfare. Therefore, by being in school, mothers offer their children an opportunity to gain knowledge, which is the foundation of all other forms of learning that a child gets in life. It therefore enables children to form dreams and work towards achieving them and making them a reality (Harmon & Jones, 2003).

Elementary education is useful in ensuring that people are not illiterate, the quality of primary education they get determines the level of their intellectual capacity even when they are adults. The role and value of elementary education varies from one culture to another. Nonetheless, it is essential since it is regarded as a venture that pays well. Having access to this basic knowledge helps people in making wise decisions regarding issues that they face later in life. For instance, a mother has to have information on ways of maintaining hygiene so as to prevent spread of diseases among her family members. In addition, people are also able to select effective officials to present in their governments (Cohen & Malin, 2010).

A recent study indicated that the countries in Africa which had considerably invested in elementary education years ago are now deriving economic development from this investment. Moreover, this education has resulted in social and economic development in Western Europe since it made elementary education to be compulsory. Nations should aim at giving priority to elementary education since it supports development in other sectors, as well. A population that is well educated is essential in enabling countries to grab market opportunities, do exportation of goods and services, as well as attracting of foreign investment. Furthermore, when a population is educated it becomes innovative and gets access to free market due to the competitive enterprises that become established in the state.

Elementary education is essential since children are the hope of the future and the vital resource that a nation can have. Therefore, they have to be educated so as create a nation that is focused by having citizens who are able to participate in nation building. Many nations focus on investing in other sectors whereas the elementary education is given minimal attention. This is especially common in developing countries. Consequently, the impact becomes adverse when a nation comprises of a population whose greater percentage is illiterate. Illiteracy is the backbone of many errors that people make due to lack of information. Consequently, a lot of suffering occurs when for instance, people do not know their rights due to ignorance and lack of education. They end up suffering in abusive situations like poor working conditions and relationships. There is also the spread of disease like the HIV and Aids due to high levels of illiteracy. All these can be avoided if people get at least the basic education that will enable to read and get informed (Long, 2000).

Elementary education that is poor leads to the creation of negative effects on the learners. For instance, elementary education determines the growth and development of various aspects of a child in regard to the society. Therefore, poor elementary education forms the foundation in which children develop bad habits and behaviors, poor habits of

studying, as well as poor academic excellence. Therefore, Having poor quality of primary education or the absence of it leads to high levels of illiteracy such that people who work in factories, ministries, farms and hospitals are not efficient due to lack of the appropriate skills and knowledge. Consequently, elementary education is the most crucial step that children take in their educational career since it is helpful during children's formative development. It shapes them into learners, thinkers and social beings. Elementary schools give children opportunities to release their surplus energies through activities and play, create avenues for creativity development and gives outlets for emotions. These institutions also enable children to meet peers and adults who assist them in verbalizing and cultivating the ideas and imaginations that go through their developing minds .

Elementary education forms the basis through which the material that children learn paves way for high school and college material. Usually, the skills, attitudes and knowledge that children gain in elementary schools provide a foundation for success in the future. The majority of student remain unexposed to higher learning , as well careers because they grow in environments where majority of people lack professional careers or college degree. Therefore, the adults who handle children in elementary schools serve as the first exposures of people who have attended college and have a career, hence, offer children with advice in education and career options. Furthermore, some of the elementary schools have counselor who serve as managers in handling cases. They are trained to assist children in three major domains: academic excellence, social/personal development and career selection (Cohen & Malin, 2010).

Problems of Elementary Education

Faulty Policy of Government

The constitutional directive is that states shall Endeavour to provide free and compulsory education to all children until they complete the age of 14 years. But it is a matter of regret that the prescribed goal has not been reached as yet. The main cause for this is that the policy of Government was based on idealism. Basic education was accepted as the form of national education. Being inspired with this aim, work started to convert the existing primary schools into basic schools. India is a vast country with a very large population. Money was too much in shortage for implementation of so expensive a scheme of conversion of a large number of Elementary Schools.

Political Difficulties

Education is the basis of democracy. It is necessary to educate the citizens in order to make democracy a success. But so far the Government of India has not been able to devote their full attention towards education. Main reason is that since the attainment of Independence, Government had to face the problems of food, of inimical neighbors, the problem of Kashmir, the problem of linguistic states etc. Those problems still exist and these problems have all along forced to allocate so much money that Government has not been able to devote their due attention for elementary education.

Faulty Administration of Education

In most of the states the responsibility of universal primary education is on the authorities of Blocks, Municipalities and Educational Districts. The progress of expansion of primary education gets slow because of the indifference and incapability of these institutions.

Dearth of Money

Inadequacy of money is a serious problem that confronts primary schools. Income of the local institutions responsible for primary education is so much limited that they are totally incapable of meeting the expenditure of compulsory education.

Dearth of Trained Teachers

There is shortage of trained teachers to make Elementary Education Universal and compulsory. Nowadays, the young teachers do not wish to work in rural areas. But the fact remains that majority of Primary Schools are in rural areas. The chief reason of non-availability of suitable teachers is that teaching work is not attractive for many persons, since the salary of primary teachers is hopelessly low.

Establishment and School Buildings

The Primary schools should have accommodations of their own as far as practicable. Problem of school houses along with the problem of lack of teachers in all the primary schools can be solved through shift system in the existing schools. In order to enrol the additional age-group 6- 14 children additional section rooms should be constructed.

Unsuitable Curriculum

The curriculum for primary schools is narrow and unsuitable to the local needs. The curriculum should be interesting for the children for its continuance. Learning by work should replace the emphasis on monotonous bookish knowledge. Education of craft should be given in the primary schools in accordance with the local needs and requirements. But the schemes of craft education in the primary schools should not of highly expensive ones.

Wastage and Stagnation

It is another major problem and great obstacle for universalization of Elementary Education. Out of every 100 students enrolled in class - I more than half leave schools by Class IV, only 32 pupils reach class V and only 26 reach class VIII. This is due to the lack of educational atmosphere, undesirable environment, lack of devoted teachers, poor economic condition of parents, absence of proper equipment etc. In order to check such massive wastage and stagnation at the primary stage, existing educational system and curriculum should be reformed, teaching method should be interesting, school buildings should be adequate and neat and clean, and the parents should be educated. These may help the problem of wastage and stagnation to be solved.

Natural Obstacles

Natural barriers are the great obstacles in the way of expansion of compulsory education. The village and small habitations in areas of Himalayan regions, Kashmir, Garhwal, Almora with less population are situated in distances apart. So also the desert areas in Rajasthan, the dense forest areas in Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Assam and many Southern States create problems for expected enrolment. These are very very difficult areas with lack of communication and of Education and School Organization absence of transport. It is desirable to make provision, for schooling facilities even in small habitations without leaving much for mobility of small children in the severe cold, heat or heavy rains

Social Evils

Social evils like superstition, illiteracy faith in ancient conventions and customs, child marriages, untouchability, pardah system etc. create innumerable obstacle in the expansion of compulsory primary education. Still man; persons get their sons and daughters married at a very minor age against the Child Marriage Prohibition Act and deprive these school-going children of the fruits of education.

Language Problem

1961 Census reports about 826 languages and 1652 dialects in the country. The Constitution of India, 1950 mentions 14 languages, which can be made medium of education. Compulsory education has not been fully introduced among the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes and denotified tribes in the country. This is due to the hindrances of languages as medium of education. In the Five Year Plans the incentive programmes of free text-books, free uniform, stipends in hostels, and conversion of Residential Ashram Schools etc. do not improve matters much.

Conclusion

Elementary education is very beneficial not only to children, but also the nation at large. It is the foundation of advanced learning. It shapes the lives of people even into adulthood by promoting wise decision making. Children who obtain this education develop many skills such as sharing, turn taking, communication, as well as math skills. They also rapidly develop socially and emotionally as compared to those who never got this basic education. In addition, when a population is educated, the nation does not suffer many losses due to innovativeness of its people who are able to bring about economic development both at the grass root levels and nationally.

References

- Colcough, C.(1982),—The impact of Primary School on Economic Development, A review of Evidence", World Development, 10(3), pp. 85-94
- Das, A.(2007),—How Far Have we Come In SarvaShikshaAbhiyan", Economic and Political Weekly, January 6. Vol. XLII, No.1
- "UNESCO SDG Resources for Educators – Quality Education" (<https://web.archive.org/web/20220121083949/https://en.unesco.org/themes/education/sdgs/material/04>). En.unesco.org. UNESCO. 9 October 2018. Archived from the original (<https://en.unesco.org/themes/education/sdgs/material/04>) on 21 January 2022. Retrieved 21 January 2022.
- Summers, Keyonna (1 September 2020). "COVID-19 and the Future of Education" (<https://www.unlv.edu/news/release/covid-19-and-future-education>). University of Nevada, Las Vegas. Archived(<https://web.archive.org/web/20201022044437/https://www.unlv.edu/news/release/covid-19-and-future-education>) from the original on 22 October 2020. Retrieved 11 December 2020.
- "Adverse consequences of school closures" (<https://en.unesco.org/covid19/educationresponse/consequences>). UNESCO. 10 March 2020. Archived (<https://web.archive.org/web/2020041065452/https://en.unesco.org/themes/education-emergencies/coronavirus-school-closures/consequences>) from the original on 1 April 2020. Retrieved 11 December 2020.
- Slay, Bre-Ann (20 May 2020). "COVID-19 Will Intensify Education Inequities for Black Students"(<https://diverseeducation.com/article/177796/>).diverseeducation.com. Archived(<https://web.archive.org/web/20210117220700/https://diverseeducation.com/article/177796/>) from the original on 17 January 2021. Retrieved 11 December 2020.

- United Nations Treaty Collections (2021). "International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights" https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg_no=I V-3&chapter=4.
- Stauffer, Brian (2020). With Millions out of School, the Countdown Begins to Get All Children into Quality, Accessible Education (<https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2020/country-chapters/global-3>). Humans Right Watch.

