Improving Learning Outcomes in Indian Primary Schools through Pedagogical Innovation

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Abstract- *India has demonstrated considerable progress in improving various aspects of its primary education system, including infrastructure and buildings, teacher student ratios, and school enrollment. However, student learning outcomes remain consistently low across the country. A review of the literature surrounding learning outcomes has highlighted gaps in school instruction and has shown the dire need for innovations in pedagogy and curriculum to improve student learning. Taking this into consideration, the present paper was written highlighting the few innovative pedagogical measures taken place aroundthenation to improve low learning outcomes.*

Keywords: Primary Education, India, Learning Outcomes, Pedagogy, Right to Education, RTE,

Introduction

Across the globe, there are millions of children who leave school without the ability to read, write, or do basic arithmetic. As a result, many are unable to, say, calculate change from a monetary transaction, or read a doctor's prescription or a legal document, or even interpret a political debate, let alone build a career or earn a livable income. Schooling without learning is a waste of resources and is an injustice to students who seek schooling in order to learn. Education must equip students with the skills they need to lead healthy, productive, meaningful lives; however, in India, this is not the case – of the 250 million children worldwide who cannot read or write, two-fifths reside in India, despite a primary school enrollment rate of 92.26%.

For quality education, it is imperative that governments and policymakers focus on interventions that benefit learning; this includes ensuring enrollment, attendance, teacher training, and student engagement through curricula. However, students are only likely to learn higher-order skills if they can grasp the basics – reading and math.

Back ground of the study

Primary education was made a fundamental right by the Government of India in 2009, through the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act of 2009 (RTE Act). The Act stipulates that no child shall be liable to pay any kind of fee which may prevent him or her from pursuing and completing elementary education, and casts an obligation on the appropriate government authority to provide and ensure completion of elementary education

by all children in the 6-14 age group. Before the Right to Education was passed, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA)-An India's flagship program for universalization of primary education was the introduced in 2001. With the passing of the Act, SSA finally found legal backing for its implementation and has become the primary vehicle for carrying out the goals stated in the RTE Act.

In recent years India has made significant improvements in the provision of, and improved access to, education. Despite improvements, however, other statistics are bleak. Even though policy measures within the Act appear to be promising, poor implementation has resulted in low-quality schooling. According to the Annual Status of Education ASER 2016 Report, 73% of eighth graders in rural India can read a fifth-grade level text but not any higher. Similarly, 43% of eighth graders can divide numbers, but cannot perform other higher-order math operations. These statistics clearly show that students who are unable to grasp critical competencies in reading and math are ill-prepared for instruction in their current grade. These low student performance numbers are a result of systemic drawbacks of the RTE Act itself showing that mere declaration of a right does not amount to on-the-ground change.

Quality of schooling and low learning levels is the most significant issue in the implementation of the RTE Act.. Poor quality can be attributed to various factors, including poor curriculum and syllabus, deficient pedagogy, negligent or under-trained teachers, and gross underfunding. With pressure to complete the syllabus within a year, teachers are often forced to concentrate their efforts on the students that are already at the top of the class (Banerji, 2016). With no room for personalized attention, students in the bottom percentiles are often ignored and do not get the guidance they need; and with no mention of qualitative norms and standards in the Act itself, it is hard to quantify teaching goals.

Also, primary education is extremely underfunded. Government expenditure per student on primary education in India is only 9.76% of GDP per capita (World Bank). Moreover, a persistent problem within the system is that often, education is mistaken for literacy. Education has often been defined in functional terms; that is, school education is merely for imparting skills of literacy and numeracy. Further, even these skills are often not provided effectively, causing students to fall behind.

Lack of accountability is a biggest challenge. The Act did not create a mechanism vested with the overall responsibility of overseeing progress or redressing grievances, allowing local authorities and schools to skimp on the Act's implementation. Therefore, the RTE Act, while successful in enrolling and retaining students, has fallen short of providing students with positive educational outcomes, because it does not provide students with the skills they need for their future lives as productive members of the workforce, or even as adult citizens and parents.

Here, Educational outcomes can be separated into two categories – one, an objective or standard in education policy that is measured in terms of enrollment, attendance, and attainment/learning outcomes; and two, as life or societal outcomes, whether in the form of long-term health outcomes, labor market outcomes, or intergenerational mobility.

Objectives as Educational Outcomes

Enrollment Policies with respect to enrollment and learning outcomes have focused on a basic principle – once students are enrolled in school, they will gain foundational competencies related to learning, including reading and math. Studies have found that "households will invest in an additional year of education for their child only if the present discounted value of the expected increase in benefits exceeds the costs of doing so" (Glewwe and Muralidharan, 2015). For this reason, there has been a consistent focus on increasing enrollment in schools through lowering the cost of schooling, causing enrollment rates to skyrocket. Bringing children into school will increase student achievement and learning, however, this impact may only be limited to students who were not enrolled in school previously (Glewwe ET al.2011). So, it is assumed that by stimulating the demand for education, enrollment will increase and consequentially so will learning and educational attainment (Hanushek and Woessmann, 2008). However, research has shown that simply getting students to school is not enough to make sure that they are actually learning. Hanushek and Woessmann, through a study of demand-side programs such as conditional cash transfers, school nutrition/meal-provision programs, and fee reductions, have shown that the high enrollment induced by these programs was not necessarily accompanied by increased student achievement, rather, it may have had negative effects on students who were previously enrolled, because per pupil resources may fall.

Additionally, spending on infrastructure, buildings, and amenities to attract and increase enrollment, while important, has shown a limited impact on learning. Rather, while these investments make schools more appealing to teachers and students, they have no impact on the teaching and learning process (Muralidharan, 2013).

Attendance In practice, while enrollment rates might be high, attendance rates still tend to be low. This is particularly true in countries and regions where there is pressure on schools to show high enrollment rates in response to budget allocation rules and/or compulsory schooling laws, such as in India (Glewwe and Muralidharan, 2015). Students do not learn as a result of enrollment; rather, they learn as a result of going to school and attending class on a regular basis.

Bedi and Marshall, (1999) find that the achievement gains from increased attendance themselves motivate students to come to school regularly. This shows a two-way relationship between learning and attendance – not only does attending school promote learning, but learning also bolsters regular attendance.

Learning Outcomes ultimately, student learning and achievement is what incentivizes students and their parents to invest in an education, that is, student learning makes parents and students more likely to enroll in and regularly attend school. A learning outcome may be measured in the form of a particular educational standard a student must achieve, whether in the form of test scores or graduation and completion rates. A learning/instructional outcome may in the form of skills, whether vocational or foundational, such as reading, arithmetic or writing. Together, enrollment, attendance, and learning accurately represent a positive educational outcome. The question, then, is once students are enrolled in school and are

present in class, what facilitates learning? It is teacher attendance. Kremer *et al.* (2005) find that in India, a 10% increase in teacher absence is associated with 1.8% lower student attendance, as well as with a 0.02 standard deviation reduction in student test scores. This finding impacts perspectives on learning and absence in two ways. One, a student may decide that it is not worth coming to school if there will be no teacher to teach. So, if a student is not attending school regularly, he/she is less likely to learn anything; and conversely, if a student is not learning anything, he/she is less likely to attend school in the future, therefore learning less in the long-run. Teacher absence can be reduced in two ways – monitoring, and financial incentives and a combination of the two is especially effective (Banerjee and Duflo, 2006) In a program in Udaipur, India, teacher attendance was monitored daily through cameras, and teachers were given financial bonuses for regular attendance, then the absence rate of teachers was cut in half – from 36% to 16 18% over one school year. Conversely, teacher absence can also be addressed by incentivizing student learning (Banerjee and Duflo, 2006).

However, if having a teacher in the classroom has still not caused a rise in learning levels, then there is clearly a gap in the provision of a quality education. Teachers in India, are expected and required to teach a very demanding curriculum within a short amount of time and without any teaching instructions, thereby limiting the flexibility of teaching practices (Muralidharan, 2016). Further, Banerjee et al. (2016) have shown that low learning levels may also be due to ineffective teaching strategies.

Overall, the existing literature on outcomes has shown that learning is at the center of creating positive educational outcomes. While raising enrollment and attendance is crucial to improving learning and achievement, the improved learning itself is an immense motivator for students to enroll in and attend school. Further, as learning outcomes improve, so do positive life outcomes. Increased achievement leads to better health in the future, higher incomes in the future, as well as to intergenerational wellbeing and economic and social mobility. However, achieving these improved learning outcomes has proved difficult, particularly in India, where there are pervasive issues of quality in the current education system. Efficiently reorganizing classroom instruction has been suggested as a means of improving outcomes (Banerjee et al. (2016), Banerjee et al. (2010) for reading and math competencies in a primary school classroom.

Innovative pedagogy in primary classroom has the potential not only to improve the quality of education, but also to empower students or future generation of the country by strengthening governance and galvanize the effort to achieve the human development goal for the country. Innovative approaches practiced in few Indian schools, reveals how small, novel methods have redefined learning in the environment of their own little schools. Teachers in these schools may not have the desired resources or capital at their disposal but are constantly pushing the boundaries when it comes to improving learning outcomes through sheer creativity, enterprise and innovations.

Few pedagogical innovation in primary schools are highlighted here that can be taken out in country to help teachers manage their workload and be more effective at teaching primary graders.

1. Each learner has its own learning style. The teacher must identify each child's ability to process information so that they can achieve success at a faster rate. The optimal learning environment is when the Student sees, hears, and feels the material themselves. Animated videos hit the Audio and Visual, and when the Student creates one of them, it hits the kinesthetic type too.
2. Using word flashcards, use of dictionaries and thesauruses, picture dictionaries, charts and pictures, showing actual objects, models, globes, and maps. Even the extensive collection of coins and stamps also can be used to provide a qualitatively different educational experience to the children.
3. Incorporating Tools like smart phone apps, filmstrips, movies, pictures, info graphics or other will not only develop their ability to listen but will also help them understand the concepts better.
4. Infusing real world experiences into classroom instructions makes teaching moments fresh and enriches classroom learning.
5. Teaching alphabets with Cut-outs increases their curiosity to learn.
6. Teaching through Folk songs, Poems
7. Use of School Building as an aid
8. Hands-on activities
9. Role-play technique
10. Teaching through Games
11. Teaching through Online Learning Tools

Conclusion

At primary school level, a young mind can grasp the basic concepts easily through innovative pedagogy. Once students grasp basic competencies in reading and math, they will be more likely to proceed at par with their peers. The use of technology as well as other innovative pedagogy could be used in class-room on a temporary basis and on the basis of success, it could be implemented further.

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