

Quality Education: Delhi Government Initiatives

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Education is the foundation stone of a successful life: it empowers learners with knowledge and skills for overall development. Quality education must emphasise better acquisition of knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that help an individual deal with human, societal, national and universal goals.

Cognitive and non-cognitive skills developed in schools contribute to economic as well as social development. It helps learners become socially more acceptable individuals and plays a pivotal role in creating peaceful, blissful and justifiable societies. Imparting quality education in schools is important for the development of skilful human beings as a resource for the country. Presently, children in different parts of the country are receiving unequal education with respect to quality parameters, though their success is completely associated with the level of quality education they are receiving. It is a fact that a person with quality education is able to innovate efficiently leading to enhanced economic development.

Current Scenario in Delhi Government Schools

Delhi is both the capital of India and a metro city where provision of quality education system is expected. Delhi has different types of schools to provide education such as private, government – aided, schools run by Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) and schools run by Directorate of Education. However, there are many unrecognised schools as well which are run by individuals or a group of individuals.

Delhi has over four million students in schools and most of them are studying in schools run by MCD and Delhi government. Recent studies and surveys have found that there are unfortunately very low standards of learning in children: it was found that youngsters in Delhi aged between 14 to 18 cannot read their mother language or mother tongue fluently and more than 50 percent, or half, of the students cannot solve simple division and read English. A similar status of learning has been found in upper primary level students. A survey conducted by Delhi government reported that in

class six only 25 percent students can read Hindi textbooks and can read English textbooks of the second class.

This scenario of learning levels compels us to think about other places in remote areas where educational facilities are difficult to provide. It is important to disseminate quality education to students for their future benefits. UNESCO (2014) recommended that improving all aspects of the quality of education and ensuring excellence of all so that recognised and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all, especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills.

Need for Innovative Practices

The Right to Education Act (RTE) was implemented in 2009 with a noble objective to provide education and make education accessible to each and every child from 6 to 14 years age group, keeping under its purview the classes from 1st to 8th. This right is not just a right to access education, but it gives every child the right to attain quality education.

The current status of the level of learning in students lays great emphasis on the adaptation of some new and innovative teaching learning processes to overcome barriers of learning. Innovation in the quality of education is required to shape a generation which can communicate effectively, think critically and rationally, work collaboratively and take decisions on merit. So, a review of the curriculum, with emphasis on innovative methodologies is the need of the hour to overcome the hurdles present in providing quality education.

Initiatives by Delhi Government

Look Beyond Basics, an annual status of education report (ASER, 2017) reported that 86 percent of youth in the age group 14-18, whether in school or in college, are still within the formal education system and claimed that about 25 percent of this age group still cannot read basic texts fluently in their own language. Only 43 percent of them are able to solve division (three digits by one digit) problems correctly.

More or less the same situation prevails in Delhi as well, but the Delhi government decided to break the odds and try to find ways to ensure quality education. The government started flagship programmes to enhance the quality of teachers, students as well as teaching- learning process.

A programme named Chunauti was launched in June 2016 with the aim of bridging the learning gaps of grades 6 to 8 and to ensure no dropout in class 9. Students of class 6 to 8 were divided into two groups (Pratibha and Nishtha) and students of class 9 were in three groups (Pratibha, Nishtha and Vishwas) according to their learning levels. Teachers were asked to adopt suitable methodologies rather than follow the textbook and lecture method. Special training sessions were organised for teachers and specialised content was designed and developed for the same to strengthen foundation learning skills, ie reading, writing and basic mathematical competence.

Another initiative of Delhi government is the appointment of Mentor Teachers. About 200 teachers have been selected from Directorate of Education (DoE) schools to provide onsite pedagogical and academic support to teachers in schools. A mentor teacher is assigned five or six schools to visit every week and observe teaching and learning and provide assistance to teachers wherever required.

Further, the government introduced another scheme of Teacher Development Coordinator (TDC) to support teachers within the school. Each school was ask basis with teachers and help enhance their skills, provide feedback to the teachers and the school administration and also keep in touch with mentor teacher to improve his/her own skills using brainstorming sessions to come up with solutions to help students and teachers of their schools.

A recent initiative introduced by the Delhi government is 'Mission *Buniyaad*', a scheme started on 11th May 2018 to end on 30th June 2018. It is basically an extension of previously launched scheme known as 'Reading Campaign', which was introduced to gauge and address issues related to reading skill of students from classes 6 to 8. Teaching -learning material (TLM) for this campaign, which focussed on basic concepts was developed and administered. It was claimed by the government that the reading campaign initiative produced good results and around 75,000 students learnt to read fluently and 90,000 students learnt

to solve basic mathematical operations. However, it is reported that around 2.5 lac students are still below the desired level. So, Mission *Buniyaad* was launched to address issues associated with writing and basic numeric ability.

Other initiatives started by the Delhi government, such as the Pragati series should be mentioned. This is based on the principle of 'learning without burden'. A set of foundational learning material for English, Hindi, Maths, Science and Social science was developed for classes 6 to 8. This material was printed and distributed free of cost to every student of the government schools to enhance their learning experiences. Organising summer camps in government schools for class 6 is another remarkable initiative of the Delhi government. The idea behind this campaign is to familiarise students with the school environment with utmost emphasis on the activity -based learning experiences as prescribed by NCF 2005. Different activities are conducted in the summer camp such as art and craft, reading and writing, games, dance, music etc. to engage the students and make them learn and acquire skills.

Another initiative of the Delhi government is *Kala Utsav*. It was initiated with the aim to showcase and make students aware about the aesthetics, heritage, customs, culture and traditions of other states. This initiative promotes art in education and artistic talent of students through music, theatre, visual arts and craft at different levels.

Another significant step of the Delhi government is the establishment of Mega Parent Teacher Meetings (MPTMs). This gave teachers and parents the opportunity to meet every month to order to bridge communication gaps and provide proper feedback to the parents regarding learning and development of the students. This also brings in a harmonious and cordial relationship between teacher and parents.

SWOC Analysis of Schemes

Strength

- Schemes started by the government shows clear intensions and willingness of the government to enhance learning environment for the students of government schools.
- Delhi government has spent 25 percent of its total budget to enhance and improve educational environment for students as well as for teachers.

- Supplementary and remedial teaching learning materials are provided.
- Educational inputs are given to the teachers by organising teacher trainings on regular basis.
- There are academic interventions and feedback by the teacher development coordinators (TDCs).
- Community participation to enhance students' learning.
- The teachers proactively support such moves though they demand a lot of effort.

Weaknesses

- Students' participation is not as per expectations: only 25 percent students appear to be attending classes in the summer vacations because they prefer to go to their hometowns in summer vacations and do not want to attend such classes.
- Government schools are already facing a crisis in terms of numbers of teachers. Further, about 200 teachers are deputed as mentor teachers and 1029 teachers are working in the capacity of TDCs from already appointed teachers, which adds to the crises of teachers.
- Mostly guest teachers are involved in Mission Buniyaad.
- No extra appreciation or incentives are given to teachers to motivate them to put in extra effort to improve the situation.
- The government asks for data such as attendance of the students, teacher's diary, distribution of refreshment etc instead of emphasising on actual learning.

Opportunities

- Government, school administrations as well as students have the opportunity to make learning the environment better so that students can learn in a better way, with special focus on reading, writing and solving basic arithmetic problems.
- Further, these initiatives open the door for implementing follow-up programmes to improve academic settings in government schools.

- Teachers get a chance to improve their existing knowledge and skills by attending in-service training as per the requirements of present times.
- Similarly, students also get a chance to overcome their weaknesses in relation to academics, specifically in reading, writing and basic arithmetic problems.

Challenges

- Ensuring good attendance of students is the most challenging task for the administration as well as for teachers.
- It is difficult to carry out different programmes back to back and also maintain regular curriculum as per given guidelines
- Another difficult task is keeping both the teachers and students motivated to come and perform in the scorching heat of summer.
- Real assessment of such schemes and initiative is a great challenge.

Conclusion

It has been observed in the past that governments blindly allocated money to different heads with the focus to improve infrastructure alone which resulted in increased per child expenditure but the performance of the schools did not improve at all. This led to inconsistency between expenditure and performance. This time the Delhi government has made the education system a priority and is spending a lot of its budget to enhance and improve educational settings and educational environment for the students as well as for teachers. The government took sensible steps and introduced different schemes to ensure quality education in addition to improve infrastructure. It provided opportunities to students to learn without being too burdened and overcome their learning barriers with the help of the 'joyful teaching- learning' approach. However, it is challenging for the teachers as well as for administration to carry out different programmes back to back and also maintain regular curriculum as per given guidelines.

Despite all this, it is encouraging to see teachers working so sincerely and supporting such changes which demand a lot of effort.

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