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Availability of Teacher for Better Education

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Summary:

What is the purpose of Education? As Swami Vivekananda says, "Is it book learning? No. Is it diverse knowledge, No, not even that. Education is that by which character is formed, strength of mind is increased, the intellect is expanded and by which one can stand on one's own feet." I will start with the problem of our current education system. The biggest problem is that it does not motivate our children. Millions of students do not know any rationale of going to school, except obligation. Today education fails to retain the knowledge, once students have completed their examinations. This lead to young minds being stifled and stunted at an age when they should be asking questions, learning and gaining knowledge, and developing a thirst for more knowledge.

As per the Draft NEP (2019), "Teachers truly shape the future of our children - and, therefore, the future of our nation. It is through teachers that our children are imparted with values, knowledge, empathy, creativity, ethics, life skills, and social responsibility. Teachers form the very heart of the education process, and represent an indispensable vehicle towards a progressive, just, educated, and prosperous society." From ancient times, teachers have been playing an important role in our society. A teacher's role in inculcating knowledge, kindling inspiration and encouraging creative thought in children cannot be understated.

KeyWords - Rationale, Motivate, Obligation, Knowledge, Ethics, Empathy, Creativity, Prosperious

While India has done well in terms of access and equity, and brought almost every child to school, the learning levels of children need considerable improvement. This is borne out by the National Achievement

Survey (NAS) and public studies such as Annual Status of Education Report (ASER). Provisioning of quality education to school children entails the use of multi pronged strategies and interventions at various levels. The key components of quality include: teachers, effective

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classroom processes, assessments and evaluations of student's learning, school infrastructure, school leadership and community participation.

There are a total of 43.31 lakh teachers in the elementary stage and 6.11 lakh teachers at the secondary level. Data shows that currently 8.33 lakh teacher posts are vacant at the elementary stage and 1.11 lakh teacher posts are lying vacant at the secondary level. This indeed is an area of serious concern and needs immediate attention. States and UTs need to urgently address the issue of teacher vacancy and need to have Teacher Recruitment and Deployment Policy in place. And while doing this, it "Ensure that all students at all levels of school education are taught by passionate, motivated, highly qualified, professionally trained, and well equipped teachers" should be ensured that teachers serve a minimum tenure in rural areas.

There is an uneven availability of teachers across schools and subjects, even while most states have an overall PTR which is within the norms. Most 'easy' districts/schools seem to have too many teachers and 'difficult' districts/schools seem to be short of teachers. There are large numbers of subject teacher vacancies (especially in Mathematics, Science, and Language) at the upper primary level.

Classroom processes remain mostly 'traditional' with mostly one-way transmission and little interaction. Teachers ask questions and students speak only when spoken to. Students are mostly treated as passive receivers of knowledge with very little active participation in their own learning. Where activities are being conducted, the focus seems to be on memorization and recall with not much analysis or reasoning. Most regular teachers struggle to address individual learning and the social needs of children with disabilities.

Most in-service teacher needs are still met by a one-size fits all 'training' approach. Transaction in this training is also largely one-way. It is important to involve teachers as professionals in any training programme and discuss their experiences and understanding. Training sessions that are connected to teacher experiences are likely to be useful for practice. Coverage of teachers in in-service training is also dropping in many states. There is also very little information available on the impact of training except for anecdotal reports.

The academic role of the Block Resource Persons (BRPs) has not been fulfilled. Research studies indicate that teacher mentoring is critical for pedagogical reform, and has a much deeper impact than training.

Strong academic lifelines for schools like the BRPs are critical for this, as they do not have the adequate skills and experience to play an academic mentoring role, though many of them are very enthusiastic and committed. Teachers do not receive the kind of academic and pedagogical support that they need. Also, Block Resource Centres (BRCs) and Cluster Resource Centres (CRCs) can flourish only with strong academic institutions like District Institutes of Education and Training (DIETs) and State Council of Educational Research & Training (SCERTs) supporting them. The DIET remains a very weak link in most states and the SCERT too needs significant strengthening.

There does not seem to be enough focus on building the capability of the Head Teacher. For change to happen at the school level, school leadership is a key factor. Wherever there is an active, dynamic school leader, its impact on school functioning is clearly positive, as indicated by many research studies. A good relationship between the school and the community is very often the result of having a good Head Teacher. Systems for teacher accountability at the school level need to be built. This is closely linked with a capable Head Teacher and a good relationship with the School Management Committee.

There are a number of issues affecting teachers and teacher education today. These are listed below:

- * Lack of initiatives and mechanisms that explicitly aim to recruit the best performing students, or those that have the most talent for teaching, into the teaching profession. In particular, current teacher recruitment does not involve any interviews or classroom demonstrations that assess motivation and passion
- * Quality teacher education is severely lacking and indeed in a crisis at the current time. There are approximately 17,000 teacher education institutions in the country, of which over 92 per cent are privately owned. Various in-depth studies have shown that a large proportion of these teaching colleges are not even attempting to provide a good education. Moreover, many teacher education institutions are 'stand-alone' teaching colleges; thus despite their good intentions, they generally do not have the capability of providing teacher education that includes a strong pedagogical and practicum training.
- * Next major issue is that of deployment of teachers. According to government data, the country faces over 10 lakh teacher

vacancies-a large proportion of them in rural areas-leading to Pupil Teacher Ratios (PTRs) that are even larger than 60:1 in certain areas. Even more worrisome than the problem of PTRs in some areas is the issue of lack of teachers in schools across the necessary subjects.

- * Associated with the challenge of deployment of teachers is the sudden and unpredictable transfers to which teachers and indirectly their students and schools are often subjected. Losing teachers suddenly can have harmful effects on students, and their learning. Transfers also prevent teachers from becoming truly invested in and building relationships with the schools and communities in which they serve. Hence, stability of tenure of teachers must be ensured for better and enhanced educational outcomes.
- * Lack of sufficient infrastructure, resources, and supplies are other impediments that affect the availability of teachers, especially in rural India. Lack of safe drinking water, working toilets, and electricity in some schools pose grave challenges for effective learning to take place. In addition, there is lack of availability in support mechanisms and structures that can help support teachers in their duties.
- * In spite of the Right to Education Act mandating teachers not to indulge in non teaching activities, teachers are often asked to spend large portions of their time on these activities, such as midday meal preparation, administrative tasks, data management, etc. This prevents teachers from concentrating on their actual teaching jobs.
- * Education sector is a rapidly changing industry. A teacher needs to be constantly updated with the best teaching practices and methodologies that have proven to be useful. This means reevaluating and reflecting one's pedagogical skills by adopting novel and innovative techniques. The system does not promote constant update of teaching skills and capacity building in such a way that it does not lead to training fatigue. The high performing countries keep professional development and training as the top most priority and conduct regular rigorous in-house trainings to improve the quality of teaching.

- * Finally issues like salary, promotion, etc, in the school system are hardly based on merit and competence. There is a dire need to revisit and overhaul service conditions and career management to restore the high status of the teaching profession. This will facilitate productivity and efficiency on the part of teachers.

Suggestions to Improve Teacher Efficacy

What is needed is a complete transformation of the teaching profession in the key areas listed above and so that education and learning standards could be improved. There is a dire need to improve the efficacy of teacher and teaching standards. Some suggestions that can help achieve these are listed below:

- * To ensure that truly excellent students enter the teaching profession from and in rural areas, merit-based scholarships need to be instituted across the country. In rural areas, special merit scholarships that also guarantee employment in their local areas should be established upon successful completion of their four-year integrated B.Ed. Programmes. Incentives will be provided for teachers to take up teaching jobs in rural areas, especially in those remote rural areas with the greatest current numbers of teacher shortage and vacancies.
- * Finally, in order to gauge passion and motivation for teaching, a classroom demonstration or interview should become an integral part of teacher hiring at schools.
- * A comprehensive teacher requirement planning exercise needs to be conducted in each State to assess expected teacher and subject vacancies

Over the next two decades

- * To ensure decent and pleasant service conditions, all schools need to be equipped with adequate and safe infrastructure, including working toilets, clean drinking water, clean and attractive spaces, electricity, computers and internet in order to ensure that teachers and students are comfortable and inspired to teach and learn.
- * In collaboration with parents and other key local stakeholders, teachers will also be more involved in the governance of schools and decision making, including as members of School Management Committees.
- * Finally, teachers need be given more autonomy in choosing finer aspects of curriculum and pedagogy, so that they may teach in

the manner that they find most effective for the students in their classrooms and communities. Teachers should be recognised for novel approaches to teaching that improve learning outcomes in their classrooms.

- * Teachers must be given constant opportunities for self-improvement and to learn the latest innovations. To ensure that every teacher has the flexibility to optimise their own development as teachers, a modular approach to continuous professional development will be adopted. Opportunities, in the form of local, State, National, and international teaching and subject workshops, as well as online teacher development modules, will be available to all teachers so that each teacher may choose what is most useful for their own development.

Other recommendations to improve teacher availability and quality of teaching in schools are as follows:

- * Ensure availability of a full complement staff of teachers in every school with a focus on remote schools and remote districts. States should rationalize teachers across districts and schools, ensuring that every primary school has at least two teachers and that every upper primary school has teachers for all subjects.
- * Strengthen BRCs and CRCs for teacher professional development. BRCs and CRCs need to build a repository of curricular material and resources (print and digital) to help teachers in preparing for their classes and working on self-guided study.
- * States should develop a strong core group of outstanding teacher educators through a rigorous process of selection and professional development in partnership with identified institutions.
- * Make material for teachers and teacher educators available in the state/local language. Create a digital repository of existing material at the state level which could be aggregated at the national level. Identify universities/ departments that could take responsibility for creation, translations and validation of the new materials.
- * Significantly strengthen SCERTs and the DIETs. These two institutions are, in the long-term, the academic lifelines for the school system. It is critical to build strong leadership in these institutions, create a cadre of teacher educators and ensure full faculty availability, assure availability of quality infrastructure

and learning resources (including vibrant libraries in both institutions) and strong linkages with all departments of school education.

The teacher is central to good education; at its core, education is the process between the teacher and the student. If education is to improve, teaching has to improve. Any change effort has to recognize the centrality of the teacher. Teaching is an intellectually and ethically demanding profession. Teachers must be seen as independent, capable, and responsible professionals with respect given to their professional identity and knowledge.

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