
UNIT 5 EDUCATION COMMISSIONS AND POLICIES SINCE INDEPENDENCE

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5.1 INTRODUCTION

How can educational opportunity be improved in our country? How can the poor and marginalised children get quality education? How will the opportunity for education matter to their future life prospects and to the development of societies in which they live? The substance of education policies revolves around addressing these type of challenging questions and debates. Education policies also focus on options to effect systemic change in education systems.

This Unit is a discussion on Education Commissions and Policies on education in Independent India. The Unit examines the debates on education and enables us to understand the States' role in education, State education policy and the current challenges in State policy. It is an attempt to understand the major initiatives undertaken to achieve the goals of equity, equality and quality in education and analyse the constraints in the achievement of these goals.

5.2 OBJECTIVES

After going through this Unit, you will be able to:

- understand the provisions for the development of elementary education in India;
- correlate the recommendations and actions for elementary education;
- find out the problems in implementation of various programmes;
- elaborate the State policy in achieving the goals of education for all;
- evaluate the effectiveness of various programmes in achieving the goals of equity, equality and quality; and
- suggest effective ways of achieving the goal of universalisation of elementary education especially in the context of RTE, 2009.

5.3 EDUCATION COMMISSIONS: AN OVERVIEW

The educational situation on the eve of independence was quite bleak. In spite of all that had been achieved under the British Rule, we began our freedom on a fairly low level of attainment in education in almost all respects. There were 17 universities and 636 colleges (with a total enrolment of 2,38,000 students), 5,297 secondary schools with 8,70,000 pupils (which implied that not even one youth in every twenty in the age-group 14-17 was in school), 12,843 middle schools with two million pupils (which meant that only one child out of every eleven in the age-group 11-14 was enrolled) and 1,72,661 primary schools with fourteen million pupils (which implied that only one child out of every three in the age-group 6-11 was in school). Vocational and technical education was poorly developed, both at the school and university stages, and the supply of high level trained scientific man-power was very limited. Educational inequalities were very large, especially between one region and another, between urban and rural areas, between men and women, and between the advanced and intermediate castes on the one hand and the scheduled castes and tribes on the other. The standards of education were generally unsatisfactory, especially at the school stage, with too much of emphasis on English and too little stress on Mathematics, Science or the Indian languages. The percentage of literacy was only about fourteen and the total educational expenditure was just about Rs. 570 millions or less than half a per cent of the national income. It was this challenging situation which the nation was called upon to reform when it kept its first tryst with destiny in 1947 (Naik, 1947).

Against the above background, in the aftermath of Independence, several Committees and Commissions were constituted to analyse the problems and suggest the way forward. It was felt that Universities could play a significant role in the development process. It was suggested that the duties and responsibilities of the Universities were significant and needed in the light of the leadership they were expected to provide in politics, administration, the professions, industry and

commerce. They were expected to enable the country to free itself from want, disease and ignorance by developing scientific and technical knowledge. So the first Commission formed was the Commission on University Education.

5.3.1 University Education Commission (1948-49)

University Education Commission (1948-49) was the first Commission on education after Independence. Its major emphasis was on higher education but it also touched upon the issues related to school education. The Commission was appointed under the chairmanship of Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, a great visionary of modern era.

The Radhakrishnan Commission on University Education defined the vital tasks of higher education. The aims of university should be to produce able citizens who can take up national responsibilities successfully in various fields. The university has to produce able administrators and suitable workers in various occupations and industries. It has to provide leadership in various walks of life in the best interest of the nation.

The Commission recommended that the standard of admission to University courses should correspond to that of the present intermediate examination, i.e., after 12 years of study at school and intermediate college. It remarked that “our secondary education remains the weakest link in our educational machinery and needs urgent reforms.”

The Commission stated that the function of school education is to provide good general education, it further spelt out the elements of good education “which will not only prepare pupil for university work, but at the same time prepare him for practical work to earn his living if he did not proceed to a university.

The Commission suggested that the functions of a school and a university should be different. The function of a school should be to provide suitable education to those who join higher education and also to those who do not have the intention of proceeding further. Education of both sets could be combined together, whereas some schools could train students for work in agriculture industry and commerce.

The University Education Commission laid great stress on the introduction of general education throughout school. The Commission clearly wanted that school should diversify its outcomes in such a way that many could effectively participate in real life by taking up jobs or self-employment and only very few would continue study beyond school.

5.3.2 Secondary Education Commission (1952-53)

The concerns of education articulated during the freedom struggle were revisited by the National Commissions – the Secondary Education Commission (1952-53), and the Education Commission (1964-66). Both Commissions elaborated on the themes emerging out of Mahatama Gandhi’s educational philosophy in the changed socio-political context with a focus on national developments (NCF, 2005, p.3). A separate education commission was appointed under the chairmanship of Dr. Lakshmanaswami Mudaliyar in 1952 to address the issues related to school education. The Commission Report (1952) had envisaged schools to play a crucial role in developing democratic citizenship, emphasizing that “democracy is based on faith and in the dignity and worth of every single “individual”, where the innate worthfulness cannot be eclipsed either by economic or racial or social consideration (SEC, 1952, p.20).”

It stated “citizenship in a democracy involves many intellectual social and moral qualities a democratic citizen should have the understanding and the intellectual integrity to sift truth from falsehood, facts from propaganda and to reject the dangerous appeal of fanaticism and prejudice (SEC, 1952, p. 19). It also called for education opportunities that would translate into practice a passion for social justice.”

The Secondary Education Commission presented its report in 1953 which had recommendations on almost all aspects of secondary education. The major recommendations of the Commission were:

- installation of higher secondary system;
- diversified courses;
- three language formula;
- emphasis on education and vocational guidance;
- improvement in methods of teaching, text books and system of examination; and
- improvement in building and equipment.

The Commission introduced the policy of developing a three-year national system of secondary education (after eight years of elementary education).

The recommendation of splitting intermediate stage into two parts, one year going to the school and other to the university turned out to be retrograde - the eleven year higher secondary course introduced specialisation too early (after class VIII) and made vocationalisation difficult (Naik, 1969).

Though the major recommendations of the Commission were related to secondary education, but it clearly indicated the importance of elementary education.

5.3.3 The Education Commission (1964-66)

Drawing on Nehru’s Mission and articulating most of his key themes, the Kothari Commission (1964-66) was set up under the Chairmanship of Dr. D. S. Kothari to formulate a coherent education policy for India. The Commission was most comprehensive in nature, it reviewed almost all aspects of the education system without limiting itself to any one particular aspect, unlike the Commissions that came before and after it. Two of the unique features of the Report are:

- i) its comprehensive approach to educational reconstruction; and
- ii) its attempt to project a blueprint of a national system of education for India.

According to the Commission, education was intended to increase productivity, develop social and national unity, consolidate democracy, modernise the country and develop social, moral and spiritual values. The crucial role of education in national development appears in all its vividness throughout in the report, appropriately titled “Education and National Development”.

The Commission identified the three important facets that would bring about the desired educational resolution, they are:

- internal transformation so as to relate it to the life needs and aspirations of the nation;
- qualitative improvement so that the standards achieved are adequate and become internationally comparable; and

- expansion of educational facilities broadly on the basis of manpower needs with emphasis on equalisation of education opportunities.

It suggested the restructuring of education into a uniform pattern of 10+2+3. It adopted a “manpower approach” to the enrolment issue and declared that the principal purpose of higher education was to cater to the needs of industrial and other sectors, even as it acknowledged its role in promoting social transformation.

The Commission sought to reorient educational system to the masses to help people come into their own. It sought to end the dichotomy between work and education to make the products good workers as well as educated individuals. It recommended a minimum of 10 years of common curriculum for building citizenship in a democracy and for linking the “work of knowledge” with the “world of work”. In this concept, diversifies courses would be introduced only at the +2 stage.

Major recommendations of the Commission included emphasis on Science and Mathematics, introduction of work experience as an integral part of school curriculum, introduction of common school system, educational structure with 12 years of schooling, free text-books at primary stage, provision of mid-day-meals, promotion of education of handicapped and special measures for ensuring equality of educational opportunities (regional, tribal and gender imbalances to be addressed), establishment of school complexes, neighborhood school, three language formula etc. (two of its major recommendations for democratising school education have been discussed in detail later in this Unit).

The Commission emphasized the need of alternative channels of education to eradicate illiteracy and provide adult education. By laying more focus on Mathematics and Science rather than Social Science or Arts, the Commission reinforced the notion that India’s development needs are better met by scientists than social scientists.

For improving the quality of education, the Commission focused on institutional planning for improving standards nationwide, promotion of new work ethic, improved teaching and learning materials and methods of teaching and evaluation, and selective development of schools.

Teacher Status

The Commission emphasized that the most urgent need was to upgrade the remuneration of teachers substantially, particularly at the school stages. It recommended that the government should lay down minimum scales of pay for teachers and assist States and Union territories to adopt equivalent or higher scales.

Teacher Education

The Commission urged that professional preparation of teachers was the key for qualitative improvement of education and recommended measures like:

- qualitative improvement in teacher education programmes;
- introduction of new courses for headmasters/teacher educators and educational administrators; and
- expansion of teacher education institutions and recommendations of the training facilities.

5.3.4 National Knowledge Commission (2009)

To encounter the educational challenges in 21st century, the National Knowledge Commission (NKC) was appointed. It is not exactly an education commission as its role was to propose the framework for quality, access and equity in higher education. NKC is one of the important recent initiatives for improvement on quality of education.

National Knowledge Commission (NKC) was constituted in June 2005 by the Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh, under the Chairmanship of Mr. Sam Pitroda, to prepare a blueprint for reform of our knowledge related institutions and infrastructure which would enable India to meet the challenges of the future. NKC has submitted recommendations on areas such as Right to Education, libraries, language, translation, portals and knowledge networks. Some of its recommendations are:

1. The need for a central legislation affirming the Right to Education. The legislation should also lay down minimum standards of quality in school education and for it to be effective, the responsibility of the Government at different levels, must be recognised and made justifiable.
2. The teaching of English as a language should be introduced, along with the first language (either mother tongue or the regional language) of the child, starting from Class I. Further, NKC has also focused on the need to reform the pedagogy of English language teaching, and the use of all available media to supplement traditional teaching methods.
3. Changes in the school system which would encourage decentralisation, local autonomy in management of schools, and flexibility in disbursement of funds.
4. To improve quality and generate accountability, improving school infrastructure and revamping school inspection with a greater role for local stakeholders and greater transparency in the system.
5. Information and Communication Technology (ICT) to be made more accessible to teachers, students and the administration.
6. The need for reforms in the curriculum and examination systems by moving away from rote learning to a critical understanding of concepts and finally improvement in faculty.

NKC suggested that the primary responsibility for school education is on the State Governments, and, therefore, States needed to be consulted for policy formulation. NKC also recommends both pre-service and in-service teacher education programmes be subject to the same regulatory, authority and with adequate monitoring of the training provided by private organisations.

Check Your Progress 5.1

Notes: a) Write your answer in the space given below.

b) Compare your answers with those given at the end of the Unit.

- 1) What are the recommendations of the Secondary Education Commission regarding improvement in the quality of education?

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2)	What are the unique features and thrust areas of the Kothari Commission?

3)	Why was the National Knowledge Commission constituted? Critically discuss its major recommendations with regard to privatisation of school education.

5.4 MAJOR EDUCATION POLICIES

The major four Education Commissions discussed in the previous chapter lay down the foundation stone of developing education policies in India. In this regard National Policy on Education 1968, 1986, and also Revised Programme of Action, 1992, was established for preparing the detail roadmap for implementation of the schemes of education. Let us discuss in details, what the policies had to say about aspects of education.

5.4.1 National Policy on Education (1968)

Arising out of the recommendations of the Kothari Commission, the National Policy of 1968 marked a significant step in the history of Independent India. It aimed to promote national progress, a sense of common citizenship and culture, and to strengthen national Integration. It laid stress on the need for a radical reconstruction of the education system to improve its quality at all stages and gave much greater attention to Science and Technology, the cultivation of moral values and a closer relation between education and the life of the people.

The NPE-1968 very briefly indicated that strenuous efforts should be made for the early fulfillment of the Directive Principle under Article 45 of the Constitution seeking to provide free and compulsory education for all children up to the age of 14. It suggested that suitable programmes should be developed to reduce the prevailing 'wastage' and 'stagnation' in schools and to ensure that every child who is enrolled in school successfully completes the prescribed course.

The Policy also emphasized enrichment of curricula and improvement of text books and teaching methods. It advocated the strengthening of Science education at the school level and stepping up of scholarship schemes for backward sections of the society.

Though NPE-1968 was a good effort in suggesting ways forward, it could not be implemented successfully in the absence of a detailed implementation strategy, assignment of specified responsibility and lack of financial and organisational support. The next significant move was formulation of the NPE 1986.

5.4.2 National Policy on Education (1986)

The Government of India reviewed the prevailing education system in 1985 and the policy was articulated in the document “*Challenge of Education: A Policy Perspective*”. The new education policy was intended to prepare India for the 21st century. The policy emphasized the need for change in the following words - “*Education in India stands at crossroads today, neither normal linear expansion nor the existing pace and nature of improvement can meet the needs of the situation.*”

The 1986 policy acknowledged the achievement of policy goals set by the 1968 policy, like setting up of a school within a kilometer and adoption of a common education structure, it, however, stated that increased financial and organisational support was necessary to address problems of access and quality.

The policy was intended to raise educational standards and increase access to education. At the same time it would safeguard the values of secularism, socialism and equality, being promoted since Independence. The government also proposed to seek financial support from the private sector to complement government funds. The Central Government also declared that it would accept a wider responsibility to enforce the national and integrative character of education to maintain quality and standards. The States, however, retained a significant role particularly in relation to the curriculum.

NPE 1986 proposed a *national system of education* based on the accepted structure of 10+2+3. Regarding the further break-up of the first 10 years, it suggested an elementary system comprising 5 years of primary and 3 years of upper primary education followed by 2 years of high school. It suggested that +2 stage be accepted as part of school education throughout the country. The national system implied that upto a given level, all students irrespective of caste, creed, location or sex have access to education of a comparable quality. The Policy reiterated the need to take effective measures for implementation of common school system recommended in the 1968 Policy.

Setting up of **Navodaya Vidyalayas** was another landmark in the history of education in general and elementary education in particular.

In its fourth section, there is an emphasis on opportunities of elementary education for girls and removing the problems in this regard. It has also been suggested that primary schools be opened in remote areas including ashram or residential schools in tribal regions. The policy emphasized on inclusion of motor handicapped children in normal schools and arrangement of special schools at district headquarters.

In Section Five, issues related to elementary education were specially addressed. It was proposed that:

- **Access, Enrollment and Retention** of all children upto the age of 14 years in the schools.
- **Quality improvement** of education by improving the school environment, child centered and activity-centered teaching methodology, continuous evaluation through out the year, removal of all kinds of physical punishment, continuing the practice of not failing the students in any class at elementary level and arranging the essential facilities in primary schools.
- Arranging **non-formal education** for children, who left the schools, in between, or are residing at places not having schools.
- Regarding **teachers and teacher education**, the policy suggested that District Institutes of Education and Training (DIET) need to be established

with the capability to organise pre-service and in-service courses for elementary school teachers and for non-formal and adult education. It recommended that when DIETs get established, sub-standard institutions should be phased out, selected Secondary Teacher Education Institutes should be upgraded to compliment the work of the State Councils of Educational Research and Training (SCERT). The National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE) should be provided the necessary resources and capability to accredit institutions of teacher-education and to provide guidance regarding curricula and methods. Networking arrangements should be created between institutions of teacher education and university departments of education.

- The NPE and POA elaborately discussed about the concept of language development and emphasised the adoption of regional languages as the medium of instruction at the university stage. Mother tongue should be the medium of instruction at the school stage. Recommendations relating to language practice were as follows:
 - three language formula, improvements in the linguistic competencies of students at different stages of education;
 - provision of facilities for the study of English and other foreign languages; and
 - development of Hindi language as a link language etc.

The Programme of Action (PoA) in this Policy proposed **Operation Blackboard** to improve the human and physical resources available in primary schools.

The key legacies of the 1986 policy were the promotion of privatisation and the continued emphasis on secularism and Science. The NPE, 1986 also advocated developing consciousness about environment. The Policy had some important features like common school curriculum, minimum levels of learning, value education, role of media and education technology, work experience, emphasis on teaching of Mathematics and Science, Sports and Physical Education and education for international understanding.

The Government constituted a review committee under the chairmanship of Acharya Rammurthy in 1989 to review the progress and effectiveness of NPE 1986. The Report of Rammurthy Committee put up in 1990 was named “**Towards an Enlightened and Humane Society**”. The Committee recommended that even the private schools should be converted into common schools to remove social, economic, regional and gender disparities. It suggested that there must be some concrete programmes for SCs, Tribes, Women and educationally backward minorities. It further suggested that there should be adequate funds to improve the basic structure and quality of primary education. Primary education must be in mother tongue and the aid to schools providing education in other medium should be stopped. The recommendation of the Committee provided a base to develop a new programme of action, the revised Programme of Action, 1992.

5.4.3 Revised Programme of Action (1992)

Before considering the suggestions of the Ramamurthy Committee, the Government appointed another committee under the chairmanship of Janardan Reddy in 1992. The report of the Committee provided a base for the modified National Policy on Education and a concrete programme emerged as Programme of Action, 1992 (POA 1992).

The revised programme of action proposed education for equality. It recommended a more comprehensive Operation Blackboard to enhance its coverage area up to upper primary level, aim at a minimum of 50 percent female teachers in future appointments at elementary level, informal education programme for the educationally deprived and working boys and girls, and computer education to as many schools as possible. It was also proposed that elementary schools should be open through out the year.

Check Your Progress 5.2

Notes: a) Write your answer in the space given below.

b) Compare your answers with those given at the end of the Unit.

- 4) NPE, 1986 introduced the concept of 'Operation Blackboard' in the context of school facilities. Discuss the objectives and relevance of suggesting this measure.

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- 5) Discuss the main recommendations of NPE 1986 with regard to elementary education. Discuss the aspects related to improving the quality of school education in detail.

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5.5 SCHOOLS FOR EQUALITY AND EQUITY

In order to achieve the goal of education for all, some proposals for setting up school systems were proposed in the Commissions and Policies. In this section, we will discuss three of them in detail, namely, the common school system, neighbourhood schools, and alternative schooling.

5.5.1 Common School System (CSS)

The Education Commission (1964-66) had recommended a Common School System of public education as the basis of building up the National System of Education with a view to "bring the different social classes and groups together and thus promote the emergence of an egalitarian and integrated society". The Commission pointed out that education was increasing social segregations and increasing disparities. It further noted that "this is bad not only for the children of the poor but also for the children of the rich and privileged groups as the parents were preventing them from sharing the life and experiences of the children of the poor and coming into contact with the realities of life and rendering the education of their own children incomplete...."

A “Common School System” (CSS) means a system which provides education of an equitable quality to all children irrespective of caste, creed, community, language, gender, economic condition, social status and physical mental ability.”

Further, the 1986 policy envisaged that the Common School System would be open to all children irrespective of social, economic and other differences. The 1986 Policy, while advocating a National System of Education, resolved that “effective measures will be taken in the direction of the Common School System recommended in the 1968 policy.” It also noted that the Constitution embodies the principles (equality and social justice) on which the National System of Education is conceived.

What is a Common School System? The most important feature of a Common School System is *equitable* (not *uniform*) quality of education for all types of schools, be they government, government-aided, local body or private schools. Six essential and non-negotiable attributes of equitable quality of education need to be specified:

- i) minimum physical infrastructure, including library, teaching aids, playgrounds and many other features (e.g. early childhood care centers and pre-primary schools attached to primary/elementary schools);
- ii) professional quality of teachers and teacher student ratio;
- iii) diversified and flexible curriculum to reflect the geo-cultural plurality of the country, while emphasizing certain core curricular features of nation-wide significance;
- iv) pedagogy for holistic, child-friendly education;
- v) apart from gender sensitivity, pedagogic and social empathy for the *dalits*, tribals, cultural and ethnic minorities and the physically or mentally challenged children; and
- vi) decentralised and community-controlled school system.

By far the most significant benefit of the Common School System is that it promotes equality and social justice and it helps in nation-building and the creation of social capital which is essential for sustaining democracy and ensuring economic progress and prosperity.

The 1968 Policy recommended the Common School System, implementation of which was overlooked by the POA, 1986. In 1990, the apex, Central Advisory Board on Education (CABE) constituted Acharya Ramamurthy Committee to review its non-implementation. The Committee in its analysis outlined the following reasons for the Common School System not having made headway:

- i) economic and social disparities: the well to do communities send their children to schools with better infrastructure teachers and teaching standards ordinary to schools are not sought after and this results in low investment in them;
- ii) the Constitutional protection given to the minorities-to establish and administrator their own educational institutions is incompatible with a Common School System;
- iii) quality of education dispensed in government schools has remained poor;
- iv) lack of political will;

- v) proliferation of privately managed English medium school charging capitation fee and offering expensive coaching; and
- vi) existence of KVs, Sainik Schools, Navodaya Vidyalayas, in the government sector.

5.5.2 Neighbourhood Schools

The concept of neighbourhood schools is central to the Common School System. The Kothari Commission Report recommended that each school within the Common School System should be attended by all the children in the neighbourhood. This has to be specified and delineated by a prescribed authority. The Report said: “Each school should be attended by all children in the neighbourhood irrespective of caste, creed, community, religion, economic condition or social status, so there would be no segregation schools.” Arguing for neighbourhood school, the Commission advanced two arguments. First, a neighbourhood school would provide ‘good’ education to children because sharing life with common people would be an essential ingredient of good education. Second, the establishment of such schools would compel rich, privileged and powerful classes to take an interest in the system of public education and thereby bring about its early improvement. The developments in school education post Kothari demonstrate that the ‘rich privilege and powerful classes’ did not take an interest in the system of public education, as Kothari had hoped.

The 1986 National Policy on Education accepted the Commission’s recommendation on the Common School System (CSS) aiming at the implementation of the neighbourhood school concept within twenty years. After some twenty years, however, in 1986 the New Policy maintained the rhetoric of CSS but in reality had abandoned it.

5.5.3 Alternative Schools

The Education Guarantee Scheme (EGS) is a programme to set up Alternative Schools in habitations where there is no formal school within a radius of one k.m. and there are at least 15 children of the elementary school going age. Sometimes, EGS centres exist in remote habitations with only about 10 children. An EGS centre is expected to exist until it is upgraded to a primary school provided it is in operation for two years and the State norms for setting up a small school are satisfied. Education Volunteers (EVs), selected by the village, run the centres; they are trained initially for 30 days and receive continuous training subsequently. The CRCs/BRCs and DIETs provide academic support to the centres. The children are exposed to the same formal curriculum that exists in the primary school, and receive textbooks and the mid-day-meal. At the end of the financial year 2005-06, there were 1,11,416 EGS (Primary) centres, catering to 4.04 millions children. Upper primary EGS centres cater to habitations without access to upper primary schooling in Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra, Odisha, Uttaranchal and West Bengal. Such centres have two teachers each.

The EGS was founded on the following key, institutional features:

- i) **The right to demand a school** with the State’s guarantee that it would be met: the understanding here was that this would enable empower and energise people to demand schools in educationally deprived areas. In the process, the government would also come to know where schooling facilities were critically needed.
- ii) **Accountable ‘Gurujis’** – The community was given the power to appoint the ‘gurujis’ through PTAs and SMCs, it was also expected to monitor,

motivate and discipline them, thus making them accountable to the community from the beginning.

- iii) **EGS Schools community ownership** – PTAs and SMCs are expected to play a huge role in managing the school, motivating children, reducing drop-out rates thus ensuring that community owns the schools.

Criticism - The official claims of success of EGS have drawn criticism from many quarters. The French scholar, Lectercq argued that even though “access to education has improved through EGS, children are offered an education guarantee yet the guarantee is incomplete, some children are nominally enrolled, attendance is erratic, and the quality teaching and educational outcomes are insufficient”. Other studies point out similar problems stating that systems like EGS which tend to expand access through under-qualified, poorly trained and low-paid **para teachers** deliver poor quality education. Not only that, such systems establish two streams of education in the country-one which is better endowed in terms of facilities for the privileged sections and the other which is deficient and for the underprivileged (Govinda and Josephine, 2004, Pandey 2006, Pritchett and Pande 2006).

Check Your Progress 5.3

Notes: a) Write your answer in the space given below.

b) Compare your answers with those given at the end of the Unit.

- 6) Discuss the concept of Common School System. How was it expected to provide equitable education to all school going children?

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- 7) ‘The Education Guarantee Scheme (EGS) offers education that is poor in quality’. Do you agree with the statement? Give reasons.

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5.6 UNIVERSALISATION OF ELEMENTARY EDUCATION

To carry forward the Constitutional commitment of strengthening the social fabric of democracy by providing equal educational opportunities to all, efforts to reach out were intensified through several schemes and programmes. In this section, we will be discussing two centrally sponsored schemes implemented in partnership with State Governments on universalising elementary education.

5.6.1 Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) scheme to universalise elementary education through district based, decentralized specific planning and implementation strategy by community ownership of the school system. It is a programme for achievement of Universalisation of Elementary Education in a time-bound manner, as mandated by 86th Amendment to the Constitution of India making free and compulsory education to all the children of 6-14 age groups as a fundamental right.

SSA has focused on all major issues related to universalisation of education. It focuses on institutional reforms, sustainable financing, community ownership, institutional capacity building, improving main stream educational administration, community based monitoring with full transparency, accountability to community, priority to girls' education and focus on the inclusion and participation of children from SC/ST, minority groups, urban deprived children, children of other disadvantaged groups and children with special needs. The scheme aims to improve enrolment, retention and the quality of education to enable children to achieve grade appropriate levels of learning.

SSA is being implemented in partnership with State Governments to cover the entire country and address the needs of 192 million children in 1.1 million habitations. The programme seeks to open new schools in those habitations which do not have schooling facilities and strengthen existing school infrastructure through provision of additional classrooms, toilets, drinking water, maintenance grant and school improvement grant. These provisions need to be aligned with the legally mandated norms and standards and free entitlements mandated by the RTE Act.

The Report to the People on Education 2009-10 published by MHRD, Government of India has reflected on the impact of SSA on Universalisation of Elementary Education. The Report says that observations from the field indicates that with enormous increase in number of institutions and enrollment, the issue of universal access to primary education has, more or less, been successfully addressed. The universal enrolment to elementary education is being addressed through the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan.

Committee on Implementation of RTE Act and the Revamp of SSA

Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) is implemented as India's flagship programme for Universalising Elementary Education. The provisions in the RTE Act are applicable to the SSA goals on access and Universalisation of Elementary Education. In the present phase of SSA, it is mandatory to ensure that the approach and strategies for Universalising Elementary Education are in conformity with the rights perspective mandated under the RTE Act.

In September 2009, the Government set up a Committee under the chairpersonship of Shri Anil Bordia, former Union Education Secretary, to suggest follow up action on SSA vis-à-vis the RTE Act. The Committee had a series of interactions with State Education Secretaries, educationists, representatives of teachers' unions, voluntary organisations and civil society organisations. The Committee's report, entitled "*Implementation of RTE Act and Resultant Revamp of SSA*", submitted in April 2010, was guided by the following principles:

- i) ***Holistic view of education***, as interpreted in the National Curriculum Framework, 2005, with implications for a systemic revamp of the entire content and process of education with significant implications for curriculum, teacher education, educational planning and management.
- ii) ***Equity***, to mean not only equal opportunity, but also creation of conditions in which the disadvantaged sections of the society – children of SC, ST, Muslim minority, landless agricultural workers and children with special needs, etc. – can avail of the opportunity.
- iii) ***Access***, not to be confined to ensuring that a school becomes accessible to all children within specified distance but implies an understanding of the educational needs and predicament of the traditionally excluded categories – the SC, ST and others sections of the most disadvantaged groups, the Muslim minority, girls in general, and children with special needs.

- iv) **Gender** concern, implying not only an effort to enable girls to keep pace with boys but to view education in the perspective spelt out in the National Policy on Education 1986/92; i.e. a decisive intervention to bring about a basic change in the status of women.
- v) **Centrality of teacher**, to motivate them to innovate and create a culture in the classroom, and beyond the classroom, that might produce an inclusive environment for children, especially for girls from oppressed and marginalised backgrounds.
- vi) **Moral compulsion** is imposed through the RTE Act on parents, teachers, educational administrators and other stakeholders, rather than shifting emphasis on punitive processes.
- vii) **Convergent and integrated system of educational management** is pre-requisite for implementation of the RTE law. All States must move in that direction as speedily as feasible.

Table 5.1 Indicators of the achievement of Elementary Education

Indicators	Primary and Upper Primary Level Achievements
Access	99 percent of the rural population has a primary school within one km. 3,66,599 new schools opened till September, 2010.
Gross Enrolment Ratio	GER increased in 6-14 age group to 114.37 from 96.3 in 2001-02 at primary level and to 77.23 at upper primary level in 2008-09.
Gender Parity Index (GPI)	Improved to 1.00 at primary level in 2008-09 from 0.83 in 2001-02 and from 0.77 to 0.96 at upper primary level.
Drop out Rate at Primary Level	Reduced by 14.10 percent to 24.93 percent in 2008-09 from 39.03 percent in 2001-02. Dropout rate for girls declined by 16.98 percent during the same period.
Pupil Teacher Ratio	Is 44:1 at primary and 34:1 at upper primary level. 11.13 lakh teachers were recruited by December 2010.
Enrolment of Children with Special Needs	29.72 lakh children identified and 24.59 lakh children enrolled in schools by September, 2010.

(Source: MHRD Annual Report, 2010-11)

Activity 5.1

Prepare a small report on the drop-out rate and the reasons for it at the primary level in your District.

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5.7 NATIONAL CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK (NCF, 2005)

NCERT prepared National Curriculum Framework (NCF) in 2005. NCF 2005 seeks to provide a broad framework within which teachers and schools can choose and plan experiences that they think children should have.

The major recommendations of NCF-2005 in addressing elementary education may be summarised as:

- Reducing the curriculum load based on insights provided in ‘Learning Without Burden’.
- Ensuring quality education for all children.
- Creating an inclusive environment in the classroom for all students.
- Learner engagement for construction of knowledge and fostering of creativity and active learning through the experiential mode.
- Local knowledge and children’s experiences are essential components of text books and pedagogic practices.
- The school years are a period of rapid development, with changes and shifts in children’s capabilities, attitudes and interests that have implications for choosing and organising the content and process of knowledge.
- **Language skills** — speech and listening, reading and writing — cut across school subjects and disciplines. Their foundational role in childrens’ construction of knowledge right from elementary classes through senior secondary classes needs to be recognised. A renewed effort should be made to implement the three-language formula, emphasising the recognition of children’s home language(s) or mother tongue(s) as the best medium of instruction. These include tribal languages. English needs to find its place along with other Indian languages.
- **Mathematics:** The teaching of Mathematics should enhance children’s ability to think and reason, to visualise and handle abstractions, to formulate and solve problems. Access to quality Mathematics education is the right of every child.
- **Science:** Science teaching should engage the learners in acquiring methods and processes that will nurture their curiosity and creativity, particularly in relation to the environment. Awareness of environmental concerns must permeate the entire school curriculum.
- **Social Sciences:** Social Science content needs to focus on conceptual understanding rather than lining up facts to be memorised for examination, and should equip children with the ability to think independently and reflect critically on social issues.
- **‘Peace-oriented’** values should be promoted in all subjects throughout the school years with the help of relevant activities. Health and Physical education are necessary for the overall development of learners. Environmental education may be best pursued by infusing the issues and concerns of the environment into the teaching of different disciplines at all levels while ensuring that adequate time is earmarked for pertinent activities.

- A school culture that nurtures children’s identities as ‘learners’ enhances the potential and interests of each child. Specific activities ensuring participation of all children — abled and disabled — are essential conditions for learning by all.
- Participation of community members in sharing knowledge and experience in a subject area helps in forging a partnership between school and community.
- Reconceptualisation of learning resources in terms of textbooks, supplementary books, workbooks, teachers’ handbooks, etc. based on fresh thinking and new perspectives, multimedia and ICT as sources for two-way interaction rather than one-way reception.
- It is desirable to evolve a common school system to ensure comparable quality in different regions of the country and also to ensure that when children of different backgrounds study together, it improves the overall quality of learning and enriches the school ethos.
- Reducing stress and enhancing success in examinations necessitate a shift away from content-based testing to problem solving skills and understanding.

Check Your Progress 5.4

Notes: a) Write your answer in the space given below.

b) Compare your answers with those given at the end of the Unit.

- 8) *“My vision of a classroom is a place where there is no discrimination or bias on grounds of gender, caste or community, where learning takes place, where self-confidence is built and exercised, and where personal interactions are nurtured and developed.”*

According to this account of a teacher, what essential attributes should a class have?

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- 9) *“My vision of a classroom is one where children do not hesitate, but do their work spontaneously and with confidence; where children are not afraid of making mistakes, and are not afraid to talk to the teachers. They move around freely, form groups or consult with peers. The teacher helps, observes, supports, and monitors. Parents and others are in school, talking with children and teachers, children and the community has respect for the teachers. Community members share and discuss problems with the teachers asks them to solve issues, and even admire their work.”*

Discuss how the idea of classroom visualised here is likely to impact the child’s learning in a classroom.

- i) The child gains confidence in facing problematic situations and undertakes tasks without any hesitation.

ii)

5.8 FIVE YEAR PLANS AND ELEMENTARY EDUCATION

The Tenth Plan laid emphasis on Universalisation of Elementary Education (UEE) guided by (i) Universal Access; (ii) Universal Enrolment; (iii) Universal Retention; (iv) Universal Achievement and (v) Equity.

The Eleventh Plan places the highest priority on education as a central instrument for achieving rapid and inclusive growth – It focuses on the following areas:

XI Plan 2007-2012

- Universal enrolment of 6–14 age group children including the hard to reach segment.
- All gender, social, and regional gaps in enrolments to be eliminated by 2011–12.
- One year pre-school education (PSE) for children entering primary school.
- Dropout at primary level to be eliminated and the dropout rate at the elementary level to be reduced from over 50 percent to 20 percent by 2011–12.
- Universalised Mid-day-Meal Scheme (MDMS) at elementary level by 2008–09.
- Significant improvement in learning conditions with emphasis on learning basic skills, verbal and quantitative.
- All EGS centres to be converted into regular primary schools.
- Restructure SSA with a clear goal of providing a quality of education.
- Ensure basic learning conditions in all schools and acquisition of basic skills of literacy and numeracy in early primary grades to lay a strong foundation for higher classes.
- Give special focus on Mathematics, Science, and English (core) where students tend to be weak and universally introduce English in Class III onwards.
- Implement a Common Syllabi, Curriculum, and Pedagogy and carry out the consequent textbook revisions.
- Support more quality-related activities and improve interactive classroom transaction.
- Achieve 100 percent training for teachers including para-teachers. Revise PTR to 30:1 from 40:1.
- Recruit additional teachers to deal with single teacher schools and multi-grade teaching with mandatory two-third new teachers to be female for primary classes.
- National Eligibility Test (NET)/State Eligibility Test (SET) for teacher recruitment by NCERT/State.
- ‘Improved Quality’ to be defined in operational terms through clearly identified outcome indicators, viz. learning levels of students, teacher competence, classroom processes, teaching learning materials, etc.

- The National Curriculum Framework (NCF) 2005 and the syllabi prepared by NCERT to be the guiding documents for States for revising their curricula syllabi with SCERTs playing a more active role in ensuring common standard.
- Top priority in pre-primary schooling to habitations of marginalised sections.
- Special attention to districts with high SCs, STs, and minority population.
- Innovative funds for Special Focus Districts (SFDs) to be doubled.
- Focus on improving the learning levels of SC, ST, minority children through remedial coaching in schools and also in habitations through educated youth of Nehru Yuva Kendra Sangathan (NYKS), NSS, Self Help Groups (SHGs), and local Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs).
- Special schools for slum children in 35 cities with million plus population.
- Special intervention for migrating children, deprived children in urban slum areas, single parent's children, physically challenged children, and working children.
- Creation of capacity within the school for dealing with students lagging in studies.

The XIth Plan also recommended that *there is a need for setting up a new Education Commission for deliberating on the emerging perspectives on education in the changing global context.*

Activity 5.2

Go through the XIth Plan document and enlist the supporting provisions for achieving the goal of education for all.

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Check Your Progress 5.5

Notes: a) Write your answer in the space given below.

b) Compare your answers with those given at the end of the Unit.

- 10) In what respect, XIth Five Year Plan is different from the previous Five Year Plans with respect to elementary education?

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5.9 COMMISSIONS AND POLICIES ON EDUCATION – A CRITIQUE

In the sections above, we have discussed how the Commissions and Policies on education, particularly school education, have focused on equality and quality as twin objectives in school education. Education has been the central focus for establishing an egalitarian society and also for national development. However, the results on the ground have not matched with the expectations. In this Section, we will analyse that the problems persist despite good intentions.

5.9.1 Elementary Education – A Neglected Sector

After Independence, the Nehruvian vision of “growth with equity and social justice” guided planned development in the country, elementary education however remained a neglected aspect of planned development. As Naik (1965) puts it, there was no perspective plan to guide the development of education in terms of Constitutional philosophy. In terms of investment, elementary education received a substantial share of the educational budget in the First Plan but much less than was necessary to fulfill the Constitutional promise in subsequent plans.

The Education Commission (1964-66) provided the much needed attention to elementary education by recommending massive expansion of free lower and upper primary schools and secondly the establishment of a Common School System that sought to bring all existing (government, government aided and private) schools within the ambit of a common system. This marked a major policy shift towards equalising the system which offered substandard education to the majority. The Policy statement in 1968, which followed the recommendations of the commission for transforming the vision into reality was “innocuous, non-specific and non-committal” with no clear direction towards the attainment of egalitarianism (Naik, 1982).

Egalitarianism, as a concept suffered a blow as it was replaced by a free system of elementary schooling marked by expansionism in vast tracts of unserved rural and urban areas. Limited and declining budgetary allocations by the Central Government and inequalities in educational funding failed to make primary education truly free (Tilak, 1990 and 1996).

5.9.2 Changing Political and Economic Landscape

The 1970s and 1980s saw swift developments in the political and economic spheres, which had their impact on the education system too. The State started to abandon its responsibilities in the areas of education and health care citing financial crunch. The New Education Policy (NEP) introduced by the Rajiv Gandhi Government in 1986 paved the way for large-scale participation of the private sector in education. Although the NEP accepted the concept of education for all, it favoured greater participation by the private sector.

The neoliberal economic policy being pursued by the State since 1991 saw education in a different light. Education was termed a “non-merit good”. In the perception of the policymakers, the ‘social rates of return’ on higher education were not high enough and subsidising it only resulted in “private benefits” to already better-off students and did not actually promote egalitarianism. State participation and budgetary support started dwindling.

The committees and experts had no difficulty in endorsing the political agenda of the policy-framers. Following the gradual withdrawal of the State, private educational institutions rushed into the field.

In the 1980s, in the context of an emerging global and knowledge economy, the focus was on educational change that would be capable of “dynamically handling the imperatives emerging out of a rapid technological revolution” (GOI, 1986). The intention was to attain the unfinished task of UEE and also respond to an expanding high-tech market. NPE (1986) responded by measures such as curricular and linguistic reform, school mapping, decentralised planning, mid-day-meal etc., even though the Plan outlay increased in the Ninth Plan, it was still not adequate in meeting the back log. The State government met the bulk of educational expenditure and way was paved for external dependence.

5.9.3 Introduction to Neo-Liberal Policies

After the 1990s, a number of other non-state actors – a commercial private sector, NGOs, and community stepped in to share the responsibility of elementary education. More scope for private investment, laying off regular teachers, appointment of para-teachers, decentralised governance, etc were introduced for cost-effectiveness.

5.9.4 Continuing Challenges in School Education

1. Enrolments have increased because of the expansion of schooling. There is a greater participation of underprivileged groups, but issues of regular attendance, retention and satisfactory completion of primary schooling continue to persist.
2. The lack of public provision in schools continues to affect the school system, lack of teachers, teaching – learning conditions and learning achievements that are unsatisfactory are problems that need attention.
3. Growth of unaided private, English medium, primary schools, especially in the rural areas is emerging as an alternative option for parents who aspire for education to enter urban job market for their children. Increasingly, the functional government schools are being preferred by only those who are at lowest rung of social and economic ladder.
4. Classrooms as sites of dominance and discrimination in schools and in government or private sector operate on exclusionist, undemocratic, and dominating principles. Caste, religion, class, language and gender determine the basis of relationship between the school, teacher and the learner. The emotional, cognitive and pedagogic effects of the interplay of these factors are clearly visible on the children who are fearful and unwelcomed in school.

5.10 LET US SUM UP

The Commissions and Policies related to education have from time to time sought guidance from the Constitutional vision of India as a secular, egalitarian and pluralistic society, founded on the values of social justice and equality. Education has derived its content and meaning from the Constitution and the system has tried to democratise opportunities to move in the direction of education for all. Accomplishments in school education, since Independence have been many – like 82 percent habitations have a primary school within a radius of one kilometer, nearly 55 lakh teachers spread over 10 lakh schools educates about 2,025 lakh children. There are, however, several issues that are of concern, like “drop-out” at the elementary stage, 75 percent of our schools in rural areas being multi-grade and learning being a burden for the children. Quality in education remains the most critical aspect.

Education Commissions and Policies in education have tried to address these issues, with partial success but lack of clear-cut focus on elementary education, paucity of funds and a weak political commitment to steer the project have stood in the way of achieving desired results. As the political and economic landscape changes, private players have entered the fray and the State has further curtailed its role. The silver lining, however, is the RTE Act (2009) and the NCF (2005) which are committed to making learning a joyful experience for each and every child in school.

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5.12 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOURS PROGRESS

1. - Improvement in methods of teaching, text books, and system of examination;
 - Diversified courses;
 - Installation of higher secondary system; and
 - Three language formula.
2. The unique features and thrust areas of the Kothari Commission are: (i) its comprehensive approach to educational reconstruction; and (ii) its attempt to project a blueprint for a national system of education for India.
3. National Knowledge Commission was constituted to prepare a blueprint for reform of our knowledge related institutions and infrastructure which would enable India to meet the challenges of the future. For recommendations, you may refer to section 5.3.4.

4. NPE, 1986 introduced 'Operation Blackboard' for improving human and physical resources in primary schools. The scheme was relevant in the sense that most of the primary schools were running with shortage of resources both human and material.
5.
 - Assessment, enrollment, and retention of all children;
 - quality improvement of education by improving the school environment; and
 - arranging non-formal education for children.
6. Common School System means a system which provides education of an equitable quality to all children irrespective of caste, creed, community language, gender, economic condition, social status and physical mental ability of the students. Equitable education to all is expected to be provided through: minimum physical facilities, professional quality of the teachers, use of diversified and flexible curriculum, pedagogy for holistic, child friendly, and liberalise education, and free from gender and social biases.
7. 5.5.3 can help you to answer the question.
8. Self exercise.
9. Self exercise.
10. XIth Five Year Plan was different from previous Five Year Plans with respect to elementary education because; huge budgeting provision was made for the development of elementary education, free elementary education a right of the children, universal enrollment and retention was the top agenda etc.