

Original Article

Inclusion of the Excluded: A Study on Education Guarantee Scheme (EGS) in India

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ABSTRACT

India is the second most populous country in the world which is projected to be the world's most populous country by 2025. Government of India has a herculean task to build the human resources of the country. Acknowledging the fact, the Government of India had initiated a mammoth programme for spreading education entitled "Sarva Siksha Abhiyan (SSA)" meaning Universal Education Mission with an aim to educate all children of the country in the age group of 6-14. With the introduction of Right to Education Act in the country education becomes a fundamental right for every child. The SSA ensures a primary school in the radius of 1 km and wherever such schools are absent, an education centre under Education Guarantee Schemes (EGS) is opened to take care of early education of children. It is seen that community participation is the key success factor in ensuring effectiveness of any educational institution in the remote areas. This paper is an outcome of a study to determine the effectiveness of EGS centres in assessing the learning achievement of children studying in these centres.

Keywords: out of school, learning achievement, inaccessible areas, community involvement

INTRODUCTION

India is the second most populous country in the world. As per 2011 census, the country has over 1.21 billion people which is more than a sixth of the world's population. Already containing 17.5% of the world's population, India is projected to be the world's most populous country by 2025, surpassing China, its population exceeding 1.6 billion people by 2050. However, the fact remains that its population growth rate is 1.41%, ranking 93rd in the world. Considering the mammoth population figure, a small percent increase will lead to huge addition in the total population. To check the population explosion, one of the primary focuses is to spread education among masses.

India has more than 50% of its population below the age of 25 and more than 65% is below the age of 35. It is expected that, in 2020, the average age of an Indian will be 29 years, compared to 37 for China and 48 for Japan. Thus, the country is populated by young people and to become a super power, the young human resources need to be nurtured.

Understanding the importance of education, the country has enacted an Act entitled "Right to Education Act" that makes right to education of every Indian child as a fundamental right. It is a revolutionary step taken by Government of India in spreading education among children of the country. However, it is not a one-day affair as there has been persistent effort in the country for spreading education among masses. Among important events, 86th Amendment Act (2002) via Article 21A (Part III) of the Constitution of India seeks to make free and compulsory education a Fundamental Right for all children in the age group 6-14 years. In June 2005, the Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE) committee drafted the 'Right to Education' Bill and submitted to the Ministry of Human Resource Development. More than six decades after Independence, the Indian government has cleared the Right to Education Bill that makes free and compulsory education a fundamental right for all children between the ages of 6 and 14.

About Sarva Siksha Abhiyan Mission

Even much before the enactment of the Right to Education Act (RTE), the Government of India initiated the process of spreading education among children in every nook and corner of the country. One of the major initiatives happens to be the Sarva Siksha Abhiyan (SSA) Mission. While RTE puts emphasis on education as a right, SSA is an effort with a missionary zeal promoted by the community members to spread education by way of persuasion and incentives. Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan is

Government of India's flagship programme for achievement of Universalization of Elementary Education (UEE) in a time bound manner, as mandated by 86th amendment to the Constitution of India making free and compulsory Education to the Children of 6-14 years age group, a Fundamental Right. 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 class rooms, toilets, drinking water, maintenance grant and school improvement grants. Existing schools with inadequate teacher strength are provided with additional teachers, while the capacity of existing teachers is being strengthened by extensive training, grants for developing teaching-learning materials and strengthening of the academic support structure at a cluster, block and district level. SSA seeks to provide quality elementary education including life skills. SSA has a special focus on girl's education and children with special needs. SSA also seeks to provide computer education to bridge the digital divide.

SSA has many components and has been designed in a very logical way taking into consideration all aspects. SSA acknowledges and estimates barriers to education, whether it is poverty, inaccessibility, or physical challenges etc. All these aspects are taken care of by different schemes. One of the most important areas where SSA has put emphasis is on the Education Guarantee Scheme (EGS) and/or Alternative and Innovative Education (AIE). The scheme is designed in a unique way and destined to achieve its desired goals.

About Education Guarantee Scheme (EGS) and Alternative & Innovative Education (AIE)

The EGS and AIE are an important component of SSA to bring out-of-school children in the fold of elementary education. The scheme envisages that child-wise planning is undertaken for each out-of-school child. The EGS was initially designed to specifically address the issue of access.

The EGS & AIE cover children in the age group of 6-14 years, however, for children with disabilities, it cover children upto the age of 18 years complying with the provisions of Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection or Rights and full Participation) Act, 1995 of India. EGS & AIE is based on the assumption that the planning for universalisation of elementary education (UEE) for all children in the 6-14 years age group should be done in a holistic manner. The EGS & AIE clearly states that every district should initially target enrolment of all children in the 6-8 years age group in formal schools only (with some motivational camps or bridge courses, if necessary). For elder children (9-11 years age) also, the effort should be towards mainstreaming (admitting children to formal schools) through appropriate interventions like bridge courses, residential camps etc. Thus, the thrust is on ensuring enrolment and retention of children in formal schools as far as possible. Of course, it is recognized that children in the 12-14 years age group (who have never been enrolled or have dropped out early) and certain difficult groups like street children, children who migrate, bonded child labour etc cannot be admitted into formal schools and would require alternative interventions for some time. Such an approach envisages that child-wise planning is undertaken for each 'out of school' child and the possibility of enrolment/mainstreaming of 'out of school' children into formal schools is explored first before deciding on the alternative approaches that are necessary. This would require that the non-formal and formal systems converge totally at all levels. The EGS & AIE accord a priority to setting up of EGS centres (primary level) in un-served habitations where no school exists within a radius of 1 km. and at least 15 children in the age group of 6-14 who are not going to schools are available. The funds for EGS & AIE are shared on a 75:25 basis between the central and state governments for all state run schools.

This unique programme is acknowledged as a breakthrough in social sector planning, one that was based on community demand and managed by community itself. The working of EGS is monitored by a body formed by community itself viz. the Village Education Council (VEC), the centres are run by person(s) taken from local community with a missionary zeal against a nominal honorarium known as Siksha Mitra (education friend). Some persons from the local community itself are appointed by SSA against a nominal honorarium. They are given the charge of monitoring and are known as Cluster Resource Person (CRP), Block Resource Persons (BRP) etc.

Quality education is a cornerstone of EGS & AIE. Several elements of the Scheme viz. increased duration of the EGS & AIE centres (at least 4 hours everyday), induction and recurrent training of 30

days for Education Volunteers (EVs), 2 day review and planning meetings every month, regular academic support for EVs should contribute to improved quality. "EGS reinterpreted the definition of responsibility of the state to provide universal primary education by enlarging the understanding of state to mean not only government but local government or panchayat and the community". (Gopalkrishnan and Sharma, 1999).

EGS is a totally community driven approach. From its outset, it was positioned as a large-scale programme and not a small innovation. While the approach was certainly experimental, it was evident from the start that the Government was determined to cover the entire country. "Increasing adolescent crime, violence and general social unrest among educated youth further reinforces negative attitudes towards the youth and towards education, especially if cohort that has completed primary schooling." (Vimala Ramachandran, 2002) It is to be acknowledged that the EGS and AIE have provided the light of education to those children who, otherwise, had been deprived of from the arena of primary education.

Functioning of EGS

EGS are run on community driven approach. The Village Education Committees (VEC) is constituted with an intention of seeking support from community in running the schools on participative manner. It conducts periodical meetings to ensure co-operation of the community. The VEC is entrusted to monitor the functioning of the EGS and the work of the Shiksha Mitra (SM, the teacher in the school). The VEC is instrumental in selecting the SMs, disbursing his dues and also releasing funds for development of the EGS. VEC also has an important role in identifying the needs of the EGS and seeking enrolment of all school-age children through various means.

The Problem under Study

In the line of other states of India, the State of Assam has also made a significant progress in the field of SSA interventions. It is heartening to note that SSA, Assam has achieved 86.58% in terms of opening of EGS centres. Till May 31, 2007 the State has 5,870 centres against a target of 6,780 centres. However, in terms of number of learners, the State has surpassed the target of learners by enrolling 3,96,117 learners against the target of 3,59,434 resulting in 110.22% target achievement. (source: Mission Director, SSA, Assam). This is the only large state in the country to record such achievement, though Sikkim has got 255% target achievement but in that case the number of learners is very less, enrolling 3145 learners as against 1,233.

However, the figures alone cannot state whether the objectives of EGS are achieved in the State. The quality of education provided by these centres is also a matter of concern. The concept of EGS cannot be successful without the support of the local community. Thus, a need is felt to know about the status of functioning of such EGS centres in the State of Assam. The present study is carried out with a focus to assess the functioning of these EGS centres and also to know the learning achievement level of the children studying in such centres.

A Description of the Study Area

Assam is one of the twenty eight states of India. It is located at the gateway of Northeast India and is separated by Bangladesh from mainstream India. The total geographical area is 78438 sq. km. As per 2011 census the total population of the state stands at 3,11,69,272. Of this 86 per cent live in rural areas. The child population in age group 0-6 as per 2011 census is 45,11,307 and the literacy rates is 73.18%

Darrang district consists of a narrow strip of plain lying between Himalayas and *Brahmaputra* river in the north-west part of Assam. It comprise of an area of 1420.51 sq.km. It consists of 6 blocks. As per 2011 census Darrang district has a population of 9,08,090 persons. Average literacy rate of Darrang in 2011 is 64.55%. There are a total of 149,626 children under age of 0-6 (16.48%)

Sonitpur district is spread over an area of 5,324 sq. kms. on north bank of *Brahmaputra* river. In terms of area Sonitpur is the second largest district of Assam.. It consists of 7 blocks. Sonitpur has a population of 1,925,975. Average literacy rate of Sonitpur in 2011 is 69.96%. There are a total of 267,238 (13.88%) children under age of 0-6

Located in the very heartland of Assam, Nagaon district falls directly at the center of the entire northeast of India. Total area under Nagaon district is of about 3,975 sq.km. Nagaon has a population of 2,826,006 persons. Average literacy rate of Nagaon in 2011 is 73.78%. There are a total 446,238 (15.79%) children under age of 0-6.

Aims and Objectives of the Study

The main objective of the study has been to evaluate the functioning of EGS centres in the state of Assam with special emphasis to the learning achievement level of the children. The following are the specific objectives.

- To study the enrolment pattern in different classes
- To study the regularity in attendance of children from class I
- To find out the academic competencies of children studying in different classes right from class I
- To assess the status of admission in Class V in upper primary schools
- To assess the impact of EGS centres in terms of creating interest of community towards education and sustaining their interest, and
- To assess the condition of EGS centres

METHODOLOGY USED FOR SELECTION OF SAMPLE EGS CENTRES

The success of any research study depends on the research methodology adopted for the study. The reliability of the findings of the study is dependent on the sample selection method, pattern of questions being asked, questionnaire administration, analysis technique, method of handling the interviews etc. Following sections deal with the explanation of the method of selection of sample, about the research instruments etc. applied for the study.

Sample Area and Sample Size

Assam is one of the 28 states of India situated in the eastern part of the country. The State is divided into 23 districts for administrative convenience. The study covers 10 percent of the EGS centres in each district of Darrang, Sonitpur and Nagaon. The total number of EGS in these three districts is 1444 and as such 145 EGS centres are selected for study.

Sampling Plan

The sampling procedure has been designed in such a way so as to ensure that each and every unit has its chance of inclusion in the study.

Determination of Sample Size and Sample Units

A multi-level stratified random sampling is followed which is described as below:

Level 1: District

Three districts viz. Darrang, Sonitpur and Nagaon are selected for the purpose of selected study. Table I shows the basis for fixation of number of EGS centres selected for the purpose of the study.

Table I: Sample Size and No. of Running EGS in the Selected Districts

District	Total No. of running EGS	No. of EGS selected for study
Darrang	555	56
Sonitpur	522	52
Nagaon	367	37
Total	1444	145

The sample size is 10% of total functioning EGS centres in three districts under study i.e 10% of 1444 or 145 EGS centres. Every effort is taken to see that the 145 EGS centres that are selected for survey should represent the characteristics of the EGS centres running in the State especially in the study districts. Thus, the demography of these districts covers all sections of diverse population of Assam. Besides indigenous Assamese population these district comprise of tribal, tea garden workers, minorities etc. The above data also reflect that these three districts cover almost 25% of the total running EGS of the state as well as 27% of total learners studying in EGS centres in the state. Thus, the findings from the study area would have high relevance to those of the State.

Level 2: Blocks

Three blocks from each district are selected on the basis of maximum localization of EGS centres situated in each block. The first three blocks in order of ranking based on number of EGS have been selected. Based on this criterion, the following blocks in the study districts are selected. Table II shows the name of the blocks selected for study against each of three selected districts.

Table II: Blocks Selected for Study

District	Selected Blocks
Darrang	Dalgaon, Mazbat and Kalaigaon
Sonitpur	Balipara, Naduar and Dhekiajuli
Nagaon	Lanka, Jugijan and Batadrava

Level 3: EGS Centres

Proportionate numbers of EGS centres are selected on the basis of the following three criteria.

Criterion 1: Habitation Specification

First three habitations on the basis of the number of EGS centres are selected for study.

Criterion 2: Enrolment size of EGS

EGS centres are categorized into 3 groups on the basis of the number of enrolment of children. As such, three categories of EGS are small (1-40), medium (41-80) and large (81 and above). The size of sample in each category depends on the proportion of that particular segment to the total number of the segment in the category, block vis-à-vis district. Table III shows the summary of number of final selection of sample size being EGS centres selected for study.

Table 3: Sample Size Determination as per selection Criteria

District	Block	Habitation	Enrolment of children (number)			Sub Total	Sample Size
			1-40	41-80	81- above		
Darrang	Dalgaon	Plain	1	5	13	19	29
		Char	0	2	8	10	
		TG	0	0	0	0*	
	Kalaigaon	Plain	1	1	0	2	15
		Char	0	5	8	13	
		TG	0	0	0	0*	
	Mazbat	Plain	1	5	2	8	12
		TG	0	2	1	3	
		Forest	0	1	0	1	
Sonitpur	Balipara	TG	0	4	3	7	17
		Forest	2	2	1	5	
		Plain	0	4	1	5	
	Naduar	Char	2	6	1	9	18
		Plain	2	3	0	5	
		Forest	0	3	1	4	
	Dhekiajuli	Forest	0	3	6	9	17
		Plain	1	3	2	6	
		TG	0	1	1	2	
Nagaon	Lanka	Plain	0	5	10	15	23
		Forest	0	0	4	4	
		Remote	0	1	3	4	
	Jugijan	Plain	0	6	1	7	8
		Remote	0	0	1	1	
		Forest	0	0	0	0	
	Batadrava	Char	0	1	3	4	6
		Plain	0	1	1	2	
		Reverine	0	0	0	0*	
Total						145	

* the calculated sample size on proportional basis comes out to less than 1 centre

In the selection of EGS centres, following additional points are considered:

1. EGS centres that follow only Assamese medium of Instruction
2. EGS centres that are established during 2003-04
3. EGS centres have learners in all the four classes.

After following the above criteria and after considering the additional points, 145 EGS centres are selected for detailed survey.

Collection of Information

Collection of information is a very vital part of any explorative study. Thus, the study aimed at collection of quality data for ensuring convincing findings.

Secondary Information

Published information regarding Sarva Siksha Abhiyan has been taken from the office of the Mission Director, SSA, Guwahati. Details regarding EGS centres are collected from the district offices as well as block offices operating under SSA mission. Moreover, relevant information has been also collected from various publications of the Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India. Some of the information worth mentioning are regarding aims and objectives of Sarva Siksha Abhiyan, details regarding the current status of EGS in the State of Assam, district-wise including location maps of EGS block-wise, details of all EGS centres in each district and list of the Block Resource Person (BRP)/Cluster Resource Person (CRP) with all contact details (collected from the office of the District Mission Coordinator in each district)

Primary Information

Information regarding the functioning of the EGS centres and learners' achievement level has been gathered from various stakeholders viz. the Siksha Mitra, Office bearers of Village Education Council, Community head, parents, learners etc. through structured interviews with the help of a detailed questionnaire. The details of the questionnaire is described in the following section.

Pilot Survey

To fine tune the questionnaire, a number of pilot surveys are being carried out in each district and finally the questionnaire is made ready for administration.

Information about learning achievement of children

Various information regarding the learning achievement of children studying in EGS centres are tried to be collected from interviews of different stakeholder. However, to authenticate the findings, a test of learners is carried out in the selected EGS centres on the day of visit.

Research Instruments

The objectives of the study have been to evaluate the functioning of EGS centres as well as to find out the learning achievement level of the children studying in these centres. Keeping these objectives in mind, a thorough study is being carried out in all selected EGS centres as well as the stakeholders with the following research instruments.

Questionnaire:

A questionnaire is being administered to find out the views of various stakeholders as well as to know the status of functioning of such centres. The questionnaire has 6 parts besides the identification sheet, the details are as follows:

Identification sheet containing all the details regarding the EGS centre studied.

Part I: Getting views of the Siksha Mitra regarding the activities performed by the Siksha Mitra, various competency building programmes undergone by them, problems faced by them, suggestions put forward by them etc.

Part II: Getting views of the VEC Secretary/President about the status of functioning of the EGS centre under study.

Part III: Getting Community's view regarding the functioning of the EGS centre in their locality.

Part IV: Getting views of learners by exploring their interest in coming to the EGS centre, motivation factors etc.

Part V: Getting Views of Parents regarding the status of functioning of EGS centres.

Part VI: Observation Sheet. It is, in fact, a check-list to record presence of learners on the day of visit, infrastructure of the centre, availability of teaching learning materials etc.

Question Paper for Evaluation of Learning achievement of the Children

An evaluation test is being carried for all the learners in each class in the selected EGS centres. The question paper for each class is designed in pursuant to the topics taught till the date of visit. The duration of test is of 2 hours consisting of both oral and written. Every care is taken to ensure that tests are administered in a congenial environment.

As the evaluation test is conducted for all the children of the selected EGS centres, the answer scripts are of substantial quantity. The same are evaluated and the marks are tabulated for finding out the learning achievement level of the children among the study districts.

Status of Functioning of EGS Centres

The EGS centre has a prime role to play to bring about an academic revolution in such places where there was no formal education system. However, the statistics of number of EGS centres and learner's enrolment may not give any satisfaction unless it is seen that these centres are running successfully and have been successful in achievement of the objectives of the SSA. As such, the study aims to assess the status of functioning of these EGS centres by way of an in-depth of study of its enrolment pattern in different classes, regularity in attendance of learners, academic competencies of children studying in these centres, status of admission in class V so as to know the continuity of education of learners, impact of these centres in creating and sustaining an academic environment in the locality and finally to evaluate the condition of such centres in terms of its infrastructure, availability of TLM etc. The following sections of address these issues specifically.

FINDINGS AT A GLANCE

The major objective of the study has been assessing the functioning of EGS centres and evaluating the learning achievement level of learners. The major objectives have been sub divided into several sub-objectives with an aim get the input required for reaching the basic objectives of the study.

Enrolment Pattern in Different Classes

The Enrolment pattern shows that the enrolment number goes on decreasing in upper classes. The difference of enrolment figure in Class I and Class II is the maximum. It shows that the drop-out is the maximum in Class I. If a student could continue till the completion of Class I, his or her chance of sustainability towards education is enhanced. The majority of the children in the age group of 5 to 11 are enrolled in the nearby educational centres.

Almost 76% of the VEC respondents, 80% of the community leaders and 90% of the parent respondents believe that to a large extent all out-of-school children of the locality are enrolled in the nearby EGS centres. The main three reasons for children remaining out-of school mentioned by the cross-section stakeholders are: i) Poverty; 2) Ignorance of parents/illiteracy and iii) Children being engaged in household work.

Regularity in Attendance of Children

It is encouraging to note that the average attendance rate of learners for all classes on an average is 78%. The main reasons for drop-out are same as the children remaining out of school. However, some other reasons are also mentioned by cross-sectional respondents like shifting of families, child labour, child marriage, natural disaster, other forms religious residential education etc. 95% of the VEC respondents and 98% of the learner respondents have provided positive remarks regarding regularity of opening of the school.

Majority of the respondents including Siksha Mitra, VEC, community leaders mention that they convince parents for sending their children to school through household visits, arrange parents' meet and encourage the learners to come to schools for the purpose of checking drop-out. The other strategies adopted for it are: celebration of festivals, arranging games and entertainment programmes in the centre, taking out procession to spread awareness regarding importance of education, taking help of matri got etc.

Status of Admission of Learners in Class V

The correlation calculated between the learners passed Class IV and taken admission in Class V as per EGS record shows for boys 0.882 and for girls 0.934. The figures for the both cases show a high correlation and it is interesting to note that girls have better position than their counterpart in terms of continuance of education in Class V as per the EGS record

Case Studies in 12 upper primary schools where physical verification were made, the situation provides a mixed picture as far the record in upper primary school is concerned. A large number of learners were not found in upper primary school record. There may be drop-out or the cases may be such that the learners have taken admission in some other primary schools.

Impact of EGS centres in creating and sustaining interest of community towards education

Almost all SMs have undergone training on language and mathematics. The other important topics are documentation, new teaching methodology, evaluation methods, lesson plan etc. Majority of the SMs have undergone training of 9-10 days duration for at least once or twice.

The main sources of support received by the SMs in running their respective centres are the VEC, other villagers, GP, CRP, parents and matri got (mothers' group). The types of support they extend

relate to smooth running of the centre, providing infrastructure, centre administration and maintenance, attracting learners etc.

Top three methods found to be used by SMs to create interest about learning are I) convincing parents about importance of education ; ii) organizing meetings of villagers, iii) visiting households. Top three methods found to be used by SMs to sustain interest of learners viz. I) by arranging meeting to convince parents, ii) by maintaining a closer relationship with parents, and iii) through community participation. Other methods are teaching in a joyful environment, maintaining regularity, arranging competitions, celebrating festivals etc. It is seen that majority of SMs think they contribute to the centre by taking classes regularly, by solving routine problems, getting cooperation from the community etc. According to the majority of VEC respondents SMs perform their work enthusiastically, take classes regularly, inform the community the status of the centre and visit households etc. Most of the VEC respondents help the SM by providing useful suggestions and assistance in every aspect including teaching whenever required.

Parents' and Learners' Perception Education

Majority of the parents' respondents opines that they send their wards to the EGS centre for getting education rather than for food. A substantial portion of the parents' respondents also mentioned that their wards are studying in the EGS centre as it is near to their home.

Parents believe that their children would prosper by taking education at the EGS centre. Maximum number of parents respondents wish their daughter to study up to HSLC level and in case of boys they wish them to study up to higher level.

Majority of learner respondents mentions that they come to school for learning. All the learner respondents mentioned that they liked their SMs, enjoyed coming to the school and would think that they would prosper by studying. Most of the learner- respondents want to become teacher in future, followed by doctor and police officers.

Assessment of Conditions of EGS centre

95% of the SM respondents feel that the centres are running regularly. Almost all the VEC respondents feel that the centres are regular. Majority of SMs opine that they handle multiple classes by teaching in one class and by giving assignments to other classes, followed by group study and taking help of good students. Major problems faced by SM and VEC respondents are: I) inadequacy of TLM in time, ii) language problem and iii) problems related to mid-day meal.

88% of the VEC respondents are happy and satisfied with the functioning of the centre. Only 56% of the VEC respondents are satisfied with the functioning of the Cluster Resource Person (CRP). Major problem cited by the VEC respondents regarding the running of the EGS centre is infrastructure inadequacy.

All the community respondents baring one (out of 103 valid responses) are aware about the existence of the EGS centre. More than 91% of the community respondents have visited the EGS centres in their locality and almost equal number of respondents mentioned that their support was sought by the SMs and CRPs.

93% of the learner and 79% of parent respondents state that they have not paid any money to the EGS centres. 15% of parent respondents mention that they have paid money sometimes. Mostly money is paid by the parents respondents are for festivals in schools, cultural functions, repairing of school building etc. 5% of the parent respondents mentioned that they had to purchase TLM in case of loss or damage of the same. Majority of learner respondents (more than 82%) mention that they get mid-day meal regularly while 13% of them have mentioned that they get it sometimes. More than 86% of the parent respondents opine that they are invited to the EGS centres for meeting. More than 79% of parent respondents feel that functioning of EGS centre is good.

Physical verification about the condition and running of the EGS centre

TLMs are available in most of the cases but delivered late in many cases. Most of the SMs handle multiple classes by group study or by assigning tasks to other classes while teaching in one class. 70% of the EGS centre have their buildings under makeshift arrangement. In 52% cases data enumerators were satisfied with the functioning of the EGS centres, in 34% cases they have found it fair and in 11% cases the enumerators were not satisfied with the functioning of EGS centres visited by them. In 25 EGS centres, where a visit by SSA officials for last one year was examined thoroughly, it was found that mostly CRP visits these centre. It is very rare to find any higher level officials' visit during a complete year.

Evaluation of Learning Achievement Level of the Learners

The academic performance of learners was observed to be improved gradually over their promotion to upper classes. As per the EGS centre record, it is seen that the maximum learners in Class I get D grade (0 to 50% marks) while in case of Class IV the performance of learners are evenly distributed among 4 grades.

Written test marks and marks for oral test scored in the evaluation test conducted by the study team for all the learners were taken into consideration. Details analysis of marks scored by Class I and Class IV learners reveals that in the written test of Class I, majority has got D grade, followed by A grade. In case of written test marks of Class IV also, majority of learners have scored D grade although the variation of marks is much lesser in case of Class IV than that of Class I. In Oral test marks for Class I and Class IV reveal that majority has got A grade (above 75% marks) followed by B Grade (61% to 74%) and D grade.

54% of SM respondents have mentioned that they assigned projects to the Class IV students. The main topics of the project have been identification of plants, environmental awareness etc.

SIGNIFICANT OBSERVATIONS

The study team, while carrying out the study, has observed some issues worth mentioning related the functioning of EGS centres. Mostly the EGS centres are located in remote areas that are inaccessible and connectivity from the main land is very poor. Natural calamities affect the normal functioning of the centre leading to lower attendance of learners. In rainy days, attendance is very low due to poor roads etc. This is very true in case of floods. In one of the study areas viz. Lanka block, it is found the region is prone to malaria, deaths of learners are reported in many cases. Lack of pure drinking water is also noticed.

VEC has a lead role to perform. It is seen that where VEC President/Secretary is sincere and dedicated, the EGS centres perform well. The selection of an honest, sincere and dedicated person for VEC President, Secretary is of prime importance.

Exact calculation of out-of-school children can be made by comparison of VER (Village Education Register) figure with those enrolment figures in EGS and other educational institutions. In most of the cases, VERs are found not to be maintained properly. In some cases, the present VEC could not maintain proper records, as his/her predecessor did not transfer all relevant records.

Sometimes Class IV pass-outs find problem in getting admission in Class V due to insufficient number and capacity of upper primary school in nearby locality.

Even if provision for summer vacation is not there in case of EGS, however, it is seen that attendance becomes very low during the summer vacation period of formal schools. Moreover, during the period of vacation mid-day meal is not offered. Mid Day meal in itself is a debatable issue. It has both positive and negative impact. It is seen that children both enrolled and non-enrolled come to school at the time of distribution of mid-day meal.

It is observed that SSA officials' visits to the EGS centres are very low. However, visits by officials have got great impact on the overall functioning of the centre. It creates a positive impression on the entire locality.

Medium of instruction has been a vital issue. It is felt that a bridge language is necessary for perfect dissemination of knowledge in many of the centres.

The SMs responsibility and the volume of work are much higher in relation to the compensation package received by them. Student Teacher ratio is very high. Class I need an exclusive SM as they need special care and affection. Further, the rate of drop out in Class I much higher than that of other classes, hence they need for special attention.

It is seen that though community involvement in EGS functioning is not satisfactory but if the same can be strengthened, it can bring about tremendous change to these centres of learning.

CONCLUSION

The overall findings of the study have come out with positive note towards the status of functioning of EGS centres in the study area and also the learning achievement level of the learners. Most of the EGS centres are functioning well and the learners' educational achievement level is also found to be satisfactory. The contribution of EGS centres for the locality cannot be denied. The learners who study in the EGS centres, most of them might not have seen the face of education had there been no

EGS centre in the locality. However there are certain deficiencies which need to be looked into for strengthening these centres and bringing excellence.

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