

# Approach Paper to 12<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan: Inputs on Education

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## 1 Executive Summary

Given the vast and diverse landscape of the Indian elementary education system, significant progress has been made towards the achievement of the goals laid out in the Constitution and the National Policy on Education. These include significantly higher levels of funding, access, enrollment, infrastructure and the recently legislated Right to Education (RTE) Act. In spite of these developments, critical challenges continue to remain in areas such as retention, quality and equitable opportunities for all.

In this context, the consultation exercise facilitated by the Planning Commission is likely to yield multiple, diverse recommendations. In our view, the following general principles must be applied to these recommendations to ensure that the resulting plan is meaningful and manageable.

- **Focus on Execution not Policy:** Policies pertaining to education are largely appropriate and do not suffer from any major lacunae. The critical gaps lie in implementation and execution of policy.
- **Recognize Limitations of Private Partnerships:** The role of private partners and private capital in education has been given high importance in recent times. In our view, this approach is a fundamentally flawed one. Given the scale, diversity and deep inequities of India, private entities can only have a minor role to play in providing education (primary or higher). It is the government that must spearhead the effort to provide good education at all levels – private partners can only play a limited supplementary role in specific and specialized areas of expertise.
- **Focus on the Vital Few:** While many of the proposed interventions may be valid and well-intentioned, we believe that concentrating energies and resources on a few critical ones will yield better results than attempting too many things simultaneously.

In our view, four vital interventions that can lead to systemic and sustainable improvements are:

1. **Radical Overhaul of Teacher Education:** The pre-service and in-service teacher education systems in India are in disarray. For example, an estimated 80% of existing B.Ed. colleges are defunct with uncontrolled mushrooming of low quality teacher training institutes. The curriculum, pedagogy, leadership and regulation of teacher education must be revamped and revitalized urgently.
2. **Focus on Education Leadership and Management:** About 5 –7 % of government schools provide high quality education to their students – largely because of the leadership, motivation and competence of the teachers and head teachers involved. However, there is currently no system that provides systematic leadership skills training to Head Teachers to equip them for the task of leading their school to quality performance. This needs to be urgently addressed.
3. **Rejuvenation of Institutional Structures for Academic Support:** The institutional structures for teacher development and academic support are in shambles. Educational structures like the SCERT, SIEMAT, DIETs etc must be re-vitalized without any delay. Improved leadership quality, higher competencies of academic staff, superior people development and greater autonomy are essential. This will greatly contribute towards the development of better teachers, curriculum and learning processes in the classroom.
4. **Focus on Early Childhood Education (ECE):** Children aged between 3 and 6 need to be exposed to a child-friendly learning environment to lay the foundation for school education. Therefore the integration of ECE and school education conceptually, legislatively and operationally is of critical importance.

## 2 Teacher Education & Development

In our experience there are about 5 –7 % of government schools that provide high quality education to students. These schools do so largely because of the pivotal leadership, motivation levels and competence of the teachers and head teachers involved. If the quality of teachers in all our schools needs to improve then the following issues are of key importance:

- **Holistic Teacher Development:** There must be profound improvement in a range of related domains in Teacher Education and Professional Development and not just more ritualistic “training” programs. The scope of such reforms needs to be much wider and should include pre-service education teacher selection, teacher preparation, continuous professional development, continuous academic support and teacher motivation.
- **Radical Overhaul of Pre-Service Teacher Education:** The teacher education system in India is in disarray. Informed estimates suggest that 80% of existing B.Ed colleges are near defunct. They have archaic curricula, poor leadership and inadequate faculty. This is despite the fact that the NCTE was set up to assist teachers and their training institutions in upgrading quality and professionalism. The NCTE is in its eighteen years of existence has not managed to control the mushrooming of low-quality teacher training institutes. Thus, there is concurrently an urgent need to re-vitalize the NCTE.
- **Teacher Recruitment:** The State Education Departments and the MHRD should ensure that existing Teacher Eligibility Tests (TET) are based on teaching competencies and not on information recall. The Government needs to make required changes in TET in consultation with academic bodies like NCERT, NUEPA and other academic institutions. The Teacher Eligibility Tests (TET) should change from being a test of information and knowledge to being a test of teaching competencies.
- **Teacher Career Development:** The MHRD should establish policies and procedures for setting academic goals for teachers, providing formative feedback and summative performance appraisal. The State Education Departments should implement such policies while tailoring it to the local context.
- **Involvement of Teacher Educators:** It is vital to include the teacher educators sufficiently in the process of reform and change. This inclusion needs the creation of a framework for autonomy and competence at all levels of teacher education - SCERT, DIETs, BRCs. CRCs and teachers.
- **Development of Academic Resources:** Develop appropriate material for teachers/teacher educators in a variety of languages (changed curriculum needs to be supported with the right material/academic resources in various languages)

## 3 Education Leadership & Management

School leadership is only second to teaching competency in its impact on student learning. In our nearly 1.3 Million schools especially the lower primary schools, there is currently no system that provides systematic leadership skills training to Head Teachers to equip them for the task of leading their school to quality performance.

- **Systemic Approach to Leadership Development:** The MHRD and State Education Departments should establish a system whereby ongoing management and leadership skills training are provided

to School Head Teachers. Funds should be made available under the SSA for conducting such training programs.

- **Leveraging Professional Expertise:** Professional expertise in management and leadership training is required to provide School Head teachers the necessary skills for providing academic leadership. There are also a number of organizations that specialize in providing such training programs and these can be contracted to provide Head Teacher Leadership training.

#### 4 Rejuvenation of Institutional Structures for Academic Support

Teacher competence greatly depends on the academic support that is provided to in-service teachers on a continuous basis. Institutions such as NCERT, SCERT, DIETs, SIEMAT etc. which were established for this purpose have become almost dysfunctional. For example, the 600+ District Institutes of Education and Training (DIETs) established to provide academic support to teachers and act as the hub for academic leadership in the districts are today in a state of decay and an assignment in a DIET is seen as a “punishment posting”.

These institutions suffer from a lack of vision, absence of a sense of purpose, poor quality of leadership, and low staff morale. The key steps required for their rejuvenation include:

- **Develop Vision and Clarity of Purpose:** In many instances, ‘Academic Lead Institutions’ have become irrelevant, enervated and subservient to administrative bodies. They have deviated from their primary vision of providing academic leadership – they need to rediscover their sense of purpose, focus on core academic functions and not slide into becoming mere “administrators of academic work”.
- **Strengthen Core Processes and Practices:** Academic and academic processes need to be strengthened through greater decentralization and higher autonomy which encourages institutions to be more flexible, responsive and innovative.
- **Create Separate Academic Cadre:** The State Government should establish a separate cadre for education functionaries in DIETs and other academic institutions like SCERT, NCERT, BRC, CRC. The cadres should have a clear and attractive career path and professional development opportunities to keep employees motivated.
- **Encourage Academic Leadership and Integration:** The State Government should constitute District Education Councils comprising of DIETs, SSA and Zilla Parishad heads. In these Councils the DIETs should assume a leadership role in the planning, execution and support of academic activities in the district. Similar leadership role needs to be played by the SCERT at a state level and NCERT at a national level.
- **Encourage On Going Quality Assessment:** The MHRD should create a framework of quality and encourage independent assessment of the institutions against the framework. The MHRD should monitor quality on a regular basis.

## 5 Early Childhood Education (ECE)

Several studies on early childhood have shown that 3-6 yrs. is the time when children need to be exposed to a child-friendly learning environment to enhance their all-round development and lay the foundation for school education. Children who experience schooling for the first time at the age of 6 years are clearly at a disadvantage to those with a good pre-school experience.

In the current scheme of things, the Government of India has evolved the Integrated Child Development Services Scheme (ICDS) which is the single largest provider of Early Childhood Education (ECE). In this context the following issues surrounding ECE should be considered:

- **Policy and Legislative Imperatives:** The RTE applies to only children between 6 and 14 and the critical years of 3 – 6 have been excluded. The Early Childhood Education (ECE) directive under Article 45 of the Indian Constitution should be included as a Fundamental Right to Education. The legislation should be duly backed by adequate resources from the state.
- **Convergence with Primary Education:** There is a need to develop close tie-ups between primary schooling and ECE initiatives thus allowing an easy transition for the child from pre-school to mainstream education, arresting dropouts, enabling elder girl children to attend primary schools by relieving them of child-care duties etc. The MHRD and the Women and Child Welfare Department (WCD) should work closely together to ensure harmonious and synchronized functioning of pre-school and primary education systems.
- **Establishment of Minimum Standards:** In the absence of any minimum specifications concerning ECE centers, the current approach in ECE is of a minimalist approach. For example, nearly three-quarters of teachers engaged in ECE have not received any type of pedagogical training. The MHRD should ensure that the in-service and pre-service training, curriculum and content of the ECE workers is of a good quality and invite bodies like NCERT, NIEPA, NIPCCD and competent private organizations to evolve minimum specifications.
- **Increased Access and Coverage:** According to the 2001 census, the country had approximately 60 million children in the age group of 3-6 years while only 34 million children were covered by ICDS and other private initiatives. The State should establish one ECE centre for a group of 25 children within accessible distance of their homes and support various forms of mobile services/crèches to cater to remote habitations.
- **Improved Working Conditions of Existing Anganwadi Workers (AWW):** Over 800,000 AWWs and an equal number of helpers totalling about more than one and half million women, have been engaged in imparting ECE under ICDS. However, they have poor working/service conditions due to the honorary status of their work and compensation ranging from Rs. 800 to Rs. 1300 per month. The State should revise the honorarium amounts for AWW to substantially higher amounts and sufficient funds allocated for this purpose.