Understanding contemporary policy backdrop and relevance of 'Skills for Life and Livelihood' at Elementary level of Education

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ABSTRACT

Elementary Education (EE) in India is the only compulsory level of education extended as a right to all children in the age group 6-14years, and it is very likely that a huge proportion of the population gets opportunity of education upto this level only. When universalizing elementary education is still a challenge and learning outcomes in our schools are also concerning, it is necessary for education policies to emphasize 'Skills for Life and Livelihood' at elementary level of education. It is essential to necessitate the quality of learning in our schools for enabling a better material, human and spiritual life, and also for the sustainable development of the country withal.

This paper is based on a 'secondary descriptive research' that used purposive sampling and interview method, etc conducted by Public Policy Research Centre, to emphasize the same aspects of EE. It builds on these arguments through philosophical and contemporary rationale of education. Further it goes on exploring discrepancies in the existing policy framework wrt SSA and RTE, alongwith tracing out a possible road-map within the existing framework. The study has been submitted at the Ministry of Human Resource Development for consideration in the new National Policy for Education framework under School Education. In this paper, the same study is presented briefly to portray the relevance of the argument, findings of the study and approach of the way forward recommended through the study (Detailed recommendations of the study are not mentioned here).

Keywords: Indian education system, elementary education, life and livelihood skills, SSA, RTE, new education policy.

India is one of the world's fastest growing economies in terms of GDP share (PPP), only behind China and US (World Bank Report 2011). The 'Global Economic Prospects' report published by World Bank in January'2015 forecasted that by 2017 India will out-pace China in terms of GDP growth rate.[1] The country sits on a most advantageous situation with 65% of its population being under the age of 35 and approximately 12 million individuals on an average are expected to join the workforce every year. With these demographics, it happens to be world's youngest nation of median age 27years.

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However, the ability of the nation to reap maximum benefits out of this better-off is doubted when the quality of our education system is bothering. Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2014 mentions though the enrolment levels in Indian schools are 96% or higher for the 6-14 age group but 25% children in Std-VIII and 50% in Std-V cannot read Std-II level textbooks and 19.5% children in Std-II cannot recognize numbers.[2] National University of Education Planning and Administration (NUEPA) also mentions concern over the quality of learning in its document titled 'India: Education for all-towards quality and equity' published in August'2014.[3] And so does National Achievement Survey (NAS) 2014 conducted by National Council for Education Research and Training (NCERT)[4].

With this huge grey area in terms of quality of education in the Indian Education System we cannot expect our generations to have a future of vast opportunities. This definitely paves way for poor employability. Quoting in this regards further, the India Skills Report 2015 released by CII with PeopleStrong and Wheebox that finds only 39.36% (18-21 yrs), 34.13% (22-25 yrs) and 30.48% (26-29 yrs) graduate/under-graduate candidates employable out of 300,000 tested all across India,[5] and most lacked basic employability skills of communication and numerical/logical ability. These statistics certainly threaten the aspirations of sustainable development and maximizing the demographic dividend in India.

Philosophical Perspectives

Education is the index of Nation's sustainable development apparently. Just as GDP reflects prosperity of the nation at a point of time, the quality of education in a country reflects its ability to sustain development over time. Developing nations should not devalue the importance of education. It not only provides knowledge to people, but also renders them ability to acquire skills, techniques, information and broadens their horizon/ outlook. The Indian concept of education, since early Vedic period has been that it emancipates (**सा विद्या या विमुक्तये**), that it develops art of life in an individual.

In the words of G.D.H Cole[6], *"The education system which we attempt to set-up must depend on the kind of society we mean to live in, on the qualities in men and women on which we set the highest value, and on the estimates which makes educability both of those who are endowed with the higher intellectual or aesthetic capacities and of ordinary people."* This relates to the philosophical aspect of education that forms of the base of any education system across the globe. As Plato defines, "*True education, whatever that may be, will have the greatest tendency to civilize and humanize in their relation to another'*, which is still the most widely accepted theory of education based on humanism[7].

The Indian education system ever since the Vedic age was propounded on same humanist principles essentially, extending it to the path of salvation. Historian Altekar has rightly remarked in this context that in India education has been '*regarded as a source of illumination and power that transforms and ennobles our nature by progressive and harmonious development of our physical, mental, intellectual and spiritual powers*[8].' The contemporary Indian philosophers of education have also furthered the same essence of education. Their theories also seem to be based on the ancient *Upanisadic* thought, extending to *Neo-Vedanta* philosophy. Whether it was Sri Aurobindo, Vivekanada, Tagore or Gandhi, 'all these philosophers with minor differences among them have maintained what can be called *Integral Humanism,* which is the philosophy of our age' (G.R Sharma, 2003).

The doctrine was advocated by educationist Pt Madan Mohan Malviya. In his view, '*education must be given to all as he believed that poverty lies in the ignorance of people. He realized the importance of education for social and economic development.*' He advocated compulsory primary education in India and universal elementary education for overall development. He linked importance of elementary education with agriculture and industrial education, mentioning that it provides the base for technical and specialized education. Malviya's philosophy of education based on Integral Humanism emphasized education to be a tool for overall development of personality.[9]

The Gandhian exposition on aim of education is remarkable here. It mentions that 'education is ought to be a kind of insurance against unemployment'[10]. In his words, "*The child at the age of 14, that is, after finishing 7 years course should be discharged as an earning unit. … Even so the State takes charge of the child at age-7, and returns it to the family as an earning unit. You impart education and simultaneously cut at the root of unemployment."* The 'Wardha Scheme of Basic Education' postulated by Gandhi contained the same ideals that advocated

education through handicraft for skilling children in order to make them self-reliant later in life, establishing direct relationship of knowledge and life. It advocated mother-tongue of the child to be the medium of instruction, and child to be the centre of education system while teachers to be the main pillars of the entire system. It was focused on overall development of the child--his body, mind and soul. It provided for systematic and organized knowledge delivery to the child. It adequately provided for teachers' training as well[11].

It is evident here, that the Indian Philosophy of Education looks at education as a path towards salvation, primarily based on Integral Humanism, which is further based on the attributes of life-body, mind, intellect and soul, related to *kama, artha, dharma* and *moksha*, respectively. And since, elementary education-the founding level of education is the only compulsory channel of education in India, it is relevant to emphasize 'skills for life and livelihood' through Elementary education.

The Skill Component

Since there is a wide possibility in developing countries that compulsory basic education is the last level of education accessed by most of its population. So it becomes highly essential to impart quality education that forms the strong foundation for life as well as livelihood. For developing nations, the developmental process for maximizing demographic dividend shall begin with career awareness at the elementary school level, which is initiated to broaden the student's knowledge about careers, ability to connect academic learning to the workplace and self-realization. It establishes school as a foundation for education-workplace connections and requires community involvement and support (*Oklahoma School-to-Work System 1996*). Because young children come to school with preconceived ideas of work and several other perspectives of life, based on their youthful observations, experiences, and imaginations, an elementary-level 'School to Work and Life' approach serves to expose these students to a broad range of careers

Table 1: Categorical Representation *General Livelihood skills*

Skill head	Sub skill set	Education Level
Basic numeracy	Identifying and understanding numbers, their types, features, real world application.	Lower primary
Arithmetic	Addition, Subtraction, Multiplication, Division and their real world applications (like percentage, average, etc) with understanding.	Lower primary (c/f to next level)
Language skills	Reading, Writing, Listening And Speaking (Indentifying and understanding Letters, word formation, sentence formation, comprehension, functional grammar, translation, etc.) in language of home. General understanding of English language.	Lower primary (c/f to next level)
General Awareness	General Science (Life science, physics and chemistry), General History, Civics, Geography.	Elementary (c/f to next level)
Cognitive ability	Applied academic skills, developing and presenting information/knowledge, basic organizational skills (team work, problem solving, negotiation, etc through Art-craft and Sports); ability to use and understand clock, calendars, money, and time/money planning also.	Elementary (c/f to next level)
Technology	Identify contemporary technologies; comprehend use of basic computer applications, utility software (Ms-office, etc).	Upper Primary (c/f to next level)
Career Planning skills	Identify opportunities and relate it to their abilities/preferences, understand overall importance of the work in society and for the nation, ability to understand the dynamics of the work, ability to explore related skills required through the course of education.	Upper Primary (c/f to next level)

Source(s): Extracts from (a) NCERT-MLLs(1990) (http://wikieducator.org/images/6/61/The_MLL_Document.pdf)

(b) National Curriculum Framework 2005

(c) Career & Employability skills, Michigan Dept of Education(2001)

(https://www.michigan.gov/documents/Career&Employ_Standards_12_01_13760_7.pdf)

Note: Lower Primary=STD I-V (Age 6-10yrs), Upper Primary=STD VI-VIII (Age 11-14years), Elementary=STD I-VIII (Age 6-14yrs)

Table 2: Life Skills Components

Thinking Skills	Social Skills	Emotional Skills
Self Awareness	Interpersonal relationships	Managing Feeling/Emotions
Problem-Solving	Effective Communication	Coping with Stress
Decision Making	Empathy	Self Esteem
Critical Thinking		Self Awareness
Creative Thinking		

Source: Central Board for Secondary Education (CBSE) i Curriculum (International Curriculum).

in the real world, occupations that may be unfamiliar to them and/or nontraditional for their gender, race, or ethnicity[12] alongwith empowering them with skills for life-long learning. The Indian philosophy of education also reflects a similar emphasis wrt development of skills for life and livelihood through basic education.

On broadly categorizing the learning outcomes and skills for elementary level of education as described in the National Curriculum Framework, Minimum Learning Levels, CBSE curriculum guidelines, etc., under 2-broad heads in this paper: Livelihood Skills and Life Skills, can be listed as above:

Interestingly, the India Skills Report that reports poor employability skills of Indian graduates/ undergraduates highlights the skills required by the employers that substantially includes skills like numerical ability, logical ability, communication skills and cultural fitment, integrity/values, adaptability, etc alongwith domain expertise requirements. These skills overlap with the learning and skills imparted since the basic level of education to the higher levels. Rising cases of juvenile crimes, crimes in school premises, rising suicidal tendencies, inability to cope up with stress, etc over and above poor learning in schools indicates a strong need to emphasize life skills and livelihood skills both, with a holistic approach through elementary education, treating education as an instrument to transcend poverty and bring sustainable development.

Contemporary Issues and Concerns

The first issue comes from the side of focus of policy interventions, which is more on quantity wrt providing essentials of education, and less on quality and governance aspects. Ever since Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) was rolled out in 2001, universalization of elementary education (UEE) in India has caught speed, and then Right to Education (RTE) is another milestone. Number of recognized Educational Institutes has increased across states and trends in Gross Enrolment Rates (GER) are also motivating[13]. However, District Information System for Education (DISE) reports '*ratio of primary to upper primary schools'* to be still 2.04 (2013-14), '*Single classroom primary schools'* to be 7.1% (2013-14) and '*Single teacher primary schools*' to be 11.5% (2013-14).[14]

Further, representing loopholes in governance aspects is reflected in rising absenteeism, drop-outs and poor retention, transition rates. Higher levels of enrolment are not an absolute index of success for UEE, if the same %age enrolled doesn't complete compulsory education, as required under RTE Act.

In 2011, the RTE report mentioned that only 57% children enrolled are going to schools regularly.[15] The EFA review report 2014 reported the average student attendance at the primary stage was 68.5% in 2006-07 and 76.2% in 2012-13, while the average student attendance at the upper primary stage was 75.7% in 2006-07 to 77.8% in 2012-13.[16] Reaching out to children who are child labourers, bonded labourers, migrant children or those being trafficked is still a huge concern.

According to National Crime Records Bureau, every year around 65000 children fall victim to trafficking. Only 10% of such cases are registered with the police. Besides, around 43.5lac child labour in India (2011 Census), reflecting most of them must to be out-of-

school (OOSC). Although Schemes like the Mid-Day-Meal (MDM) and the Non-Detention Policy (NDP) came to curtail drop-outs and ensure retention in schools, are seen not to meet the required essence. Children are seen to be only interested in food provided through MDM and the attendance falls sharply after the lunch-time.

There are 'disconnect in policy and practice' wrt to learning and learning outcomes. There have been focused efforts to define the same since 1978, when National Council for Education Research and Training (NCERT) proposed Minimum Learning Levels (MLLs). Thereafter, NCERT after using evaluations of the 'primary education renewal project' (1984) and guidelines of National Education Policy 1986 came up with '*Minimum Learning levels at Primary stage'*.

Now the important vision behind developing the MLLs way back in 1986 is noticeable here and is so relevant today as well. It mentions that since 'there is a large fraction of population who do not get an opportunity of education beyond elementary level, it is necessary that they learn essentials of life and whatever they learn at this stage is sustained throughout their lives. Hence making them permanently literate, socially useful and contributing in the society'[17]. The MLLs were developed class-wise and subject wise later in 1992 for the elementary stage. Further in this context, the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) since 2005 provides guidelines for making syllabi, textbooks and teaching practices[18].

Now, because elementary education is more a state subject[19] and considering the diversity among Indian states, the efficiency and effectiveness of the exercise performed by State Councils for Educational Research and Training (SCERTs) and District Institutes for Education and Training (DIETs) to make the syllabi, textbooks based on NCF guidelines, train teachers accordingly, differs from state to state, and there is no rigourous follow-up mechanism too. Hence, there are evidences of *textbook based teaching pedagogies and more focus on completing syllabus in classrooms, thereby encouraging rote-learning and/or complex learning system irrespective of the five basic principles of NCF 2005 that holds syllabus and textbooks as mere tools for quality learning.*

There is a hegemonic position of dominant languages, eventually pushing other local languages and dialects to inferior status, blurring the diversity due to similarity of script. (Mohanty *et al. 2009:281)*. World Bank pointed out in 2005 that *'50% of world's out-of-school-children live in communities where the language of schooling is rarely, if ever, used at home.*[20]' When several studies report a huge percentage of children unable to perform basic arithmetic calculations, there is a wide scope of possibility that most of these children could not comprehend the problem questions due to language constraints, which otherwise do perform these arithmetic calculations in daily life. There is a strong need to overcome this language disadvantage in our schools for better learning and skilling.

Another huge issue at elementary level of education is wrt Teachers' availability and training, when teachers are the prime component in the system. SSA has spent substantially over-time on recruitment of teachers and additional teachers, but the absence of effective monitoring in this process has brought uneven development across states. Some districts have achieved apt Pupil-Teacher Ratio (PTR) while some are way behind. Out of 19.78lac sanctioned teacher posts under SSA, 15.59lac teachers have been recruited by States/UTs upto 31-03-2015.[21] Bihar and U.P are worst hits, requiring 1.75lac and 1.24 lac teachers to be recruited respectively, by the end of September 2013.[22] Bihar has the highest of all PTR at 53:1, followed by Uttar Pradesh and Jharkhand at 39:1 in 2012-13[23]. Bihar, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh have largest **percentage of schools with higher PTR** (>30 at Primary level and >35 at Upper Primary level).

Quoting here NSDC's findings on Skill-gaps amongst teachers in School Education[24] as below:

"There is a sense of prevalent low quality of talent entering training institutions in recent years, and subsequently joining schools. There is a severe talent demand-supply mismatch, i.e lack of interest in joining the teaching profession, combined with a mushrooming demand for teachers."

Apart from combating language issues through teaching pedagogy, another challenge for teachers is that elementary classrooms are multi-age, multi-grade

and multi-cultural, and hence the challenge is multi-dimensional, in the light of RTE. Therefore, teachers' professional development has to be emphasized. The role of National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE) and Teacher Training Institutes (TTIs) is very crucial. The % age of professionally trained regular teachers is 80.06 in 2013-14 (78.58 in 2012-13), while that of contractual teachers is 55.55 in 2013-14 (54.01 in 2012-13). Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal again present a sorry figure in this context.

In the light of these statistics, India's rate of teachers' absenteeism must be considered here, which is 25% on an average, while the global average is 20%.[25] Absenteeism, when we already have shortage of teachers (both quantitatively and qualitatively), is like a pit in a half filled bucket. The in-service training received by teachers is very low. %age of teachers received in-service training has gone down from 34.23% in 2011-12 (including contractual teachers) to 22.03% in 2013-14[26], simply implying that they are not equipped to meet the contemporary needs of children and education in the classrooms.

With all these issues, it is reflected that there are several missing links to relate policy with practice, and vice-versa. In this series, there are several examples wrt RTE provisions. For instance, RTE u/s4 provides to admit out-of-school children in age-appropriate class, which is supported by providing for Special Training for maximum 2years to enable the child to be at par with other children[27]. This provision however, has not found effective practice on grounds. Infact, the system is missing on it due to absence of adequate strategy.

Then, the non-detention policy (NDP) u/s 30(1) of RTE came-up to remove the de-motivation caused due to demotion/detention/expulsion of the child[28], turns out to motivate children and parents not take studies seriously (Geeta Bhukkal Committee Report, 2014) and supports higher absenteeism. Further, there are evidences in form of persistent repetition rates in several states post 2010, i.e. RTE enforcement[29], indicating divergence in NDP policy implementation through states' policies. Similar divergence is seen in implementation of Comprehensive and Continuous Evaluation (CCE) u/s 29(2(h)) of RTE meant to support NDP.[30]

There is resistance on ground-level and also lack of clarity in regards to several policy provisions, and the system misses links in the process of decentralization with absence of adequate dialogue and real-time support mechanism.

Comparing 2-Models of States

In order to relate to these issues existing on grounds, the comparative analysis of 2-models of states, comprising Less Developed States (Bihar, UP) and More Developed States (Kerala, Himachal) is taken into consideration. Averages of certain indicators in these states has been looked into post RTE enforcement, in three groups: *Inputs function X* comprising Gross Enrolment Rates (GER), Pupil-Teacher Ratio (PTR) and % of Trained Teachers (TT) (including Para teachers), *Desirable Output function Y* comprising Reading and Arithmetic skills, and lastly, *External Factors function Z* comprising Infant Mortality Rates, Poverty Rates and % of Children Not in Pre-School, for these states.

Inputs: *Function X*. On studying trends in GER, PTR and % TT (including Para teachers) in these respective states, data clearly portrays disconnect in policies in different states.

When the most developed states (Himachal, Kerala) have average GER around 99.62 over time (2010-2014), the least developed states (Bihar, Uttar Pradesh) are at 89.39. Table 3 below reflects the inconsistency in GER in the least developed states (*S.D being 11.74*), while the most developed states have been consistent (*S.D is 2.94*). It is noteworthy that the latter had high GER since RTE implementation, while the former states reported high enrolment at the time of RTE enforcement, but thereafter the GER in these states went considerably down. However, these states (Bihar, UP) seem to climb high GER trends lately, reflecting state activity to induce enrolment over time.

Further considering the Pupil-teacher ratios in these states, when the most developed states have kept the ratio low since the beginning (Kerala reduced it further from a low at 24 in 2010 to even lower at 15 in 2013), the least developed states have teacher-constraints (especially, Bihar, which consistently has very high PTR).

Table 3: Comparison of Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) over time (2010-2014) (in selected states of India)

Year	Least Developed States			Most Developed States		
	Bihar	Uttar Pradesh	Average	Himachal	Kerala	Average
2010	102.90	109.50	106.20	111.00	96.20	103.60
2011	87.8	74.40	81.10	102.10	90.90	96.50
2012	76.0	87.10	81.55	101.40	97.30	99.35
2013	92.60	84.80	88.70	101.14	96.90	99.02
2014	–	–	–	–	–	–

Sources: MHRD, SSA and DISE Statistics.

Table 4: Comparison of Pupil Teacher Ratio (PTR) over time (2010-2014) (in selected states of India)

Year	Least Developed States			Most Developed States		
	Bihar	Uttar Pradesh	Average	Himachal	Kerala	Average
2010	64	74	69.00	15	24	19.50
2011	65	58	61.50	13	24	18.50
2012	54	43	48.50	12	19	15.50
2013	51	38	44.50	11	15	13.00
2014	–	–	–	–	–	–

Sources: MHRD, SSA and DISE Statistics.

Table 5: Comparison of % of Trained Teachers (including Para teachers) over time (2010-2014) (in selected states of India)

Year	Least Developed States			Most Developed States		
	Bihar	Uttar Pradesh	Average	Himachal	Kerala	Average
2010	88	97	92.50	100	100	100
2011	88	97	92.50	100	100	100
2012	46.30	54.40	50.35	90.80	89.10	89.95
2013	42.50	58.50	50.50	92.40	99.90	96.15
2014	–	–	–	–	–	–

Sources: MHRD, SSA and DISE Statistics

However, both the least developed states have considerably brought down their PTR from a very high level, after RTE enforcement. These states have appointed Para teachers to meet the dearth of teachers, as a cost-effective way to meet the requirements. With this, it becomes vital to view % of trained teachers in these 2-groups of states.

While the most developed states always focused on providing professionally trained teachers for EE, the least developed states could not provide for the same. Moreover, they failed badly when RTE provisions raised the GER and created requirement for more teachers. Standard Deviation for least developed states in this time period for % of Trained Teachers was critically high at 24.29, while the most developed states tried best to maintain consistency and their S.D stood at 4.74 only.

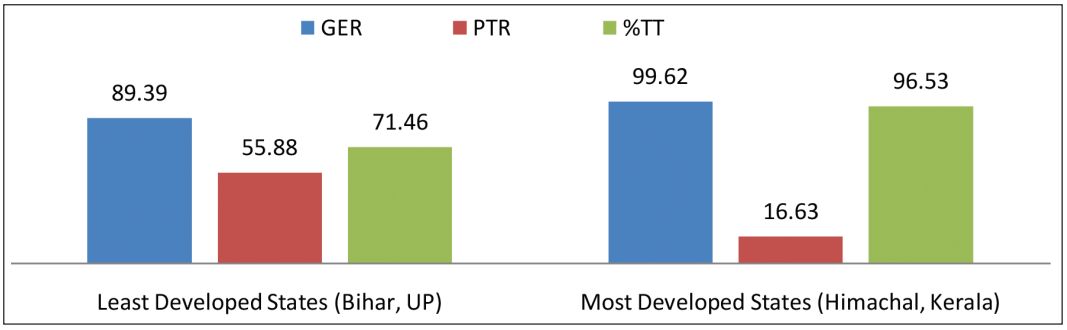

Fig. 1: Comparison of Averages of GER, PTR and % of TT over time (2010-2014) in selected states of India

The Function X presented here, can be summarized as:

- ***Least Developed States (Bihar, UP):*** While the GER is rising, there is inadequacy of teachers. PTR is sick. Further, there is acute dearth of trained teachers. There is inconsistency in meeting the requisites.
- ***Most Developed States (Himachal, Kerala):*** While the GER is rising, there are adequate provisions of having professionally trained teachers, at the same time.

This portrays the difference in approaches of state policies that deter the guidelines provided by the Central policies on critical subjects like education, while the centre misses linkages to ensure uniformity on basic parameters.

Desirable Outputs: *Function Y*. After discussing the inputs function, it is viable to consider the function of desirable outputs, which includes here Reading and basic Arithmetic skills of children in these 2-groups of states. Considering Annual Status of Education (ASER) data here for comparison, as below:

Table 6: Comparison of Reading Skills (% of Children Class I-VIII CAN READ Std II Text) over time (2010-2014) (in selected states of India)

Year	Least Developed States			Most Developed States		
	Bihar	Uttar Pradesh	Average	Himachal	Kerala	Average
2010	41.90	32.20	37.05	58.30	63.50	60.90
2011	35.50	32.60	34.05	57.00	60.80	58.90
2012	33.50	30.80	32.15	56.70	55.80	56.25
2013	34.40	33.20	33.80	57.30	60.00	58.65
2014	37.60	34.00	35.80	59.80	54.60	57.20

Sources: ASER Statistics

Table 7: Comparison of Arithmetic Skills (% of Children Class I-VIII CAN DIVIDE) over time (2010-2014) (in selected states of India)

Year	Least Developed States			Most Developed States		
	Bihar	Uttar Pradesh	Average	Himachal	Kerala	Average
2010	37.90	19.60	28.75	46.00	42.20	44.10
2011	27.30	16.10	21.70	43.60	33.50	38.55
2012	24.80	14.10	19.45	37.40	39.10	**38.25**
2013	26.90	18.30	22.60	36.40	30.60	**33.50**
2014	26.70	17.90	22.30	34.30	28.70	**31.50**

Sources: ASER Statistics

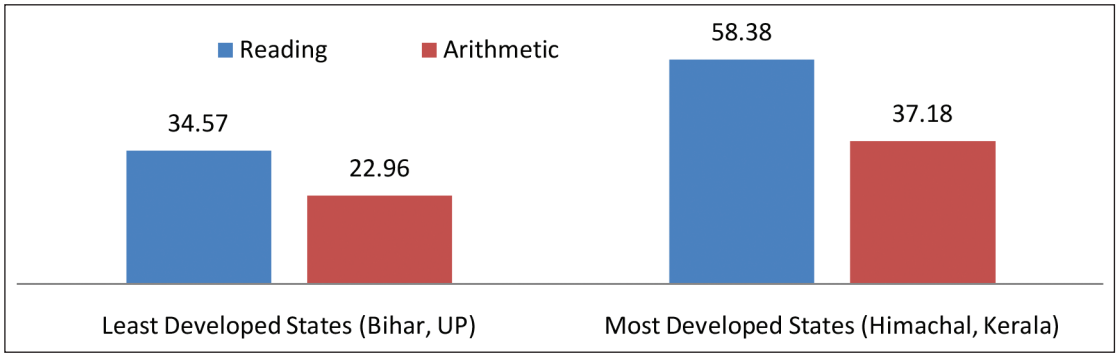

Fig. 2: Comparison of Averages of Reading and Arithmetic skills (Class 1-8) over time (2010-2014) in selected states of India

On comparing the variables in function Y of *desirable outputs*, it is seen that reading and basic arithmetic skills in both groups of states are not remarkable. The Most developed states (Himachal, Kerala) also have low averages in reading skills over time (2010-14) at or below 60%, while the least developed states (Bihar, UP) perform even worse with reading skills over time (2010-14) being below 40%. Same goes with respect to basic arithmetic skills, where the most developed states have a low average over time (2010-14) below 45%, and the least developed states have even worse averages over time (2010-14) above 30%.

The Function Y presented here, can be summarized as:

- Least Developed States (Bihar, UP): Poor reading and arithmetic skills.
- Most Developed States (Himachal, Kerala): Low reading and arithmetic skills, but considerably higher than the least developed states.

The comparison here portrays that when the most developed states are around 68% higher than the least developed states in reading skills, and in arithmetic skills also they are around 62% higher than the least developed states, they still stand on low averages. This marks the huge hollow in our education system. These statistics reflect that founding level of education in our country is not empowering children with basic skills of communication, general awareness and critical thinking, which are essential for better life and livelihood.

External factors: *Function Z*. It would be biased if the 2-groups of states here are judged only on variables directly related to EE, and not considering those external factors related to the socio-economic status of the state that affect the state policies and performance thereby.

For this, certain closely related variables have been taken into consideration for comparison, viz., Infant Mortality Rates (IMR), Poverty rates (% of population BPL) and % of children Not in Pre-school (3-6years).

Table 8: Comparison of IMR (2010-2014) (in selected states of India)

Year	Least Developed States			Most Developed States		
	Bihar	Uttar Pradesh	Average	Himachal	Kerala	Average
2010	48	61	54.50	40	13	26.50
2011	44	57	50.50	38	12	25.00
2012	43	53	48.00	36	12	24.00
2013	–	–	–	–	–	–
2014	–	–	–	–	–	–

Sources: Planning Commission Databook, Sample Registration System Reports.

Table 9: Comparison of Poverty rates (2010-2014) (in selected states of India)

Year	Least Developed States			Most Developed States		
	Bihar	Uttar Pradesh	Average	Himachal	Kerala	Average
2010	53.24	37.66	45.45	9.47	12.03	10.75
2011	33.74	29.43	31.59	8.06	7.05	7.56
2012	–	–	–	–	–	–
2013	–	–	–	–	–	–
2014	–	–	–	–	–	–

Sources: Planning Commission Databook, Reserve Bank of India Reports

Table 10: Comparison of Not in Pre-School (2010-2014) (in selected states of India)

Year	Least Developed States			Most Developed States		
	Bihar	Uttar Pradesh	Average	Himachal	Kerala	Average
2010	13.65	34.80	24.23	4.80	5.65	5.23
2011*	3.50	11.90	7.70	0.60	0.80	0.70
2012	18.30	42.20	30.25	7.10	0.70	3.90
2013	22.40	36.30	29.35	7.25	4.00	5.63
2014	25.43	34.18	29.81	6.90	12.82	9.86

Sources: ASER Statistics.

*Data for2011 accounts % of children not in pre-school from age 5-6years, while rest cover data for age 3-6years.

The least developed states have high IMR, than the most developed states, which can be directly related to child health and productivity (in later age) factors in these states. However, when Himachal is not doing extensively well in controlling IMR, it is still doing considerably well wrt education parameters, thereby paving way for sustainable development.

Similarly, the least developed states have considerably higher %age of BPL population than the most developed states. This can be taken as an indicator reflecting that children in least developed states are more devoid of access over resources than those in most developed states in India. It must be noted here that when the poorer states also face more quality education issues, it is a trap in the vicious circle of poverty, as poor education is a preservative for poverty.

The data for variable taken in Table-10 might not seem closely related, but seems to play a very significant role in delivering variables of desirable outcomes (Function Y). The least developed states here have higher % of children below 6years of age not in pre-school (around 30%), while that in most developed states is very less (above 10%).

Pre-schooling in India is not compulsory and looked after by Ministry of Women and Child Welfare through National Early Childhood Care and Education Policy (ECCE), different states have implemented the policy with different approaches which essentially focuses on health in practice. The preamble of ECCE policy document itself mentions: "*Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) is an indispensable foundation for lifelong learning and development, and has critical impact on success at the primary stage of education. It therefore becomes imperative to accord priority attention to ECCE and invest adequately by providing commensurate resources.*"[31]

The same is evident by the performance of the states compared here, when the most developed states having most of the children below 6years of age in pre-school, performance is better wrt learning indicators at Elementary Education level. It is to be noted here that in Kerala, RTE Rules cover children below 6 years also[32]. At the same time, the least developed states which have a higher % of children below 6years out of pre-school, have poor performance wrt learning indicators reflected in Function Y above.

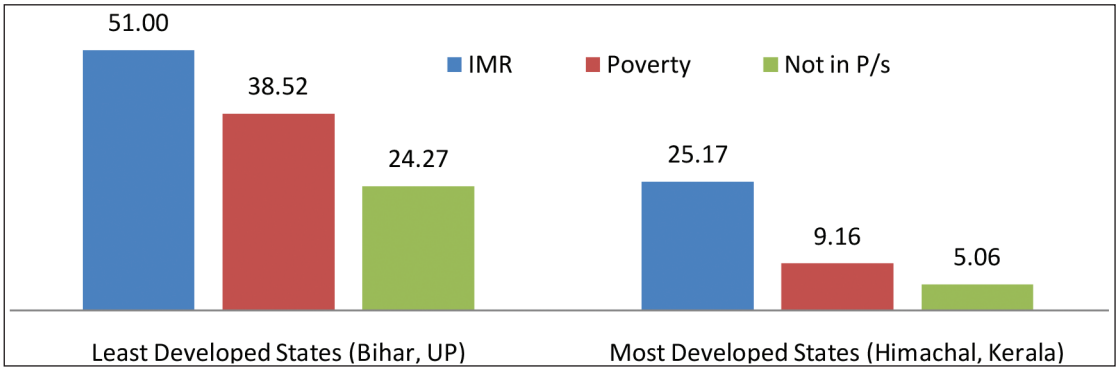

Fig. 3: Comparison of Averages of IMR, Poverty rates and Not in Pre-School children below 6yrs age (over time (2010-2014) in selected states of India

The Function Z presented here, can be summarized as:

- ***Least Developed States (Bihar, UP):*** Poor IMR, High Poverty rates and higher % of children below 6years not in pre-school.
- ***Most Developed States (Himachal, Kerala):*** Better IMR, Low Poverty rates and lower % of children below 6years not in pre-school.

There can be other external factors as well, like Under five mortality rates, Infrastructural development of the state, Political stability, Child labour, migration, etc, which are likely to influence the states' policy of education and impact of these policies.

Conclusion

As seen through the comparative analysis and issues/ concerns discussed so far in this paper, indeed both SSA and RTE are great landmarks in the policy timeline of basic education in India. Ever since these initiatives were rolled out major developments have occurred. Though there is still a long way to go in meeting the aspirations of the nation through education and skill development essentially through Elementary education. The contemporary challenges so far can be seen in regards to the governance aspects of the policies. Since implementation of elementary education policies vastly depends on state governments and the decentralized mechanisms, the guidelines issued from the central level do not reach the grounds in the desired form. So there is uneven development across states, and there are huge gaps reported in learning levels of children in our classrooms which further differs from state to state, district to district.

Considering the education policies framed post-independence, the idea of developing a comprehensive and sustainable education system has been consistent. However, the implementation mechanisms/efforts of these policies in order to reach the last child in the country could not be consistent and aptly balanced. Even after RTE enforcement, all variables covered to be influenced were not effectively affected through the implementation framework at the same time in the desired direction. There is a strong need to strengthen the policy implementation framework, through the existing decentralized mechanisms to enable the policy guidelines reach the grounds effectively and produce desired outcomes. The new National Policy for Education framework is in pipeline[33], trying to assimilate all such discrepancies comprehensively from all stakeholders at all levels of the education system. Considering the failure of elementary education to deliver basic learning to children in schools, the central government has also come up with a national sub-programme to SSA '*Padhe Bharat, Badhe Bharat*' targeted to improve learning wrt 'Early Reading and Writing with Comprehension' and 'Early Mathematics'[34], and '*Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya National Teacher's Training Programme*' to fill gaps wrt teachers' training[35].

It is necessary to deliberate reforms with respect to the Policy framework and Governance in this context, focusing to view *'education as a resource to transcend*

poverty' and have '*more target-based, responsive and democratic mechanisms'*, respectively. Adding to these, innovations, use of ICT tools, contemporary techniques and new approaches, etc are also required to find place in the policy framework in real-time, to yield better outcomes. These measures and reforms shall enable better delivery of designed policies to meet the required essence of education in terms of basic learning levels. The idea is to build a strong base for skilled India meeting the aspirations of developing India, and also for a value-based society. After all, elementary education lays the foundation for education for life.

Towards the end of this paper, it is expected the readers get lead for several subsidiary researches and the related institutions, government bodies, stakeholders to emphasize education as a resource for transcending poverty and view it as a channel for sustainable development, by imparting '*skills for life and livelihood'* at the Elementary level.

Notes

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3. http://mhrd.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/upload_document/EFA-Review-Report-final.pdf
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15. http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/only-57-per-cent-children-going-to-school-rte-act-report/1/134270.html
16. http://mhrd.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/upload_document/EFA-Review-Report-final.pdf
17. The 'Minimum Learning levels' Document available at http://wikieducator.org/images/6/61/The_MLL_Document.pdf or http://www.teindia.nic.in/mhrd/50yrsedu/r/2S/99/2S990301.htm
18. NCF 2005 has been translated in 22 languages and influenced syllabi in 17 states of India. This exercise in States performed by SCERTs and DIETs.
19. Education initially was a state subject, until 42nd Amendment 1976, when it was brought under the concurrent list. While the roles and responsibilities of the States in elementary education remained largely unchanged, the Central Government accepted a larger responsibility for Higher education, alongwith reinforcing the national and integrated character of education, promoting excellence at all levels of the educational pyramid.
20. The World Bank, 2005: "Education Notes: In Their Own Language, Education for All". Available at: http://siteresources.worldbank.org/EDUCATION/ Resources/Education-Notes/EdNotes_Lang_of_Instruct.pdf
21. Information given in Lok Sabha by Minister MHRD on 22-7-2015 (http://pib.nic.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=123511)
22. Lok Sabha Starred Question No. 188 Answered on 18.12.2013
23. http://www.azimpremjifoundation.org/pdf/PTR%20report.pdf
24. NSDC Report, Vol 8. 2015. 'Human Resource and Skill Requirement in Education and Skill Development Sector (2013-17, 2017-22)'.
25. http://infochangeindia.org/education/news/25-of-indian-teachers-bunking-school-world-bank-report.html
26. Ibid 23
27. For example, if a 10-year old child was admitted to class IV, and received two years of Special Training till age 12, an assessment may be made as to see whether the child could cope better in class V or VI in the formal school, and then the child is appropriately placed. If such child is found suitable for class V, she/he will be placed in class V, rather than mechanically being placed in class VI – because if she/he is mechanically placed in class VI, she/he might again drop out, and that would defeat the whole

purpose of this provision. That is the rationale for the provision that allows the child to be provided free and compulsory education even beyond age 14. Even after a child is appropriately placed in the formal school she may continue to receive special attention by the teacher to enable her to successfully integrate with the rest of the class, academically and emotionally. Also, child above 10years of age and never enrolled to a school is advised to be provided with residential Special Training (ST). Even so for children whose home environment is not conducive for learning, ST is advisable. Eg, for migrating families children seasonal option for ST is advisable.

28. http://indiacode.nic.in/amendmentacts2012/The%20Right%20to%20Free%20and%20Compulsary%20Education%20Act.pdf
29. DISE report 2013-14.
30. Several studies conducted give evidences on divergence from RTE provisions in several states post RTE enforcement in 2010. For eg. Mohanty 2010, Nawani 2013, Singh 2013, Sharma 2014.
31. http://wcd.nic.in/schemes/ECCE/National%20ECCE%20Policy%20draft%20(1).pdf
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