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Drawbacks in Primary School Curriculum Design and the need to Change: A study from BTAD

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Abstract

The progress of the nation in the world of today is more than ever dependent upon the quantity and quality of education received by people. Primary education is a fundamental need of life. We cannot under any circumstances ignore elementary education of the children or education of the masses up to the primary level. Elementary education is the foundation of the entire super structure of a nation which we intend to build. In the educational ladder primary education plays a pivotal role for mass literacy and provides a solid foundation for higher education. In simple analysis, the quality of primary education determines the quality of life of nations, strengthens democratic institutions, ensures economic development and modernizes social institutions. Therefore it becomes an obligatory duty and bounded responsibility of the government of welfare states to make education available to every child.

Curriculum is an integral part of the school education system. It facilitates the teacher to transfer his thoughts to the students. Curriculum, in fact, is knowledge arranged systematically for progressive acquisition. It is a sequence of learning experiences, class study, health and recreational services and guidance for educating pupils and helping them to develop their interests and abilities towards effective participation in the community life. Primary school being the first formal stage of education naturally requires a well-organized curriculum. This is, in fact, the most important stage for formal education. However, a greater need could be easily felt as regards curriculum of the primary level with better selection of content in each area than is evident now. The present paper highlights the importance of curriculum at the primary level and emphasizes on the need of developing learning skills, particularly on reading and writing, through inductive processes of learning.

Keywords: Curriculum, Elementary Education, Foundation, Primary Education, Universalization.

Introduction: At the time of independence in 1947, India inherited an educational system which was not only quantitatively small but also characterized by striking regional and structural imbalances. Only 14% of the population was literate and only one child out of three had been enrolled in primary schools. The low level of enrolment and literacy were compounded by acute regional and gender disparities.

Recognizing that education was vitally linked with the totality of the development process, the reform and restructuring of the education system was accepted as an important area of state intervention. Accordingly the need for a literate population and universal primary education for all children in the age group of 6-14 years was provided with a precisely defined and delineated framework in the Indian constitution.

Primary education has been the major concern of all the nations of the world, since it provides a solid foundation for higher education. Primary education is directly related with the success of democracy, economic development and quality of life of nations. Realizing the importance of primary education the framers of the Indian constitutions included in the Directive Principles of State policy provisions for free and compulsory education for all the children up to the age of 14 years.

The present civilization is born out of scientific- technological revolution. Nations are competing for supremacy over others. This supremacy is not confined to military might or possession of weapons of mass destructions but for means of acquiring information and creations of new information. The information acquiring and information generating societies cannot be conceived without a sound system of education; ensuring mass literacy; Universalization of elementary education and quality higher education. It also represents an indispensable first step towards the provision of equality of opportunity to all the citizens. Primary education is considered a strong pillar of democracy not only because all citizens will have equal opportunities for harmonious development of their personalities, but also because they will become creative, efficient and productive members of a democratic society. With a view to enabling the children to discharge their responsibilities efficiently and effectively as citizens, universal primary education is a pre-requisite. That is why J. S. Mill has said that universal education should precede universal enfranchisement. Primary education is thus called “people’s education”, as well as education for the ‘master’. Education particularly primary education is mainly shaped by the social milieu in which it is provided. Taking into consideration the future of our society, the philosophy and sociology of primary education must clearly project the rural and urban disparities, national and regional integration, industrial and agricultural values of life, population explosion and so on.

The word curriculum is derived from the Latin word ‘Currere’ which means ‘to run’. Thus curriculum means a course to be run for reaching a certain goal or destination. In this sense, education is considered as race, with its aims as the goal, the curriculum as the course, leading to that goal. Historically, “curriculum” has come to mean classified selections of accumulated knowledge of academic subjects or disciplines.

If education is for life and through life, as the secondary education commission has pointed out, curriculum is much more than the boundaries set by the academic subjects which are taught traditionally. Curriculum means all that goes into the lives of the pupils through the school, home and society. It is the totality of influences and experiences, selected and unselected, conscious, sub-conscious and ever unconscious, and planned and unplanned which the pupil receives through the manifold activities of the school, in the classroom, library, laboratory, workshop and playgrounds and in the numerous informal contacts between teachers and pupils. Curriculum is a key element in the educational process, its shape is extremely broad, and it touches virtually everyone who is involved with teaching and learning. The present day curriculum may be perceived as being part of the broader area known as education. Education itself is often viewed as an amorphous term that defies description and explanation. In

actuality, education is a concept that each curriculum developer needs to define and refine before the curriculum development process is carried out.

Cunningham – “curriculum is a tool in the hands of the artist (teacher) to mould his material (pupils) according to his ideas (aims and objectives) in his studio (school)”.

Crow and Crow- “the curriculum includes all the learner’s experience, in or outside school that are included in a program which has been devised to help him develop mentally, emotionally, socially, spiritually and morally”.

The Secondary Education Commission Report- “curriculum does not mean only the academic subject traditionally taught in the school but it includes the totality of experience that the pupil receives through the manifold activities that go in the school, in the class-room, library, laboratory, workshop, playground and in the numerous informal contacts between teacher and pupils. In this sense, the whole life of the school becomes the curriculum which can touch the life of the student at all points and help in the evaluation of a balanced personality”.

Whatever its definition, a curriculum need to be flexible enough to meet the needs of the variety of the students. All categories of learners need exposure to a wide array of curricular options. The key to curriculum development is selectivity. The skills and objectives chosen for the student community should reflect their goal of becoming as independent as possible both in existing and future living environments. Therefore, one objectives of curriculum for a particular category of learner may establish to priority levels in curricular content- what skills are essential for a particular type of individual to meet some defined level of independence, and what further skills are desirable for those individuals to learn, provided they have mastered the essential skills.

The learning activities and experiences are not merely specific class sessions or courses but extent to or through the entire educational spectrum of a particular school or schools. Curriculum may be perceived as being rather global in nature and representing a broad rage of educational activities and experience. Thus curriculum may be defined as the screen of the learning activities and experiences that a student has under the auspices or direction of the school.

Elementary knowledge of the fundamental subjects should find place in it. The curriculum for the five-year lower primary stages does not pose any controversial issues. It will stress, in the main, the acquisition of the tools of learning, a broad acquaintance with the social and physical environment widened beyond the immediate one, a general training of the hands and muscular co-ordination through work-experience, an all round quickening of the mind, impelling pupils to the acquisition of further knowledge and the urge to desirable social behavior.

Modern curriculum being child centered should carefully be considered the specific need, interest and capacity of the learner in different stages of development. Child is not a miniature adult but a growing and a develop individuals. His development characteristics should, therefore, be the basis of curriculum construction. In this regard our attention may be given to some of the principles to be maintained in the primary school curriculum:

- Ability of reading, writing and arithmetic should be trained and developed in the child. This is considered as the basis of all intellectual development in future.
- Humanities subjects should be introduced in the curriculum in order to make him acquainted with the human world.

- Study of the natural environment, its physical and biological world should be introduced in order to satisfy natural curiosity of the child.
- Handwork or craftwork should find place in the curriculum with a view to develop manual dexterity and effective use of the hands.
- Artful activities like song and dance, drawing and painting should be introduced with a view to give creative shape to child's imagination.
- Elementary knowledge of health and hygiene is an essential pre-requisite for keeping child's physical health.
- Group play and group activities should be encouraged with a view to develop social participation and social adjustment of the child.
- Moral education should form part of the curriculum in order to develop moral sentiment and positive attitude in the early personality of the child.

Review of literature: Various policies had been adopted by the Government of India for the quantitative expansion and qualitative improvement of primary education before and after Independence i.e. *Acts and Reports from Charter Act (1813) to Sargent Report (1944)*, Various State compulsory primary education Acts, *Kothari Commission (1964-66)*, *NPE (1968)*, *NPE (1986)* and *Sarva Shiksha Abhijan (2000)*.

In the post-independence period the appointment of Kothari Commission (1964-66) was an important event in the history of Indian education. Recommendations of this Commission provided a long term perspective for policy planning in all sectors of education including primary education. The main recommendations of this Commission for the qualitative improvement and quantitative expansion of primary education in India were as under:

- Primary school should be provided within a walking distance of one kilometer radius.
- Class I and II should be considered as an integrated unit to facilitate the students to learn at their own pace.
- Introduction of one year of pre-school education.
- Implementation of a nation wide program of school improvement.
- Encouraging literacy classes for the children in the age group of 11-14 years who could not complete the primary stage of education. These literacy classes should be organized in primary schools. Such children should be required to attend literacy classes at least for the period of one year.

Dua (2000), conducted a study on school related variables and dropout and listed the following causes of dropout and their remedies:

Inappropriate curriculum, difficult subjects and failure in subjects, distance of school from home, non-availability of basic facilities at school, inefficient teachers, faulty teaching methods, school time-table, low achievement of students, lack of interest of students in school life and home work.

Remedies for dropout suggested by the study were: mid-day meals facility, free text book and uniforms, scholarship and pre-primary education.

Selvam and Raja (2004), in their study, possibilities of quality teaching in elementary schools observed- during the in-service training program given to the block resource teachers, special focus should be on TLM preparation, novelties in pedagogy, use of operation black board material, adoption of child centered approach and activity based teaching.

Objectives of the study: The study intends to achieve the following objectives:-

1. To assess curriculum as the root of all round development for a child.
2. To ensure that curriculum can make our educational aims a reality.
3. To focus on the importance of primary school which provide a solid foundation for higher education?
4. To know that organized and systematic study of a subject is made possible through curriculum.

Methodology and data collection: The present study is based on direct observation and experience as well as on school survey keeping in view of the primary schools of Dotma Block under Kokrajhar District of Assam. The study is also based on secondary sources like books and journals.

Analysis and Discussion: Kokrajhar district is located on the north bank of the mighty river Brahmaputra that slices the state of Assam into two different parts, identified as north and south banks. The district is bounded on the north by the Himalaya Kingdom of Bhutan, by Dhubri district on the south, Chirang district on the east and the Indian state of West Bengal on the west. On the 1st of July, 1983 the Kokrajhar sub-division was upgraded into Kokrajhar district with the head quarter at Kokrajhar town. It covers the area of 3169, 22 square kilometres with population of 886,999 (as per 2011 census).

The education is a vehicle of transferring the knowledge of a society from one generation to other. The BTAD area is one of the most backward areas in the field of education. It has low percentage in literacy in comparison to other area state. As per the census report of 2011 the literacy rate of Assam is 67.27% where the literacy rate of Kokrajhar district is 66.63% (male- 73.44% and female-59.54%).

Need and justification of the study: Education works as a lever in exalting economic and social status of the people. Therefore expenditure on education is regarded as profitable investment by the economists as well as by the educationists. Economic conditions of a country depend largely on educational standards of its people since primary education is the foundation and should be the maximum or basic acquisition for the majority.

Since rural population constitutes a major segment of the totality and rural development will largely ascertain the prosperity and affluence of the nation. As a whole, primary education shoulders the greatest responsibility in the national development. The student's future may depend largely upon what he has acquired in the primary schools. It has accordingly been mentioned in the UNESCO document (1971).

For several reasons, the primary level can be seen as the most sensitive area of educational planning and development:

Firstly, because pupils who enter at the age of 5 or 6 "scheduled" to leave at 12 or 14, acquire at those impressionable ages, thought pattern and habits that will affect them throughout their lives,

Secondly, because primary education bears the brunt of today's education explosion,

Thirdly, because many young people especially in rural areas will never receive any further school experience,

Fourthly, because any egalitarian educational frame must provides minimum learning skills to all.

Primary education is also the largest single enterprise all over the globe. A bit array of teachers, the large number of students, a large number of supervisions, officers and administrators are involved in this process. As such, from the point of magnitude, from the stand point of psychological readiness from the preponderance of sociological influences, in view of the economic requisites and the philosophical background and in view of scientific acquisition of knowledge and humanism, the role of primary education is utmost significant.

Thus, the rapid development of interdependence in contemporary life has intensified the need for education. New conditions require the development of new controls of conduct and frequently make useless those that tradition sanctions. In fact, present educative efforts often run counter to present needs. This condition has not been recognized consistently by the educative agencies, with the result that the present educational program fails to meet at many points the needs of present living. Reconstruction of the general educational program of society is therefore essential. Such reconstruction must be based on consideration of the present need for education if significant results are to be achieved.

The tribal education is lagging behind the general population. Not only this, the extent and pace of education has also remain slow among the tribal. The reasons for this can be categorized as external, internal and socio-economic and psychological. The external constraints are related to the problems and difficulties at the policy level, planning, implementation and at administration level.

Internal constraints refer to problem related to the school system, content, curriculum and medium of instruction, pedagogy, teacher-related problems, academic supervision and monitoring. The third set of problems related to social, economic and cultural background of tribal and the psychological problems of first generation learners.

To develop a child into a creative and contributing member of society, the school should link the quest for knowledge through instruction with a quest for improving life around the child through well thought out activities. The learning process should also instill in the child an inquisitive mind, a joy and zest for discovery, a love and respect for nature. The school calendar should adequately provide for extra-curricular and after school activities including games and sports.

To encourage fuller participation and utilization of primary education facilities at the field level, the school program should be adopted to a more flexible mode which can attract children and is convenient in terms of timings, curriculum, school climate, etc.

The school climate must be made joyful and interesting for children through an attractive school environment; activity based child-centered pedagogy and a nurturing rather than intimidating school ethos for which the basic resources and appropriate staff preparation are critical inputs. The curriculum for Grade I and II should be received to ensure that it matches with the developmental status of the children and is able to provide a proper foundation for later learning.

Innovations in curriculum become inevitable, with the changes that take place in a new and changing environment. Hence a number of specific factors are uprising today that act to influence changes in the society. Some of the factors are as follows:

1. *Explosion of Knowledge*- Knowledge is rapidly increasing. Changes are taking place so fast that knowledge learnt becomes obsolete every 5 or 6 years. New methods are coming into being with great rapidity than the rapidity which we can learn. New technologies will change our life and work so fast that shall need re-training. Our curriculum should not contain obsolete knowledge but should

include the most recent essential and living knowledge. As new knowledge is added, alterations have to be made in dealing with the old. Thus revision of curricula keeping pace with the tremendous progress of knowledge is of utmost importance.

2. *Changes in society-* Although fundamental changes in the society has long served as an agent for curriculum arrange, changes in school years appear to have been more extensive than arising many periods in the past. The schools are subject to changes than the needs and assesses of society change.

To illustrate the influence changes in society have on the curriculum one can look at the changes that have taken place in two social institution, home and church and see the impact, the changes have had on a third social institution the school. Many functions now performed by the school were acquired in a like manner. The mood of society, including its major concern at any given time, is a potent force in setting the direction for curriculum change.

3. *Social influences-* Social influences have played a crucial role in curriculum development. The major trend in curriculum development over the past decades has been directed toward the updating, revision and replacement or development of subject matter for school program. This trend has been paralleled by a concern for greater efficiency and effectiveness in instructional processes illustrated by the increased use of technology in classroom. It should be clear to most knowledgeable settings or whatever, are intricately related to multiple social pressures and set in the content of a general cultural ethics.

Curriculum development is interwoven throughout in some crazy- guilt pattern by social forces from the broader social constraints, from forces within the school setting, and by processes in local communities.

4. *Changes in the Organizational pattern of the school-* Another factor is the changes in the organizational pattern of the school. The nature of the adjustments that curriculum and methods must make suggests necessary modification in the organization of the school .The amount of each subject matter to be learned could be set out in neatly determined parcels to cover an average school year. To provide an experience curriculum based upon problem situation learning is the task and the challenge of the modern school.

5. *Development of new educational methods-* The familiar teaching of the past were the lecture and recitation. These were appropriate to a somewhat static world and to a curriculum based upon the theory that knowledge is education. Such methods are not appropriate to the kind of competencies .Children should acquire in today's world of rapid change. In a strange new world the need methods that place a premium on the development of critical thinking, the ability to discriminate between truth and the fiction of yesterday, today and tomorrow. We need new methods that will enable youth efficiently to meet the many situations now and in the future.

6. *National Integration-* There is an urgent need to promote national unity and national identity through the curricula of schools and colleges. A commitment to national integration needs to be developed in the minds of all students. The curricula not only need to be designed for understanding the compositeness in the schools and colleges in terms of 'Unity in Diversity'.

7. *Values influencing change in curriculum-* There is much concern over the erosion of values among the students in schools and colleges .The curriculum

assigned at the school and college levels must make a conscious and deliberate effort towards developing desirable values taking care that the values promoted are universal in character and in accordance with the levels of our constitution.

8. *Newer experiments in child growth and development-* This factor influence changes in curriculum. Attention has been focused more and more upon the child's emotions and the factors that influence his social development; studies have been made both of the physiological development of the child and of the influences that his family, his community, school, playground and other social agencies have upon his growth and actions. If this approach to curriculum revision continues to be taken the effects on the school curriculum will be significant especially as teachers came to realize more and more distinctly the needs and the problems that children have.
9. *Explosion of Population-* The rapid increase of population results changes in the curriculum. The spread of relevant and meaningful education appreciable and the raising of living standard are essential for any appreciable control of the population explosion. Education is faced with the problems of expanding enrolments, need for greater physical facilities, more teachers and better curriculum offerings to meet present population growth and needs.
10. *Selection of Curriculum materials-* In the past the school has selected its curriculum materials on the assumption that life would be lived tomorrow essentially as it had been lived throughout former generations. Many of the 'facts' of science that were accepted are no longer accepted today. New discoveries have replaced old facts with new. An older curriculum unadjusted to the needs and ability of a majority of children has had to undergo very radical changes, and is in the process of even greater change. Hence a new curriculum for pupils is imperative.
11. *Design of Courses-* Higher educational program have to be redesigned to meet the growing demands of specialization, to provide flexibility in the curriculum, combination of courses to facilitate necessity access courses, and the update and modernize existing curricula. International standards have to be maintained while restricting the courses. The curriculum has to be responsive to meet the needs and aspirations of a society that undergoes change with the passage of time. The concerns and priorities of the nation should, therefore, be suitably reflected in the curriculum at all levels.
12. *The need to harmonize National Educational system-* This factor influences changes in curriculum in the sense that there is increasing contact between countries through tourism and the mass media of communication; there will be a multiplication of commercial and industrial links through the common market. It necessitates access by school leavers to foreign universities, the recognition of equivalence between different countries of education and international co-operation in curriculum innovation. Internationalization would also require a review of modern language teaching what is required is the widespread adoption of new and improved methods of modern language teaching for communication and understanding.
13. *Changes resulting from political and social pressures-* To meet the insistent demand for equality of educational opportunity, the comprehensive school will become the mutual type, with the consequences that up to the end of compulsory schooling children of all abilities and attainments and of need- based varying

motivation will be educated together. To trend over the next years is likely to be towards larger schools, on the grounds that they are able to make more effective use of specially qualified staff and expensive materials and educationists should have the responsibility for making syllabus, and encouraging innovation in the curriculum.

14. *Changes arising from new subject content-* Introduction of new content may involve new types of accommodation, new equipment and materials, different allocations of time together with team rather than individual work by staff.
15. *Changes arising from new concepts of the management of school-* Those countries where the curriculum is centrally controlled, there are already signs of a move towards some decentralization. This, taken in conjunction with the demand for greater freedom of student course may well offer the school more scope in determining parts of its own curriculum, more flexibility in organization and perhaps greater financial freedom.
16. *Intellectual Stirrings-* Intellectual influences are part of social settings. The prevailing intellectual ethos of our society is that of technological rationality. This is becoming clear with the upward spiral of our material and electronic mode of existence. Curriculum development has to be concerned with the affective domain and with the quality of living in school settings.
17. *Community Involvement-* Curriculum has to be relevant to the real life, the needs and aspirations of the people. A curriculum can be prepared only after assessing the needs of the under privileged and obtaining suggestions from parents regarding the education of their children.
18. *Computers-* Computer aided learning program are fast replacing drill books. New improved syllabi and instructional materials in computer education have to be developed and utilized on a large scale immediately in all institutions. Teachers hand book have to be prepared wider to explain the spirit behind the new curriculum and the best methods for imparting instruction on the subject.
19. *Philosophical Ideas-* Different philosophical ideas bring about differences in opinion as to what the school should do and how it should reach its goals. In general a set of believes of ideas that influence the individual or behavior. As apply to education, a general set of believer one holds concerning what young people have to learn and taught has a marks influence on the school curriculum.

In this way we can see that curriculum development and changes occur in many ways. In some cases program and designs occur by chance. They seem to have just happened, or they may seem to have slowly involved over the years without a plan or control. In most cases, however, curriculum development and changes have been directed by some level of authority.

The purpose of the curriculum field is to develop general knowledge about how to bring educational mission and means together in the real world. The task of curriculum worker is to engineer a wide variety of approaches to education and to generate alternative institutional forms in which they can be embodied. The result should be to increase a continual basis the options which they can made available. The curriculum worker will be making his contribution in the search for an increasingly humanistic education. Thus the curriculum worker can become a full participant in the basic contemporary task of revitalizing the humanistic possibilities in the society. The increasing complexity of the world we live in will continue to

become more complex, requiring education to continually strive for ways of improving the educational opportunities available to youth. Sound curriculum evaluation and improvement must play a significant role in meaningful progress is to be made.

The child of today is the builder of tomorrow. It is only through a well- designed and effectively implemented curriculum that the child could be equipped to realize his inner potential and to contribute meaningfully to nation- building. Curriculum is basic to the aesthetic, emotional, ethical, intellectual, physical, social, spiritual and vocational development of the child.

As observed by William J. Bennet (1984), the famous American political theorist, 'If the teacher is the guide, the curriculum is the path. A good curriculum marks the points of significance so that the student does not wander aimlessly over the terrain, dependent solely on chance to discover the landmarks of human achievement'.

Conclusion: Education is concerned with the transmission of knowledge. It is always a deliberate attempt to modify the individual for the better or in terms of what is thought to be desirable. It would be a bad mistake, however, to view this knowledge only in terms of curriculum content; because education transmits other knowledge as well. But it would seem fair to claim that education aims to overcome ignorance. He would also appear that education advocates the principle that it is better to have knowledge than to be ignorant. In other words it is better to be sorates dissatisfied than a pig satisfied. It is argued that the modern defective curriculum content creates satisfied pigs and increases ignorance than overcome it. Therefore, Helvetius states that "Children are born ignorant, not stupid". It is education that makes them stupid. So far as defective curriculum is concerned he is essentially correct. Therefore, designing right curriculum to impart right education is of vital importance in the modern education system.

Classroom is not an oasis but part of the world, closely intertwined and intimately interdependent on surrounding socio-economic conditions that do not offer a means of escape from the spiral of despair. Our students inhabit a world that extends beyond classroom. They will perform better where we will perform better as architects of a just and compassionate social order.

A warm, welcoming and encouraging approach, in which all concerned share a solicitude for the needs of the child, is the best motivation for the child to attend school and learn. A child- centered and activity- based process of learning should be adopted at the primary stage. First generation learners should be allowed to set their own pace and be given supplementary remedial instruction.

Thus there is an urgent need to analyze the existing curriculum of elementary education (class I-V) for the progress of elementary education.

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