

Educational Issues and Our Schools

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Our School is located at one of the tribal and backward blocks under Jhargram District, popular as Jangalmahal. Specifically the area of our School is thickly populated with SC/ST community and almost all students are belonging to the under privileged, under resourced and marginalized section of the Society.

Most of the parents of the students are daily labours, some of them are marginal farmers and very few of them are petty businessmen who visit local market twice or thrice in a week with their mobile shop for selling eatables/vegetable/ rice and grocery etc.

As the School is located at remote, backward and tribal area, as it is inhabited with mostly tribal and downtrodden people, as the per capita income of the area concerned is very low--so to ensure universalization of elementary education and to prevent never enrolment of children we generally conduct no admission test--all are directly admitted into the specific classes after proper verification of the relevant documents.

Being an inhabitant of that Block I could realize that to ensure quality and better education for these students of under served and marginalized section of this Block is quite tough--a herculean task indeed owing to some prime educational issues.

The first challenging issue is the pathetic outcome of teaching English in Bengali, viz., in the officially recognized mother tongue of the Bengali.

Actually we know it well that initially language is learnt from our Parents/Family members and others through language acquisition and next the language is learnt from our teachers in the School.

But so far as English language is concerned, the students of our area getting nothing through language acquisition because most of their parents/family members are illiterate, some are half literate and a very few are literate.

In addition to this they have to work hard throughout the day for meeting their minimum and basic needs.

So for learning English they have to depend much on their teachers and Schools but as the subject is being taught in Vernacular , as the English Teacher teaches the textual meaning and grammatical rules only, so the target students are not getting sufficient exposure to boost up their skills in listening, speaking, reading and writing and naturally they suffer from English phobia.

That is why some of the promising students with vernacular background are lagging far behind even the average students of CBSE/ICSE Board and some are undergoing more serious problem like Hrisheek Koley, a brilliant student of Physics (Hons.) of ST. Xavier's College in Kolkata, West Bengal, who committed suicide because he could not comprehend lectures in English and could not communicate in English with his friends in the Hostel. Simultaneously, Samapti Ruidas, a senior student of Nursing of Calcutta National Medical College and Hospital, West Bengal, also committed suicide, may be for the same reason as per report received.

It's also a matter of grave concern that in almost every year some Bengali Medium Schools are being closed by the education Department and just a few years back 45 schools under Barrackpur in West Bengal were closed due to very minimum number of students.

So to come to the point, the students of CBSE/ICSE

Board School are getting sufficient exposure to the four skills of English Language and becoming smart in English whereas in most cases the students of Bengali Medium Schools are being deprived of this opportunity and leaving Schools. But the students of poor and backward families don't have financial capability and opportunity to go to CBSE/ICSE Board School.

And presently both English language and literature are being taught in Bengali(INDIAN LANGUAGE) in almost all State -Board schools of rural Bengal including our area. Hence the students are not getting sufficient exposure to develop their skill in listening, speaking, reading and writing. And to repeat, so most of the students of this area suffer from English phobia .

And this Fear of English among students is one of the great hindrances in their way of acquiring it. Because this fear and lack of practice will automatically bring down their confidence level.

However, my opinion is that, we can address this problem and for this we have to let the students feel that English is not only first or second language but it's a link language in national as well as in international level.

In addition to this, English language plays a supporting role at multiple levels like advanced levels of education, administration, trade, services, etc. And when the target students will feel that the study of English language is the foundation of all other learning and it actually opens the door of several opportunities ,then they will come with higher hopes of learning realizing the urgency of learning English.

So we the English teachers must be abstained from teaching only rules and meaning in isolation, in lieu of that we should start teaching English in English .We have to encourage our students to talk in English, to think in English and to plan in English. And initial mistakes of students should be tolerated to some extent to encourage them to express themselves freely without any hesitation and tension because continuous practice will help them to be fluent whereas accuracy will come in course of time. It is notable that in spoken English grammar is flexible and we are not native speakers of English.

On the other hand they will be motivated and encouraged to express themselves even in ungrammatical English in classroom instead of mother tongue because our organ of speech and sound system need practice and frequent movement to be accustomed to the way English language demands them to. On the other hand in spoken English, the rules of grammar is flexible and so

mistakes are tolerable to some extent. In our School we have been following the said process and getting positive impact from the students.

The second challenge is the medium of teaching syllabus oriented all subjects in Bengali whereas Bengali is not the mother tongue of Bengali living in border area, as for example, West Bengal and Odisha, Odisha and Jharkhand.

Actually from birth to the school going age, the SC, OBC and other community of our area shares their thought emotions etc. in a language which is mixture of Bengali and Odisha and in this language they are much smart . The ST communicates in Santali language and the Kurmi Community communicates in Kurmali language. And most of them, can't speak or comprehend Bengali thoroughly at the initial stages of learning.

Because vernacular may be officially recognized mother tongue but not actual mother tongue—our mother tongue is the local language/dialect which is close to our heart and naturally we are much smart in this dialect.

So when the target students are getting admission in school and the teachers start teaching in Bengali ,maximum students can't follow and their learning process is hampered. In every school of our area there are some students who neither can communicate in Bengali nor can comprehend it completely at the initial stages of Schooling.

But if we change the habit of teaching completely in Bengali Language ,and start using the local language/ dialect which is widely used in the area concerned then we can address this problem to some extent. It is worth mentioning that in maximum number of schools of our area as well as adjoining districts ,the local -language-knowing teachers are available, Santali knowing teachers are available and Kurmali knowing teachers are available also.

On the other hand ,relevant study materials in local language may be developed and supplied in case of Santali (Alchiki) and Kurmali and/or the concerned teacher should use Santali, Kurmali or local language as and when required (minimum upto class VI) in the classroom.

And local teachers conversant in local language/ dialect and culture may be appointed in the School of border area as they can help the target students to understand the lesson properly. In our schools, we have been implementing the same process, that is using local languages as and when required for better understanding of the students.

And gender discrimination is the second important concern which is as cancerous as killing unborn child. Because girls are not encouraged and financially not supported very often to continue their education in the area concerned. In most cases girls are till now treated as others' property and they are neglected to a great extent.

Parents are interested about the male members of the family and don't want to invest for the girl child because they will not help their parents in future to meet the minimum needs of the family whereas the male member will do the same.

In this case we have to change the mentality of the parents towards the girl child through continuous counseling and guidance, The Girls and their family members are to be made conscious about various scholarship scheme of the Govt. and other organization and the Institute may arrange fund for the poor and meritorious girl students.

As my school is located at Tribal Assembly under Jhargram District and almost all students are belonging to marginalized and underprivileged section of the Society, so to solve this problem, since 2014, We have been providing monthly scholarship to the poor and meritorious girl students of our area and they will be receiving the said scholarship till PG level provided they scored well in the exam.

It is notable that some of my friends, relatives and some well wishers stood beside us to carry forward this mission for the education of the girls of the SC/ST dominated backward area in Jhargram. Till date we have stood beside eighty girls and they are continuing their education successfully in different institutions. Some of them are continuing MBBS, some are undergoing nursing from govt. institute, some are undergoing PG courses and some are preparing for competitive exam.

The fourth important issue is the lack of trained, qualified, experienced and sufficient number of teachers in some of the schools. Because we need trained, experienced and sufficient number of teachers as per roll strength and section wise allotment to ensure foolproof teaching learning system. In addition to this, dedicated services of all teachers at all levels of education are necessary to increase the standards and to fulfill the aspirations of students in the area concerned.

Though our Govt. has been trying it's best but it is also true that there are still some loopholes in the system.

The fifth important agenda is the lack of need-based

essential infrastructure. It is true that the concerned Govt. Departments have been trying their best for all round development but still there are so many things to be done.

Suppose that there are three lab based subjects in any Higher Secondary School but in reality there is only one Laboratory. Suppose that there is no common room for Girls or Boys in any Co-Educational School, Mid Day Meal Scheme is there but there is no dining space, there is Library but there is no reading room, Classrooms are there but not as per roll strength & there remain slack of other minimum infrastructure --so in this case what will happen?

Positively the School authority will underwent a lot of problems to ensure smooth and successful running of the School.

Since my joining as Headmaster of Dwarikapalli K.S. Sikshayatan in 2004 I have been leaving no stone unturned to pave the way for universalization of elementary education, increasing access to quality basic education and information, strengthening my institute and to support in improving the lives of the SC/ST/OBC People living at tribal and backward block under Jhargram District in West Bengal.

Besides scholarship Schemes we have undertaken multidimensional initiatives, which are enlisted below, to ensure access to quality basic education/information as well as to redress other important issues :-

- Providing nutritious, sufficient and balanced food through Mid Day Meal Programme.
- Organizing Meditation Session.
- Organizing Workshop for development of English language.
- Arranged Special Classes for inmates of the Hostel in zero Hours.
- Installed Multi Gym for the students,
- Arranged Abacas Classes for better comprehension.
- Arranged for development of communicative english.
- Initiated Video Conferencing for sharing best practices and bring national as well as international knowledge, skills and perspective to classroom and Schools.
- Arranged for NCC affiliation to boost up social skill as well to offer an avenue to the mediocre and needy students to avail the facility of joining Indian Defence Sector in a comfortable way.
- Arranged for Insurance coverage for all

students.

So now the situation has changed to some extent and so far as my school is concerned there are spacious and airy School as well as Hostel Building , there is spacious and airy Dining Hall for Mid Day Meal Programme, there is the arrangement of purified normal and cold water, there is Girls Common Room, there are sufficient classrooms for all units, there is SMART CLASS ROOM, there is well furnished Computer Lab, there is Kitchen Garden , there are hygienic urinals and toilets and there are Sanitary Vending Machine also.

On the other hand, we the Principal/Headmaster of rural Bengal including our area don't have sufficient time to scale up the development of education scenario of our schools because we remain always busy with other Programmes like Mid day Meal, Hostel, Kanyashree, Sabuj Sathee, Sikshashree, Distribution of uniform ,School Bags, Shoes, etc., etc. etc. and in reality we have minimum time to focus for the overall development of the school. Though it is true that these Schemes minimizes the rate of drop out of the students but still we need some time to focus on education because this is primary and others are secondary.

To come to the point, we have been able to bring the above said changes over there but still we need to undertake a lot of initiatives to bring expected and satisfactory changes for which I have been craving for a long time.

So being a responsible citizen of India and based on the education-oriented challenges in our Community I would positively like to explore the topic on support/opportunities/resources available to carry forward my goal to facilitate and accelerate girls' education because whenever the girls will be educated, their families will be

healthier, they will follow family planning strictly, they will be married after attaining puberty and they will have more opportunities to generate income.

And this will lead to women empowerment and will accelerate expansion of quality basic education for all, irrespective of caste, creed ,sex and income.

Hence naturally I would like to grab this opportunity of requesting everybody to hold out their support and co-operation to ensure universalization of education, expansion of quality basic education for all, women's empowerment and ensure a healthy as well as wealthy society to live in.

The analysis is completely based on my practical experience as a teacher of the Tribal and backward area under Jhargram District in West Bengal, India and I want to request all teaching fraternity to think about the problem and find out the solutions for the betterment of the education as well as the society.

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