

# **Ideas, Policies and Practices**

## **Tracing the Evolution of Elementary Education Reform in India since 1975s**

**PE 05**

**Priyadarshini Singh**

### **Abstract**

This study examines four key reform policies and programs of the Indian education system: DPEP (1994), SSA (2000), RTE (2010) and NEP (2020). Each of these has a rich and nuanced body of research to which our study contributes a unique tracing of the key ideas, debates, and stakeholders. This longue durée of reform will shed light on the histories of current reform options and if they will indeed meet the call of the times to address the learning crisis. We use the political settlements approach to understand the contestation of ideas and actors which finally determine the policy design and the implementation strategies. We unpack the iterative dynamics between ideas and actors to highlight why our reform design looks the way it does and what kind of spaces exist for transformative change particularly to ensure learning.

## **Ideas, Policies and Practices**

### **Tracing the Evolution of Elementary Education Reform in India since 1975s**

Priyadarshini Singh  
Centre for Policy Research

This is one of a series of political economy papers from “RISE”—the large-scale education systems research programme supported by funding from the United Kingdom’s Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), the Australian Government’s Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. The Programme is managed and implemented through a partnership between Oxford Policy Management and the Blavatnik School of Government at the University of Oxford. The paper was produced under the direction of Alec Gershberg, the PET-A research lead.

Please cite this paper as:

Singh, P. 2023. Ideas, Policies and Practices: Tracing the Evolution of Elementary Education Reform in India since 1975s. Research on Improving Systems of Education. PE05.  
<https://doi.org/10.35489/BSG-RISE-2023/PE05>

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## Abbreviations

<b>Abbreviation</b>	<b>Full Form</b>
ABL	Activity based Learning
AIES	All India Education Survey
APPEP	Andhra Pradesh Primary Education Program
ASER	Annual Status of Education Report
AWP	Annual Work Plan
BAS	Baseline Achievement Survey
BEP	Bihar Education Project
BRC	Block Resource Centre
CABE	Central Advisory Board of Education
CBSE	Central Board of Secondary Education
CCE	Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation
CSSTE	Centrally Sponsored Scheme on Teacher Education
CRC	Cluster Resource Centre
CSS	Centrally Sponsored Schemes
DFID	Department for International Development
DIET	District Institute of Educational Training
DIKSHA	Digital Infrastructure for Knowledge Sharing
DoE	Department of Education
DPEP	District Primary Education Project
DPO	District Project Officers
DST	Department of Science and Technology
ECCE	Early Childhood Care and Education
EE	Elementary Education
EFA	Education for All
EGS	Education Guarantee Scheme
EMIS	Education Management Information System
FYP	Five Year Plan
HSTP	Hoshangabad Science Training Program
ICSE	Indian Certificate of Secondary Education
IHDS	India Human Development Survey
IMF	International Monetary Fund
KV	Kendriya Vidyalaya
LEP	Learning Enhancement Program
LJP	Lok Jumbish Project
MAS	Midline Assessment Survey
MHRD	Ministry of Human Resource Development
MLL	Minimum Learning Level
MoE	Ministry of Education
MOSPI	Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation
MVF	M Venkatarangaiya Foundation
NAFRE	National Alliance for Fundamental Right to Education and Equity
NAS	National Achievement Survey
NCPCR	National Commission on the Protection of Child Rights
NACER	National Council of Applied Economic Research
NBE	No Board Exams
NCERT	National Council of Educational Research and Training
NCF	National Curriculum Framework
NCTE	National Council for Teacher Education
NDP	No-Detention Policy
NEP	National Education Policy
NFE	Non-Formal Education
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NIEPA	National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration
NIPUN	National Initiative for Proficiency in Reading with Understanding and Numeracy

NLM	National Literacy Mission
NSSO	National Sample Survey Organisation
NUEPA	National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration
NV(S)	Navodaya Vidyalaya (Samiti)
OB	Operation Blackboard
ODA	Overseas Development Agency
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
PMOST	Program of Mass Orientation of School Teachers
PRI	Panchayati Raj Institutions
PTC	Parent Teacher Committees
PTR	Pupil Teacher Ratio
RTE	Right to Education
SABE	State Advisory Board of Education
SC	Scheduled Caste
SCERT	State Council of Educational Research and Training
SES	Select Educational Statistics
SIDA	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
SIE	State Institute of Education
SIEMAT	State Institute of Educational Management and Training
SKP	Shiksha Karmi Project
SMC	School Management Committee
SmSA	Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan
SOPT	Special Orientation Program for Primary School Teachers
SSA	Sarva/Samagra Shiksha Abhiyaan
ST	Scheduled Tribe
TaRL	Teaching at the Right Level
TAS	Terminal Assessment Surveys
TLC	Total Literacy Campaign
TLM	Teaching and Learning Material
UDISE	Unified District Information System for Education
UEE	Universal Elementary Education
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
UPBEP	Uttar Pradesh Basic Education program
UT	Union Territory
VEC	Village Education Committee
WBG	World Bank Group

## Acknowledgements

I started this project in early 2021, just before the devastating second wave of the Covid 19 pandemic in India. With limited access to libraries, no opportunity to hold in-person discussions with reform leaders or visit the states we had initially selected for this study to understand older government programs, this project depended entirely on the generosity of my colleagues and many of the interviewees who indulged me with many long, strenuous zoom conversations, dug up old archives to share reports and patiently answered annoying clarifications.

Yamini Aiyer trusted me with this project and every time stories of the poor state of school education in India got to me and doubts emerged about the value of doing research that too on the history of ideas instead of implementation she firmly and patiently centred my focus on the many ways through which research does impact social outcomes. Alongside, she completed multiple reviews of draft versions, generously advised me on methods, gave me recommendations on interviews. Unpacking the reform story across four decades was challenging as I struggled first to access many of the government committee reports and then to make sense of the different threads of the arguments. Yamini's strategic inputs at many junctures were irreplaceable to complete the study.

Vimala Ramachandran was immensely generous with her insights and shared detailed and nuanced backgrounders to national level policies and projects which I did not find in the secondary literature. She also went to great lengths to courier many important reports which are not available in the public domain and made connections with important actors in the reform.

Rashmi Shukla Sharma not only highlighted to me the central yet mostly neglected role of the state-level administrative bureaucracy in the reform story and but more importantly, provided the much-needed encouragement and validation as I drafted the findings of the study.

Rukmini Banerjee, Abhimanyu Singh and Amit Kaushik made time for many informal discussions and provided important connections for the interviews.

Also, much thankful to Mekhala Krishnamurthy who showed the way in handling this study by often excusing me from many of my other responsibilities as part of the State Capacity Initiative, while I chased interviewees, finalised drafts or was just too overwhelmed with analysing the volumes of government reports.

Lastly, this study would not have been possible without the support and commitment of the research team. Nikhita Panwar and Nilanjan De contributed immensely as project interns. The most tireless and irreplaceable engagement came from Ritu Kochar who worked as the project Research Associate. Despite joining the project and CPR in the middle of the second wave of the pandemic and having to work mostly online, she independently handled many research and project management activities. Working with her made analysing the wordiest of the reports and writings both engaging and insightful.

All errors and omissions are my responsibility.

## Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic and the New Education Policy (NEP) launched in 2020 have together created a unique constellation of context, challenge and policy framework in which the long-stalled reforms of Indian elementary education system can be reinvigorated. Schools were closed for two years and while children across social strata have suffered prominent learning losses those at government schools who are first generation learners have been affected the most. Online classes and digital tools to sustain school learning in the last two years has not been accessible to most public-school students. Alongside this unprecedented situation, the NEP was launched and active engagement at the state and below state-level is underway to implement its most distinctive objectives, i.e. the achievement of foundational literacy and numeracy by Grade 3. This involves reorienting the teacher training model, strengthening state-level academic and curriculum development bodies and integrating an effective monitoring system among other interventions.

The NEP 2020 brings with it much promise for elementary education reform in India which has been in the limelight more for its failures than its successes. While there have been improvements in infrastructure, and enrolment rates but those in the areas of equity, learning levels and uptake of public schools are a different story. Education bureaucracy in many states is also frayed.

According to government data, the total number of schools increased from 971,000 (2000-01) to 1.52 million (2015-16) gross enrolment levels for elementary education increased from 78.6% (1990-91) to 96.9% (2015-16).<sup>1</sup> However, the expansion in enrolment itself in India has raised several issues. First, large disparities in access still remain, particularly for disadvantaged groups, and families in disadvantaged regions. Second, much of the national progress, particularly in enrolment in government schools (which were the primary beneficiaries of programs like the *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan*) was concentrated in a relatively small number of states. In other states, in spite of increased federal funding and initiatives, enrolment in government schools fell in *absolute* terms. Third, student achievement and learning outcomes have remained worryingly and persistently low. The 2018 ASER survey highlighted that only 73% of children enrolled in grade 8 were able to read grade 2 level text while only 44% of them could solve a 3-digit by 1-digit numerical division.<sup>2</sup> In 2009, Indian students who participated in the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) were ranked very near the bottom in reading and mathematics (Tamil Nadu was 72<sup>nd</sup> and Himachal Pradesh was 73<sup>rd</sup> out of 74 countries).<sup>3</sup>

Many prominent research studies have focused on analysing the implementation of key policies and programs. But limited scholarly attention has been paid to the foundation of these policies i.e. the ideas and contestations. We also know very little about why only certain ideas defined these policies and the political dynamics within the education sector that led to their prominence. In the domain of policy practice, ideas matter as much as implementation. Amidst the complexities of social systems, ideas structure challenges and solutions. They direct us to think about what is considered important and what is not and how to address it. More importantly, they focus our attention to the actors proposing the ideas and involved in ideation and those who have been left behind.

Our study is a small attempt to address this lacuna in the research on elementary education. We will examine four key reform policies and programs described in the methods section in detail. These are DPEP (1994), SSA (2000), RTE (2010) and NEP (2020). Each of these has rich and nuanced body of research to which our study contributes a unique tracing of the key ideas, debates and stakeholders. This *longue durée* of reform will shed light on the histories of current reform options and if they will indeed meet the call of the times to address the learning crisis. We use the political settlements approach to understand the contestation of ideas and actors which finally determine the policy design and the implementation strategies. We unpack the iterative dynamics between ideas and actors to highlight why our reform design looks the way it does and what kind of spaces exist for transformative change particularly to ensure learning.

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<sup>1</sup> (Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2018).

<sup>2</sup> (ASER, 2018)

<sup>3</sup> (Pritchett, 2012)

## Methods

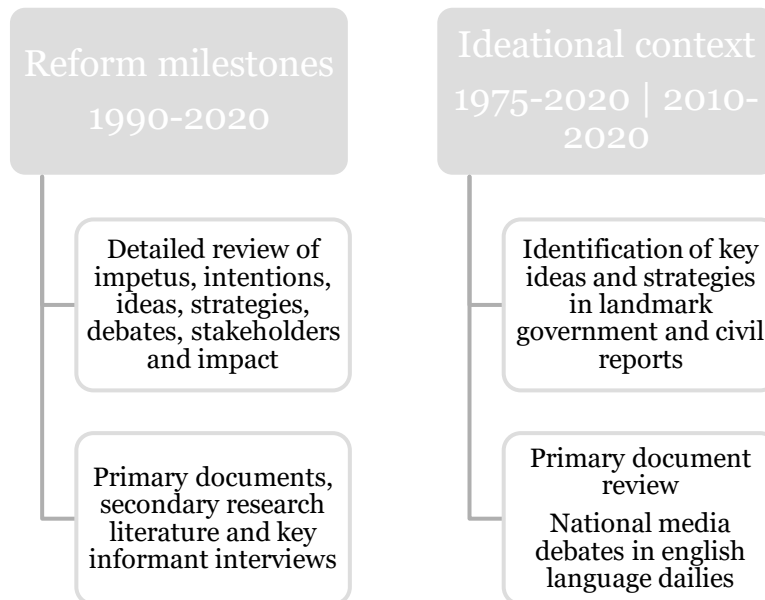
Our study sought to trace the key ideas and debates around elementary education reform proposed at the national level in public schools with a focus on issues of quality and learning. Elementary education covers the age range of 6 to 14 years and grades I to VIII. We examined three research questions in this study:

- What have been the key ideas and debates particularly around quality and learning in elementary education reform across the period from 1990-2020?
- What was the impact of reforms on the schooling system?
- What does the political settlements around the reform ideas highlight about the nature and outcome of reforms?

We used a qualitative methodology which included a detailed review of primary documents such as national and state-level policy documents, reports by government commissions, program documents, secondary documents such as research reports and journal articles, opinion pieces in English language newspapers as well as key informant interviews.

### Scope of work

#### *Methods and datasets*



Our research scope was defined by two considerations. First, we identified four key reform milestones at the national level during the period 1990-2020. These were selected because they covered the national level policy context, legislative framework and centrally implemented programs in which school education operates across India. Despite their differing scope, their impact was prominent from the perspective of the ideas and contestations among the reform actors. Their implementation strategies and governance systems transformed the state-level education bureaucracy which manages large sections of the public school architecture in India. These milestones were analysed in depth to unpack the impetus, stakeholders, debates and contestations and impact of the key ideas and strategies detailed in these milestones. We undertook a detailed review of primary documents around these milestones and secondary research literature. We also selected our key informants and designed the interview questionnaire based on their role in these milestones.

Second, in order to highlight the ecosystem of ideas in which the milestones were located, we analysed landmark government and civil society reports during 1975-2020 and national media debates in English newspapers from 2010-2020. During the course of the study we realised that the foundations for the reforms of 1990-2020 was laid during the decades of the 1970s and 1980s. Thus, we included in our



analysis key national policies, projects and findings of government committees from this period. These included national level policy documents such as five-year plans by the planning commission, reports by legislative government bodies such as the Ministry of Human Rights and Development, government appointed commissions such as the law commission and reports prepared by civil society organisations. Brief summaries of the four reform milestones of this study are given below:

- **District Primary Education Project (DPEP) 1994-** National level project implemented in 42 districts in seven states, funded by a consortium of international donors led by the World Bank. The project was the first, national-level donor funded project for education and it only covered primary classes (grades I- V). The project was eventually scaled to 240 districts at the time of its completion in 2003 (See annexure- 2 for summary).
- **Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) 2000-** First national-level program covering all districts in India with a dominant share of domestic funding. SSA was implemented in two parts. From 2000-2009 SSA-1 was based on the project's own objectives and norms. From 2010- 2014 SSA became the project vehicle for the implementation of the Right to Education Act. SSA norms and implementation structure was aligned with those that were detailed in the act. In 2014, SSA was merged with the Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan which was the umbrella program in which all national projects and programs from elementary to higher secondary level were merged. There was no substantive change in SSA interventions under (See annexure- 2 for summary).
- **Right to Education Act (RTE) 2009-** This is the first and the only legislative framework which governs elementary education system across India. Under the act, the state has to provide free and compulsory education to all children from the age group of 6-14 years. After the right to life, this is the only other right which has been added to the Indian constitution. (See annexure 2 for summary).
- **National Education Policy (NEP) 2020-** This is the third national education policy in India, formulated 36 years after the second NEP (1986). It has made fundamental changes in the design of school education structure changing it from the 10+2<sup>4</sup> structure which has been implemented in most of India since it was first proposed by NEP 1986. According to the new structure, the school years will be a total of 16 years including pre-school split between this structure 5+3+3+4 system<sup>5</sup>. (See annexure 2 for summary).

## The analysis framework

To explore our research questions our analytical framework consisted of three components.

### Key aspects of the three-part analytical framework

Mapping ideas, debates and actors	Unpacking impact of reform milestones (Peter Halls' (1989) Framework)	Analysing the political settlement around the reform milestone
Purpose of the school system & objectives of reforms	Technical	Reform impetus
Teachers	Administrative	Reform initiation
Classroom systems	Financial	Reform implementation
Learning and learning outcomes		
Assessments, exams and educational statistics		
Implementation strategies and governance		

<sup>4</sup> 10 years from classes 1 to 10 for ages 6-16- High school. 2 years for Classes 11 and 12 ages 17-18- Secondary school.

<sup>5</sup> The system includes 3 years of preschool starting ages 3 years. Overall children will be in the formal school system for 15 years. 5 years- ages 3-8 foundational years which will include preschool classes 1 and 2. 3 years- ages 8-11 for classes 3 to 5- Preparatory stage. 3 years- ages 11- 14 for classes 6 to 8 Middle stage. 4 years ages 14- 18 for classes 9-12, Secondary stage.

As part of the first component of our analytical framework we traced the key ideas, debates and actors across six main areas of the elementary education system in India. These categories emerged organically from our interviews and the government reports dataset and were best suited to describe the ideas and debates that concern our inquiry. They are also helpful in addressing the key principles detailed in the RISE guiding principles document. These ideas were not necessarily implemented across India. Some are contained in government committee reports which were largely forgotten while others are part of actual donor-funded projects which were implemented in some parts of India, though not with equal emphasis across states or with consistent support across time. However, these ideas form the universe of thinking and prioritisation of education reform. Given below is a brief description of the categories of analysis:

- a. The origin of intent: This refers to the underlying rationale for the initiation and implementation of the reform.
- b. Purpose of the school system and objectives of the reform: Ideas that define the overall purpose of the school system. This would include ideas like economic development, human resource development, national integration etc. Objectives of the reform refer to the goals of the reform milestone, i.e. say the aim of SSA was to universalise elementary schooling and bring all programs under one umbrella.
- c. Teachers: Ideas related to teacher cadre including career progression, training, performance, accountability, teacher training are included in this category.
- d. Classroom systems and learning: This includes the design and dynamics of the classrooms including pupil teacher ratio, principles of organising the classroom (example age-grade or ability level), learning interventions, curriculum and pedagogy.
- e. Exams, assessments and educational statistics: This refers to modes of examining students (i.e. either through public board exams or in-class testing), assessing their learning levels for public discourse and policy-making and gathering data on overall school performance through indicators such as enrolment, retention etc.
- f. Implementation strategies and governance: This refers to the specific strategies and governance arrangements suggested in the reform program meant to implement the reforms. For example, decentralisation or engaging village education committees.

In our second component, we examined the impact of the reform using Peter Hall's framework (1989) and analysed the ideas for their technical, administrative and financial impact. In this analysis, we did not examine each idea discussed in the six categories we have detailed above because their implementation varies significantly across the states. Since a detailed state-level analysis was beyond the scope of this project, we examined the impact of each reform milestone which was implemented as a whole using Hall's framework. This includes pre-DPEP reforms, DPEP, SSA, RTE. We did not analyse NEP 2020 as it is still in the process of being implemented. Detailed below are the indicators we have used for the operationalising the framework.

- a. Technical impact: Did the reform actually solve a clear problem?
- b. Administrative: Can the reforms be implemented within the given administrative structure or does it propose new administrative structures?
- c. Political feasibility: Is the political leadership committed to implementing the reform?

In our third component, we categorised reform actors and their role across six categories based on how they engage within the elementary education system.

- Educationists: who have been a part of policy-making or policy implementation in formal government positions but are not career bureaucrats
- Academics: University based scholars who have researched education and shaped key policy ideas and their implementation
- Civil society: NGO leaders, members of think-tanks, independent researchers

- **Bureaucrats:** Key bureaucrats who occupied decision making positions within in the Indian bureaucracy through the course of the study period
- **Donors:** Representatives of donor organisations who have funded large-scale programs in education

We then analysed their role in three aspects of the reform process, initiation, ideation and implementation to highlight how the overall reform process has unfolded across the decades.

## **The Data set**

**Data set1 Key informant interviews:** Our key informant dataset consists of 45 interviewees who were interviewed between the period of January 2021- January 2022. Due to the pandemic restrictions most of these interviews were conducted on zoom and for several months we had paused the interview process due to the second wave of Covid in India.

**Dataset2 Primary document review:** The documents in our review consisted of original government policies on education, project and program guidelines, committee reports, statistical data summaries, national plan documents (see annexure 1 for a summary of the five-year plan documents from 7<sup>th</sup> plan (1985) to the 12th five-year plan (2012)).

It's important to state that we have not discussed the ideas in these government documents in relation to the importance of the documents themselves. For example, a committee report is recommendatory in nature and has less importance than government program documents which are actually implemented. This was a conscious strategy to ensure that the universe of ideas is traced without particular focus on implementation. In the section on the impact of reforms we do talk about which ideas were important and were implemented. The discussion on the impact of reform is not a detailed study aimed to establish causation. Such a study would require a state-level analysis with a detailed review of implementation. Instead we used both the insights from the key informants as well as secondary documents to capture a national level snapshot of the failures and the success of the reform ideas.

**Dataset3 Secondary document review:** Here we have covered research studies undertaken by university academics, civil society leaders, members of donor bodies, doctoral theses etc. We have also included in our review, informal research outputs such as memoirs, blog posts, webpages and mapping reports. A brief summary of the key readings reviewed for this report is provided at annexure 3.

**Dataset4 Op-ed review:** Our review of newspaper opinion pieces focused on four national dailies, The Times of India, The Indian Express, The Hindustan Times and the Hindu. Due to the pandemic restrictions, access to articles from the 1990s and early 2000s was limited as they were not available online. We have primarily examined articles from the years 2010-2020 which were available online.

Analysis of the four datasets was undertaken around the following five categories.

- Goals and objectives as detailed in the policy/program documents and contrasted with those articulated by the interviewees particularly the debates around the prioritisation of the objectives
- Underlying and determining factors of reform
- Implementation strategies of policy ideas
- Key actors involved in the reform process at the national and the state-level
- Systems, forums and strategies for reform ideation and engagement of reform actors

## On the eve of DPEP- 1975- 1993: The heady years of new ideas and experiments

The decades from the mid-1970s to the early 1990s laid the institutional context and key ideas based on which the reforms from 1990s onwards could be ideated.

In the earlier decades, education was a state subject, funded domestically through government and private funding channels. School participation was low and there was wide diversity in school structures, schooling experiences for students, and the level of government involvement in school education across and within states. Some states had better schooling systems building on a strong base created by specific historical circumstances. For example, the commitment of the colonial government in the case of Bombay Presidency in Maharashtra, or missionary activities in schooling, catholic schools across India being a case in point. In some cases, it was the interest of the ruling families such as that of Baroda state that had passed a law to make primary school education free and compulsory as early as the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In these states, the school system performed better than in the other states which had no such structure to build on. There was a National level education policy in 1968 (Government of India, 1968) and preceding that a well-regarded national commission, the Kothari commission (Ministry of Education and Social Welfare, 1964) that made recommendations to improve school education and provide standardisation. But their implementation remained patchy across states.

### The Origin of Intent

Between 1975-1992 three prominent institutional and legal developments took place that had a profound impact on the scope and impact of reform. First, there was a change in the federal structure of the Indian state. Education was placed on the concurrent list of the Indian constitution through the 42<sup>nd</sup> amendment in 1976 and the central government began to actively participate in school education through a) model legislations which the states could emulate and b) national level programs which were funded by centrally sponsored schemes<sup>6</sup>. Second was the institutional framework of decentralised education planning and implementation. The 73<sup>rd</sup> constitutional amendment (1992) added the XI schedule to the Indian constitution and set-up a three-tier local government structure. Primary schools were entrusted with village-level governing bodies (panchayats). The idea of decentralisation in school education reform had been around for a long time and was implemented post 1992. Third, legal legitimacy to a rights-based framework of school education was provided. In 1992, in the Supreme Court Unnikrishnan Judgement, the right to education was included as part of the right to life.

Together, these three developments at the national level created the conditions for a uniform structure of school education across India. It also shaped a certain understanding of 'quality' in schooling in terms of infrastructure, teacher training, learning outcomes and administrative processes<sup>7</sup>. But they also generated deep contestations and asymmetries within and across all states in India<sup>8</sup>.

### Purpose of the school system and objectives of the reform

The purpose of the school system was seen both in terms of instilling values, such as democracy, social justice, national integration as well as national economic development, productivity, and modernisation. This was articulated both in national policy documents such as NEP 1968 and 1986 as

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<sup>6</sup> Bulk of the expenditure on school education is undertaken by the states presently also and education constitutes the largest chunk in the budget of state governments as they run the schools in terms of infrastructure and hiring.

<sup>7</sup> The first national education policy in 1968 and the Kothari commission of 1964 on which it was based also made important recommendations. These included the 10+2 school education structure. However, since school education was a state subject till 1977, the scope for central government to legislate was limited. Central government even today cannot dictate the design and delivery school education to state governments and there is much variation in the structure of schools and colleges. In Maharashtra and Assam, senior secondary grades of XI and XII are part of undergraduate degree colleges whereas in other states like Rajasthan they are part of school years. This is despite the recommendation made in the Kothari commission report (Ministry of Education and Social Welfare, 1964), 1968 National education policy (Government of India, 1968) and Shukla committee report (Ministry of Education and Social Welfare, 1973) which recommended XI and XII should be included in the school system. The report detailed the 10+2+3 school and college structure along with cost estimates, a 10 (primary and secondary) +2 (higher secondary)+3 (undergraduate) structure of education.

<sup>8</sup> Not all states accepted central involvement in school system. Kerala and West Bengal refused to set-up the better-funded Navodaya Vidyalayas which are government boarding schools for meritorious poor from the rural areas based on the elite Doon schools as this conflicted with the left-of-center ideology of the ruling parties.

well as in committee reports (See Shukla Committee report- Ministry of Education and Social Welfare, 1973). Self-actualisation and social contribution were also important goals, particularly in the context of curriculum and pedagogical reforms<sup>9</sup>. Pretty early in these decades, there were calls that reforms should focus on providing Free and Compulsory Education by the state. First such a call was made in the fourth five-year plan document (1969-74)<sup>10</sup>. By the early 1990s, this call became stronger in terms of a constitutional amendment. In the Ramamurthi committee report (National Committee for Review of 1986 Policy on Education (NPE), 1990) Right to Free and compulsory education (primary classes I-V) was declared as constitutional amendment. This was reiterated again by the Janardhan Committee (Department of Education, 1992).

The reform objectives focused on the 'quality of education' along with universal enrolment and retention from the seventh five-year plan (1985-1990)<sup>11</sup> onwards (see annexure 1 for a summary of key plan provisions for elementary schooling in 7<sup>th</sup> five-year plan). Stage-wise learning outcomes and their integration with the exam system and teacher training was articulated as early as 1975 in the first National Curriculum Framework (National Council for Educational Research and Training, 1975) and in the NEP 1986 they were part of one of the objectives of elementary education reform<sup>12</sup>. Based on the 1986 NEP, the Minimum Learning Level (MLL) Framework for Primary Stages was developed by NCERT in 1991<sup>13</sup> (Ministry of Human Resource Development, 1991). The framework set the standards for minimum essential learning in language, mathematics and environment studies<sup>14</sup>. These were tied with performance goals for schools as a whole (both formal and non-formal) and teachers. The framework called for continuous and comprehensive evaluation (CCE) instead of annual school exams conducted by state boards. Additionally, student assessments i.e. survey of student learning levels were to be conducted to test achievement of learning outcomes for policy interventions. Most importantly, the MLL framework explicitly sought to relate the provision of inputs to learning levels achieved in schools in order to channel funding to areas where learning levels were lower. It was suggested that MLL achievement results can be used to revise policy interventions. This was seen as a strategy to

<sup>9</sup> This goes all the way back to the Kothari commission (Ministry of Education, 1966) and appears repeatedly across key curriculum framework documents starting with the first National Curriculum Framework in 1975 (National Council for Educational Research and Training, 1975). Some of the key ideas were moral and spiritual development and social responsibility.

<sup>10</sup> Five-year plans indicate the financial and policy priorities that the national government has allocated to various sectors of the economy such as agriculture, transport etc. Targets are often missed and not everything set out in the five-year plans is achieved, however, as a signal of policy commitment that may actually be implemented, FY plans are more powerful than committee reports which are largely recommendatory in nature and may not be accepted by the government. However, as discussed in the methods section, this qualitative difference in the forum where the reform ideas are generated and how that impacts the reforms itself in terms of implementation is not examined in this paper.

<sup>11</sup> Previous plans also contributed important ideas which were later taken up in the 1990s. But in the five-year plans themselves, their articulation was of limited scope and reach. The third plan called for the introduction of free and compulsory primary education in the country for the age group 6 to 11 years. The fourth plan (1969-1974) again referred to free and compulsory education up to the age of 11 years but with a caveat, i.e. within the limits of available state resources. Teacher training for pre-school teachers within the small social sector scheme for child creches; improving teacher training but mainly in backward areas, for women teachers and in-service training was emphasised. In the fifth plan (1974-1978), focus remained on increasing enrolment but early recognition of curriculum reorientation and continued focus on teacher training was called for. In the sixth plan (1980-85), the policy focus was on the universalisation of primary education (classes 1-5<sup>th</sup>/ or up to 11 years of age) by increasing enrolment and retention. Non-formal education was an important pathway to achieve this. There was no explicit mention of 'quality of education' but curriculum reforms to focus on literacy, numeracy and functional skills and a call to reform early childhood care programs to include learning, development, and joyful activities were articulated. Across all these plans, all targets are in the form of enrolment of students.

<sup>12</sup> Objective 3 of the 1986 NEP states "A substantial improvement in the quality of education to enable all children to achieve essential levels of learning" (p.13). It's important to note that the point about essential levels of learning was included in the revisions made to the 1986 NEP in 1992. A new government had come into power and the NEP was revised. Most changes to the revised NEP were cosmetic but this one was substantial as it indicated a clear national policy focus on essential learning. However, it should be noted that the process towards the revision of the NEP was pretty substantive. First, the Acharya Ramamurthy committee was constituted in 1988 and the recommendations were not accepted. This was followed by Janardhan committee which submitted its report in 1992 but only some of its recommendations were accepted. There is overlap in some of the recommendations made by the two committees but the Ramamurthi committee report can be considered as more idealistic of the two with its emphasis on the 'Common school system' and removal of special schools with better funding.

<sup>13</sup> The MLL committee was headed by R.A Dave an evaluation expert from UNICEF. It builds on the recommendations of the 1986 policy and based on it, the NCERT curriculum framework developed in 1988 (National Council for Educational Research and Training, 1988). The MLL framework was explicitly incorporated in the 1992 revised version of the NEP-1986 and set the tenor of the subsequent conversations on learning.

<sup>14</sup> The MLL framework in itself was not a unique effort and was building on previous project interventions and NCERT reports. In 1978, NCERT prepared a document (National Council for Educational Research and Training, 1977) based on the interventions of two UNICEF-assisted projects 'Primary Education Curriculum Renewal' implemented in 22 states in India and 'Developmental Activities in Community Education and Participation' in two villages in Madhya Pradesh (World Bank, 1997). A 'Minimum Learning Continuum' was drawn in these projects indicating the learning outcomes expected to be achieved by all children completing Classes II, III, IV and V. The findings from the evaluation of the Primary Education Curriculum Renewal Project in 1984 led by RH Dave who headed the MLL committee framework formed the conceptual basis of the 1991 framework (World Bank, 1997).

reduce learning disparities across the country. The MLL approach was deeply contested within the bureaucracy. Calls were made to orient learning towards learning bands rather than defined outcomes. Among the limitations of the MLL framework which were highlighted was that of implementing the system across the diverse education systems in India and the possibility of the framework distorting the education structure such that monitoring systems would focus exclusively on the achievement of minimum levels of learning and teachers would teach to the test.

It's important to note here that despite these important initiatives around defining quality in school education, there was no consensus on what quality meant and this was reiterated in important research studies involving national-level bodies such as NEIPA. A landmark one done by Govinda and Varghese highlighted the many definitions of quality education were prevalent at the time, particularly stressing on the point that school effectiveness is not necessarily quality education and learner achievement should not be the central measure of quality (Govinda and Varghese, 1993). However, in the study, learning achievement was one of the objectives, particularly with regards to numeracy and literacy (p. 14).

Equity in access to schooling was also a central reform objective across these decades, particularly from NEP 1986 onwards. Special schools (schools for tribal students, non-formal or residential schools for women, migrants) and/locating new schools in areas where backward groups are concentrated, curriculum revision to reflect the community identities, values and needs of disadvantaged groups, teacher training around the challenges of marginalised background students were some of the key strategies.

### **The school system**

The school system was an important area of contestation in these decades. The prevalent system was composed of formal schools and the non-formal education (NFE) centres. Formal schools consisted of regular schools built using state-level budgets but also a small sub-set of the well-funded residential schools modelled on the elite Doon School for meritorious rural children called the Navodaya Vidyalayas (NV) as well as schools for children of government employees called the Kendriya Vidyalayas (KV). These schools were substantially better-funded by the central government and are managed by an autonomous body at the central level. The non-formal education centres were meant to cater to marginalised groups unable to attend regular school because they were working to supplement family incomes or belonged to migrant communities or had dropped out of regular schooling. The NFE approach to schooling was deemed critical to achieving UEE. An alternative idea to the schooling system was that of the common school proposed by the Kothari Commission 1964 and then again by Ramamurthi committee 1990 (National Committee for Review of 1986 Policy on Education (NPE), 1990). In the idea of a common school system, all special categories of schools such as NVs and KVs and non-formal school system would be removed<sup>15</sup>. Other committees in which (some) aspects of the common school system are endorsed are the Janardhan Committee 1992 (Department of Education, 1992) and Yashpal committee 1993 (Department of Education, 1993) but they didn't uphold the idea of a common school system as a whole. This idea emerges repeatedly as we move along the decades but it was never fully implemented.

Non-formal schooling approach had much support within the bureaucracy, political leadership and civil society. It was seen as a 'necessity' to provide education for migrant and working children. The argument that the poor can't be penalised for their poverty by denying them the incomes that their children get was dominant at the time. Contestations around the NFE during these decades was primarily led by civil society, particularly MV foundation, but it gathered strength and volume during the 1990s. Their challenge was framed in terms of every child's right to an education. The debates on abolition of child labour took place in parallel during these decades and strangely didn't intersect with those on elementary education reform. NFE continued to have much support among all actors involved in school education, with the understanding that a less formal, rigid, structured education which an NFE centre would provide is better than no schooling at all. It is noteworthy that the imagination around NFE was not devoid of an understanding of quality. Training of NFE educators, learning outcomes, minimum standards of infrastructure were discussed across committees and policy plan documents (See Planning Commission, 1980; National Council for Educational Research and Training, 1985; Department of Education, 1988). The debate hinged on whether quality education can be

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<sup>15</sup> Recommendations of the Ramamurthi and Yashpal committee were not implemented. Only some of the Janardhan committee report recommendations were implemented.

delivered within the NFE framework and its supporters held that the equity to schooling provided by the NFE approach offsets the quality as sameness of schooling experience that access to the same school provides.

## Teachers

Key ideas articulated across forums for reforming the teaching cadre during these decades included that of increasing the total number of teachers, teacher training (in-service and pre-service), improving in service conditions (standardisation of pay) and teaching and learning material<sup>16</sup>. These were examined comprehensively and in a detailed manner in the first and the only commission on teacher cadre reform, the Chattopadhyay commission<sup>17</sup> (National Commission on Teachers (1983-1985), 1985) which recommended ideas of standardisation of teacher pay scales and benefits (such as housing allowance), pre-service training (four-year integrated course) and in-service training (once every five years), community involvement in managing schools and providing statutory powers to National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE) to accredit private teacher training institutions. Constructive role for Teachers Unions in defining professional norms was also laid out by the commission. Financial norms were recommended for some of these provisions. NEP 1986 and also the challenge of education report tabled in the parliament in 1985 (Ministry of Education, 1985a) recommended transparency and standardisation across states in teacher hiring, professional advancement and performance-based incentive and monitoring. NEP 1986 also called for establishing teacher support systems in the form of District Institutes of Education and Training (DIETs) in each district for pre-service and in-service teacher training in formal schools and NFE centres. The states were also encouraged to have their own bodies for curriculum development through teacher training colleges upgraded as State Council of Education and Research Training (SCERT). The Ramamurthi committee recommended an internship-based model for teacher training<sup>18</sup>. In these decades, questions were being raised on the efficacy of full-time professional teachers for UEE. Recommendations were being made to use community resources in terms of part-time teachers for at least some subjects like Socially Useful Productive Work (SUPW) and music in formal schools and full-time in non-formal education centres (See Naik, 1985). Some recognition of part-time/or on-contract teachers was also made in the Chattopadhyay commission. But this was largely with regards to teaching subjects such as science and maths in which there were acute teacher shortages and for schools in far-flung areas. It's noteworthy, however, that the commission did not recommend that qualifications and compensation would be lowered. In fact, the aim was to attract well-qualified teachers on well-paid terms (National Commission on Teachers (1983-1985), 1985, p. 70).

## Classroom system and learning

Reform of classroom systems included introduction of stage wise, subject wise curriculum for mathematics, science, social science, arts, work experience, physical education and values such as national integration, social justice and democratic values (Ministry of Education and Social Welfare, 1973)<sup>19</sup>. The system recommended linear progression from one class to the other with single point of entry and exit. Challenges to this age-grade classroom system were raised around the same time. Naik in his paper in the Future magazine highlighted limitations of this system with regards to part-time

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<sup>16</sup> Five-year plans- 4<sup>th</sup> (1969-1974) and 5<sup>th</sup> 1974-1978 have explicit focus on teacher training and support. Additionally, other committees on curriculum reform also focused on this as the Shukla committee (10+2+3 educational structures) report (1973), Jalaluddin report (1975), NCERT ten year curriculum framework and Patel committee report on the review of the ten year curriculum (Ministry of Education and Social Welfare (Ministry of Education and Social Welfare, 1973; National Council for Educational Research and Training, 1975)).

<sup>17</sup> This was also the first commission to explore the concept of School complexes, i.e. in areas where population density is low, primary and secondary schools could be clubbed together to get economies of scale in teacher and physical infrastructure and provide good quality education to all students.

<sup>18</sup> Recall that the recommendations of the Ramamurthi committee report were never implemented and this is one of those reform ideas that has perhaps never seen the light of the day.

<sup>19</sup> In principle, this was not the first-time curriculum formulation was called for by a national level body. In 1973, Shukla committee report made prescriptions to align the schooling system to 10+2 structure recommended by the 1968 NEP and this also included curriculum. It emphasized that the curriculum for elementary education should be made locally relevant. In 1975 an NCERT committee detailed stage and subject wise curriculum from primary to high school classes based on which syllabuses and textbooks were prepared. The Patel committee constituted by the Ministry of Education and Social Welfare in 1977 reviewed and called for flexibility in the implementation of 10 stage curriculum prescribed in 1975 by NCERT to reduce the textbook and syllabus load and remove of home-work for elementary classes. The key difference in the 1986 policy is the differentiation between a standard core national curriculum and a flexible, local curriculum. Environmental studies were added by the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) 1988.

learners<sup>20</sup> or those who have not joined a formal school system. He also argued that there are varied learning styles of children in primary classes. He recommended organising the classroom around 'mastery learning' where the entire classroom is organised around units and student's progress across them once they attain mastery over each unit at their own pace.

Teacher's involvement in curriculum and textbook development to make curriculum locally relevant were called for (Department of Education, 1993). Mother tongue-based instruction in primary stages was also emphasised. Stage-wise learning outcomes and exams designed around learning outcomes rather than subject knowledge were also prominent ideas and argued in the Patel Committee report 1977 which reviewed the 10 year NCERT 10+2+3 school education system, National Curriculum Framework, 1988, Minimum Learning Levels for Primary Grades, 1991 (Ministry of Education and Social Welfare, 1977; National Council for Educational Research and Training, 1988; Ministry of Human Resource Development, 1991). However, alongside the focus on learning outcome-based curriculum reform (In NCF 1988 for example, (National Council for Educational Research and Training, 1988)) an anxiety around the way in which curriculum reforms were translating at the grassroots was articulated multiple times during these decades. Expansive syllabuses, large number of textbooks and high learning load on students at the grassroots were discussed across key committee reports such as Shukla committee 1973, Patel Committee 1977, Yashpal Committee 1991 (National Council for Educational Research and Training, 1975; Ministry of Education and Social Welfare, 1977; Department of Education, 1993). Pedagogical reforms also started from the mid-1970s with prominent ideas of child-led learning and problem-solving based learning, teaching instructions aligned with different learning needs and reduction in course cramming. A fuller articulation was made in the NEP-1986 which called for the policy to focus on child-centred learning through an activity-based pedagogy.<sup>21</sup>

### **Exams, assessments and educational statistics**

In student assessment reforms ideas such as CCE and no-detention in elementary grades were proposed as early as 1975 and calls for no public examination till the 10<sup>th</sup> standard were made repeatedly from the mid-1980s Shukla committee (1975), Patel Committee (1977), National Curriculum Framework 1988, Ramamurthi committee, 1990, Yashpal Committee, 1993) (National Council for Educational Research and Training, 1975, 1988; Ministry of Education and Social Welfare, 1977; National Committee for Review of 1986 Policy on Education (NPE), 1990; Department of Education, 1993).

Educational statistics included the All India Education Survey (AIES) in which infrastructure of schools such as enrolment, retention and drop-out rates were collected. The decennial national census captured literacy rates and National Sample Survey rounds to cover enrolment and retention. AIES<sup>22</sup> measured access to school in rural/urban inhabitation, enrolment, PTR and classroom infrastructure such as the number of rooms. Lastly, the education department released its own statistics also measuring enrolment, drop-outs and PTR, number of female teachers called the Select Educational Statistics (SES). Importantly, these datasets were not comparable with each other because the definitions of indicators varied widely (National Council for Educational Research and Training, 1985). The educational statistics were produced for use primarily by the national-level education bureaucracy.

Slightly earlier to this period, in 1969-71, India participated in an international assessment test called International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement in the subjects of mother tongue and science. India, along with 14 other developed countries, took this test. India's performance was among the lowest (National Council for Educational Research and Training, 1985).

Despite the range and the depth of the reform ideas, it was recognised that there was a lack of general consensus on what is quality education and how to implement it. There was a recognition that the focus of the education system is on teaching and not on learning particularly for students of illiterate parents (National Council for Educational Research and Training, 1985).

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<sup>20</sup> Naik states that "For instance, grown-up children in the age-group 9-11 or 11-14 (or even 14-17) who have not been to school at all and who desire to study should be free to join special part-time classes organized for them and complete the studies in classes I-V at their own pace. Similarly, those children who have completed class V (either on a full-time or on a part-time basis) should also be able to study in part-time special classes and complete the studies for classes VI-VIII at their own pace" (p.25).

<sup>21</sup> Jalaluddin report (National Council for Educational Research and Training, 1985) is an excellent compilation of reports across the decades.

<sup>22</sup> The frequency of the survey has varied from eight years (1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> round of the survey) to five years.



## Implementation strategies and Governance

Decentralisation was an important approach for implementing reform in the form of block and village-based planning. The idea of district planning for UEE was, figuratively speaking, hibernating since it was articulated as early as 1941 by D.R. Gadgil, the eminent economist and deputy chairman of the planning commission. Gadgil prepared plans for reforming primary education in Wardha and Satara district in Maharashtra. This was also reiterated in the Kothari commission report in 1964 but was not acted upon (Ayyar, 2017 p. 226). Systematic district level planning for attaining an educational objective was first attempted with the Total Literacy Campaigns of the National Literacy Mission and it was field tested in the Bihar Education Project (BEP). In Sitamarchi district, Bihar, as part of the BEP, an intense participative planning exercise was undertaken during November 1991-May 1992.

Community involvement in managing schools and supervising reform was also considered a pioneering approach. The grassroots bodies recommended for achieving this were the school management committee and village education committees by the NCF (National Council for Educational Research and Training, 1988; Department of Education, 1993). Accountability systems for achieving reform goals included grievance redressal bodies such as educational tribunals at the state-level and State Advisory Board of Education (SABE) on lines of the Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE) which would enable states to have their policy positions on elementary education issues and generate consensus across key stakeholders such as parents, teachers, frontline staff, private school bodies etc<sup>23</sup>.

Important national-level projects in elementary education took some of the ideas to the grassroots, particularly after the 1986 NEP. Operation Blackboard implemented in 1987 brought into sharp focus the need to strengthen the infrastructure of existing schools with standard facilities of rooms, teachers, blackboards, water and sanitation, games equipment, primary science kit, library, musical instruments (For summary of OB see annexure 2). Simultaneously, the NFE approach was also rigorously pursued through the Scheme for Non-Formal Education implemented in 1988 (Department of Education, 1988a). NFE centres were set-up for habitations without schools, children who had dropped out, working children and girls who could not attend whole day schools. NGOs and local elected bodies were entrusted with the monitoring of the centres and NFE instructors and supervisors were to be trained for a month before deployment and subsequently for 20 days every year<sup>24</sup>. The teaching and learning approach recommended for the NFE centres was to be in line with the NEP 1986: activity focused, joyful and child-centred.

The National Literacy Mission (NLM) was launched in 1988 to impart functional literacy to 80 million illiterate people in 15-35 age group<sup>25</sup>. While it did not focus on elementary education, it played an important role in promoting the idea of community mobilisation towards literacy and numeracy through the Total Literacy Campaign (TLC). The first TLC took place in Ernakulam district in the state of Kerala in 1989 based on a request by the Kerala Shashtra Sahitya Parishad (a voluntary agency)<sup>26</sup>.

Two prominent schemes on teacher training were launched which introduced pre-service and in-service training in the school education system. Program of Mass Orientation of School Teachers (PMOST) (1986) aimed to provide pre-service training to teachers in the areas of a) teaching and student evaluation to achieve MLLs b) use of TLM provided as part of OB and c) addressing the needs of women and marginalised communities through improved pedagogy. The training program took 10 days and was administered through the SCERT and State Institute of Education (SIE) using the cascade model. The program, however, didn't link completion of training with teacher career progression paths. PMOST continued in another scheme called Special Orientation Program for Primary School Teachers (SOPT) launched in 1993-1994<sup>27</sup>.

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<sup>23</sup> CABE is a premier national level body which played the leading role in the ideation of reform programs. Its constituted on the request of the government to design policies, or address contentious national level policy issues by including key stakeholders such as national and state level bureaucrats, civil society leaders, private school leaders, teacher's union members, etc.

<sup>24</sup> But financial norms for this were not clarified

<sup>25</sup> 30 million by 1990 and additional 50 million by 1995

<sup>26</sup> For a criticism of the TLC model on grounds that it failed in the Hindi heartland because of its very low literacy levels versus Kerala, (Ayyar, 2016)

<sup>27</sup> Similar to PMOST the aim was to train teachers to use Operation Blackboard materials provided to primary-school teachers and encourage teachers to adopt a child-centred approach to teaching. It envisaged covering 0.45 million teachers every year using cascade model another 5 million teachers using of video technology as an innovative approach to eliminate the loss of information that occurs due to the cascade model.

Small programs run by NGOs as well as state-bureaucracy using financial support from donors added another set of ideas and implementation approaches at the grassroots level, which built on the ones proposed at the national level. Hoshangabad Science Teaching Program (HSTP)<sup>28</sup> focused on reforming science teaching through a grassroots approach in which teachers, school principals, education supervisors, district administration were engaged. Textbook rewriting, teacher training, student assessment for system feedback were implemented. While the project was not scaled up across the state, it spurred the idea to create Eklavya in Madhya Pradesh (1982), an NGO formed in partnership between national and state government (funded by the national education ministry)<sup>29</sup>. Eklavya's interventions focused on activity-based learning. A prominent one was textbook development for elementary grades in which subject knowledge and competencies were integrated around common topics. As part of this project, learning assessment among students were conducted in 1987 and findings shared with state education bureaucracy.

The Andhra Pradesh Primary Education Program (APPEP) implemented in a pilot phase in 1984 was then scaled up in 1989 across Andhra Pradesh<sup>30</sup>. APPEP brought with it a child-centred, activity-based learning approach. Teacher training centres were set-up at the sub-district level and trainings emphasised working around diversity in individual learnings, teacher engagement with the local environment of the students and attractive classroom design<sup>31</sup>.

The Shiksha Karmi<sup>32</sup> (SK) project (1987) implemented in Rajasthan employed local youth with basic qualifications (Xth Grade) as 'para-teachers' on contract. They were provided basic training to teach children in habitations in at least one of the three situations 1) no schools, b) schools were dysfunctional or c) teacher absenteeism was very high. The project idea was based on a small night school project run by an NGO in Rajasthan. In the SK project, the community was engaged through village education committees in school management and supervision with an explicit rejection of a target-based approach (Ramachandran, 2012). An important administrative strategy in SK was to set-up autonomous bodies at the state-level through which project funds were disbursed. This was done to deliberately bypass the state-level education administrative bureaucracy because it was widely believed that due to inefficiency and lack of capacity, state education bureaucracy would either divert the funds for other social justice issues or delay its disbursement.

The Bihar Education Program<sup>33</sup> (BEP) launched in the state of Bihar in 1991 first in a pilot mode and then scaled up, introduced the idea of district level planning around specific education objectives so that district level variations in the challenges around school education could be addressed<sup>34</sup>. BEP also introduced the idea of Village Education Committees (VECs) and training of their members in community mobilisation and school education monitoring, in-service teacher training and additionally setting-up DIETs in the project districts. BEP's project funding formula of program components at 70 per cent, civil construction at 24 per cent, and administrative overheads at 6 per cent (Ayyar 2016, p.245) was adopted in other programs during the 1990s.

Lok Jumbish (LJ) project launched in Rajasthan in 1992 was also based on small NGO projects across multiple districts<sup>35</sup>. It implemented the practices of school mapping, micro-planning, community mobilisation and formation of community groups such as VECs, school building construction societies, youth groups. Its aim was to address the high illiteracy and low school participation despite the presence of schools nearby. Most importantly, norms for implementing the MLL framework were developed in consultation with teachers and village groups along with appropriate textbooks and teaching and learning material<sup>36</sup>.

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<sup>28</sup> This program was run by then being jointly run by the Madhya Pradesh state government and two voluntary organisations, Kishore Bharati and Friends Rural Centre (Kishore Bharti, 2022).

<sup>29</sup> Department of Science and Technology (DST), Government of India, the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD), and the Government of Madhya Pradesh provided core financial assistance when it was set up (Vidya Bhawan Society, 2004; Kishore Bharti, 2022).

<sup>30</sup> Was the first externally funded project on elementary education. Funding was from ODA and Government of Andhra Pradesh.

<sup>31</sup> See Ayyar 2016 (p.10- 24) for detailed discussion on the interventions of the project as well as the interface between donors and the bureaucracy.

<sup>32</sup> Implemented in the state of Rajasthan and funded by SIDA, DFID, Government of India and Government of Rajasthan.

<sup>33</sup> Implemented in the state of Bihar and funded by UNICEF.

<sup>34</sup> The first attempt at district planning was one done in Sitamarhi district.

<sup>35</sup> SWRC in Tilonia, the Urmul Trust in Bikaner, Sewa Mandir and Astha in Udaipur and other smaller initiatives Ramachandran 2015.

<sup>36</sup> See Ramachandran (Ramachandran, 2003, 2012) for detailed discussion on the project design and implementation approaches.

The constituency pushing for reform during this period was primarily the national-level bureaucracy working in active coordination with NGOs such as Bharat Gyan Vikas Parishad (Kerala), MV Foundation (Andhra Pradesh), Sewa Mandir (Rajasthan), Hoshangabad Science Teaching Program (Madhya Pradesh) among others. Within the bureaucracy, most of the donor funded programs were actively designed and led by key bureaucrats at the state and the national level, such as Anil Bordia during his time in Rajasthan state education bureaucracy and later the national bureaucracy. Along with him, there were other bureaucrats at the state and the national level such as RVV Ayyar and K. Nagarujana. Donor agencies such as SIDA, UNICEF, ODA also played a supportive role in both project designs and the development of implementation plans.

## The reform Impact

The onwards march from these years was not one of a linear progression. Anxiety about the poor state of school education was raised as early as in the 1985 Challenges of Education report tabled in the parliament (Ministry of Education, 1985b) and particularly including the low levels of student learning, in the Jallaluddin report 1985 (National Council for Educational Research and Training, 1985). The 1986 education policy and its PoA could not address the piecemeal approach to reform taken during this period. Many administrative and structural provisions of the policy were not implemented such as the setting-up of education tribunals, state counterparts of the CABE and the Indian Education Services. Some of the overall reform ideas were seen as idealistic by the state-level bureaucracy particularly the idea of 'Child-centred learning', and at odds with the ground reality of many Indian states. In certain states, early studies highlighted that the linkage of activity-based pedagogy with actual learning outcomes was weak and schooling came to be seen as a series of dance and music sessions by both the parents and teachers. Decentralisation while having wide support among educationists did not become an actual reality. As Varghese and Govinda highlighted (1993) education personnel who were closest to the field such as headmasters, block education officers had no understanding of pedagogy or of supervising educational institutions this effectively made even preliminary measures at decentralisation a non-starter.

The 1986 NEP was a national-level policy document produced after extensive consultations with teachers, university professors, state-level bureaucracies and accepted by the parliament. The challenges of education, 1985 document which preceded it was widely discussed within the state education bureaucracy, schools and engaged citizens (Little, 2010) and in the media, and it called for universalisation of UEE. Yet, the reform ideas and approaches of the 1986 policy did not enjoy consensus across states in terms of actual implementation. States like West Bengal refused to set-up DIETs. National-level projects implemented such as Operation Blackboard remained administratively and politically top down<sup>37</sup>. Though they were implemented through the state education bureaucracy but they were still centrally sponsored schemes and therefore shaped by central government norms. Effective implementation of these projects was not a political priority at the state-level. The states didn't take up the ideas proposed at the national-level to reform state-level education stakeholders such as the teacher cadre or local governing bodies who were increasingly seen to play a critical role in grassroots implementation.

As we will see in the subsequent discussion, DPEP was a patchwork of the ideas and approaches proposed and tested during these decades. However, the ideational energy and implementation experiences of this period didn't create a natural and direct constituency calling for a national-level program of the kind of DPEP. DPEP was not a product of a national drive to solve the education related challenges based on existing experiences. Its origins were in certain critical and unavoidable international and national developments.

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<sup>37</sup> For a detailed study of the impact of Operation Blackboard see Dyer (1993, 1996). With regards to the provision of TLM through the OB project, which was an important innovation at the time over the teacher and textbook centered culture of classrooms, Dyer highlights the key areas of policy failure. Teacher capacities to use the TLMs were not accurately assessed and the policy implementation was rushed through due to which the reform idea failed at the ground level.

## The DPEP years 1994: The ‘parallel’ universe of elementary education reform

The District Primary Education Program (DPEP) was launched in 1994 in select districts across seven Indian states Assam, Haryana, Kerala, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh and Tamil Nadu (summary at annexure 2)<sup>38</sup>. As argued by many bureaucrats and civil society representatives who were at the helm of policy reform in these decades, DPEP was a ‘game changer’ for the Indian elementary education system. Though in terms of geographical spread and financial outlay DPEP was a much smaller program than the Operation Blackboard, it had a paradigmatic influence on the kind of elementary education that was being provided in the project states, the administrative structures created to implement them and the overall approach to elementary education reform at the national-level which moved towards a project mode.

### The origin of intent

The Education for All (EFA) movement was launched in 1990 at the Jomtein conference in Thailand<sup>39</sup>. This put immense pressure on the Indian government to address the high levels of illiteracy in the country. At the time, India had among the highest illiteracy rates in the world. India played an active role in the Jomtein conference and was a signatory to the declaration. One of the papers presented at the conference by Prof. A.K. Jalaluddin (National Council for Educational Research and Training, 1985) highlighted the prominent learning gap among primary class students and the need to focus on minimum levels of literacy. The paper also highlighted the challenges of an over ambitious syllabus, complex textbooks and difficult concepts for primary schooling<sup>40</sup>.

Nationally, India was undergoing a balance of payment crisis in 1992 and had to accept the Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) conditionalities imposed by the IMF, including the social sector safety net program funded by the World Bank for education and health. DPEP focused on education and became the first national-level program funded by an external agency for primary education<sup>41</sup> in India<sup>42</sup>.

UEE was already a policy priority since the mid-1980s and DPEP’s reform ideas had indigenous roots. But the project design, the implementation systems and the extent of engagement with the wider set of stakeholders were in many ways designed to meet the needs of ‘managing’ a central government project funded by external donors. District selection criteria for example was based on census data rather than data given by the state government because state-level data was considered unreliable with significant inflation of figures (National Council for Educational Research and Training, 1985; Dyer, 1996). Districts in which the total literacy campaigns (TLC) were held was added as a criterion to include states from southern India which had better educational outcomes than the north Indian states. By including a TLC criterion, south Indian districts were covered as the literacy movement was more dominant there than in the north of India.

Female literacy rate was taken as an indication of the extent of backwardness of the districts. Technical support group was set-up at the national-level consisting of bureaucrats, civil-society leaders and educationists. To address funder concerns about swift disbursement of funds to the districts, parallel administrative structures, bypassing the state treasury and the education administration, were set-up in the form of societies, taking from the Shiksha Karmi project.

DPEP took form in the midst of an existential crisis about whether elementary education should be funded by an external funding agency<sup>43</sup>. A prominent national constituency of bureaucrats, educationists and academic researchers opposed this on grounds that this amounted to surrendering

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<sup>38</sup> In 1997, under a second phase of the programme, coverage expanded, albeit with variations in quality, from 42 to 117 districts and, by 2000, some 219 districts in 15 states were included in the programme (World Bank 2007).

<sup>39</sup> The conference endorsed an ‘expanded vision of learning’ and pledged to universalize primary education by the end of the decade 2005-2015 (UNESCO-UNEVOC, no date).

<sup>40</sup> Recall that this was also highlighted earlier in the Patel committee (1980) and the Yashpal Committee (1993).

<sup>41</sup> In the first phase, DPEP only focused on primary classes I-V. It was subsequently expanded to include upper primary classes VI-VIII.

<sup>42</sup> International aid was coming from the World Bank, EU, DFID, UNICEF and the Netherlands and it contributed to the central government’s share in DPEP projects which was the ratio of 85:15.

<sup>43</sup> By 1994, when first phase of DPEP was launched, 12 of the 17 major states in India were covered by donor funding projects, such as UPEP, BEP, APEP, Mahila Samakhya, LJ.

the primary responsibility of the state<sup>44</sup>. World bank, as part of its mandate, was keen to fund primary education in India given the sheer scale of the UEE challenge. It was implementing the Uttar Pradesh Basic Education (UPBEP) program launched in 1992 in select districts in Uttar Pradesh and a national program would be an important next step<sup>45</sup>. In the end, the national bureaucracy's decision prevailed. Many opposing the World Bank funding held that a robust public debate on the consequences of availing external funding did not take place, and it also did not seem like any discussion took place in the parliament. DPEP design was based on perspective papers on various issues of access and equity written by NEIPA and NCERT but these were not available in the public domain (Ayyar, 2016).

### **Purpose of the school system and objectives of the reform**

The debate on the meaning of quality in school education was prominent in the national-level policy arena at the start of DPEP. But, overall, there was no consensus on what quality schooling meant in an Indian context and whether it was primarily in terms of outcomes, inputs, student learning, participation, equity, etc. This was reflected in DPEP also. Many quality-focused interventions were undertaken across all aspects of schooling such as school architectural design, teacher cadre reform, textbooks and pedagogy but overall, quality was not the focus, particularly in the first phase of the project in most of the project states<sup>46</sup>.

DPEP's focus was on equitable access to schooling, particularly for the marginalised and backward groups such as SC/ST and women. Learning outcomes were also one of the project objectives and were included to address donor requirements as well as the overall national policy framework of the times, in which learning levels had become important. The 8<sup>th</sup> five-year plan (1990-1995), explicitly aimed for the achievement of Minimum Learning Levels (MLL) and strategies included setting MLL targets for states under the 20-point programme and monitoring their achievement through sample studies (Planning Commission, 1992)<sup>47</sup>. A district-level comprehensive computerised database was also to be developed for monitoring, planning and management. The MLL framework had been finalised before DPEP was launched and was included within DPEP implementation. DPEP developed its own monitoring systems for tracking learning outcomes, called the Baseline, Midline and Endline assessments<sup>48</sup>. While there were intense discussions about setting-up systems and processes for learning achievement, it was not the focus of implementation<sup>49</sup>. In the first phase, in most of the project states, equitable access was given priority given the lack of basic school infrastructure. Relatedly, in districts where learning focused interventions were implemented, the link between the intervention and the pathway to the achievement of learning outcomes was not clearly understood particularly among the implementers. This was partly because the focus was on setting systems and processes. Therefore, DIETs, SEIMATs, CRCs, BRCs and state-level resource groups etc. were set-up.

DPEP didn't engage with the debate on the right to education which was running in parallel during these years<sup>50</sup>. The Saikia committee report in 1997 (National Institute for Education Planning and Administration, 1997) based on the state education ministers' conference headed by Muhi Ram Saikia<sup>51</sup>, Minister of Human Resources Development endorsed a constitutional amendment for the right to education but argued against a central government legislation. The report stated that the responsibility

<sup>44</sup> Similar opposition was also expressed with regard to UPBEP which was also funded by the World Bank (Ayyar, 2016, p. 292-298).

<sup>45</sup> For a detailed discussion on the dynamics between the Department of Education, MHRD, Department of Economic Affairs, (DEA), Ministry of Finance and UP government in negotiating the UPBEP and role of federal relations and political contestations between ministries See Ayyar, 2016 Chapter 10)

<sup>46</sup> The inclusion of Kerala in the first phase of DPEP is an important indicator where the project design was meant to address issues of quality also. While all the other states had poor primary education indicators on basic access and equity issues, school education in Kerala was much better and Kerala was not a recipient of OB funds. It was included in DPEP as a concession and project design team saw it as a testing ground for quality issues rather than access and equity ones.

<sup>47</sup> LOs were to be measured through the achievement of comprehensive evaluation system. The plan didn't set targets for learning achievement but called for 'the educational system' to ensure that children reached the minimum level of achievement through a decentralised approach and a mapping of present levels of achievement and resource-based strategy to achieve mastery. See annexure1 for a summary of FYP.

<sup>48</sup> For a detailed summary of the state of learning achievement datasets in India see (Azim Premji Foundation, 2004).

<sup>49</sup> Project monitoring focused on enrolment data.

<sup>50</sup> Multiple reports by donor bodies such as the World Bank, bureaucrats as well as civil society leaders particularly focus had been released during this period, for a useful summary of the key arguments See, Ministry of Human Resource Development, 1999.

<sup>51</sup> The committee was constituted based on three rounds of discussions with different stakeholders in 1996 starting with a meeting of educational experts with the minister of HRD followed up a conference of chief ministers and then a conference of state education ministers. A unanimous view emerged that a Committee of State Education Ministers should be constituted to consider financial, administrative, legal and academic implications of the proposal.

of drafting the relevant legislation was with the states as most states already had some form of legislation on free and compulsory education<sup>52</sup>. The law commission report (Law Commission of India, 1998) in 1998<sup>53</sup> also known as the Reddy commission report after its chairman, BP Jeevanram Reddy however argued in favour of a central government legislation. As a project which was selective in its approach to education reform, DPEP was a foil to the rights-based approach of the RTE movement. However, many of important ideas for achieving UEE during these years were common between DPEP and the provisions of RTE discussed in these years. The Saikia committee report, for example, endorsed the NFE approach as part of RTE. It also called for the inclusion of the MLL framework in the prospective state legislations for RTE. Other DPEP ideas and approaches such as decentralisation, community mobilisation through PRIs and VECs and para teachers were reinforced in the key UEE financing reports, namely, Tapas Majumdar committee (Government of India, 1999) and Krishna Kaw committee report (Education Division, 1999).

## **The school system**

The school system consisting of formal and NFE approaches was retained in DPEP. NFE was seen as a key approach to achieving equitable access<sup>54</sup> through bridge courses, walk-in centres and residential schools for out-of-school children. This represented the national consensus as discussed in the eighth five-year plan in which NFE was identified as a prominent strategy to achieve UEE<sup>55</sup>. DPEP included the construction of new schools on a unique set of construction norms.

## **Teachers**

Teacher hiring to expand coverage was undertaken in large numbers. The system of para-teachers (those with lesser qualifications) and contract teachers (those hired on short-term contracts) particularly in North India were institutionalised for two reasons. Firstly, DPEP funds could not be used for covering permanent teaching positions and secondly, state governments wanted to avoid the cost liabilities that would come to the state exchequer once DPEP was completed. Para-teacher strategy was supported in the larger national debates on the role of teachers. In the eighth five-year plan the Shiksha Karmi project was praised and 'half-time instructors' were identified as the ideal strategy for achieving UEE. While on the one hand NEP 1986 and the earlier commission reports called for the strengthening of the teacher cadre, on the other hand, teacher cadre was also under strong attack. Questions were being raised about the high cost of teachers to the state exchequer, teacher absenteeism and poor student learning outcomes despite repeated teacher training<sup>56</sup>.

Reform in teacher hiring and deployment was patchy and varied within states. Efforts were made to include the monitoring of teacher cadre within the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRI) but this was implemented only in some states like Punjab and Madhya Pradesh. In other states, it was resisted by teachers' unions. Reform of teacher cadre was also proposed but implemented only in some states like Karnataka. In these states, recruitment was made transparent through the use of a combination of tests, standard 12<sup>th</sup> marks and teacher training to generate merit lists. Deployment reforms were also undertaken in which teachers could access available vacancies in schools and select postings once a year. Equity in deployment reforms was introduced by making the system transparent with teachers from marginalised communities such as SC/ST and older women getting a choice in their posting.

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<sup>52</sup> The report lays down the guidelines for the state legislation including provisions such as grounds for exemption from compulsory legislation. It also called for the setting up of the National Elementary Education Mission (NEEM) by the implementation of the ninth five-year plan.

<sup>53</sup> Later in 1997 the 83rd constitution amendment bill was introduced in the parliament and human resources standing committees in the parliament supported the constitutional amendment and reviewed various aspects of making school education a right some of which became critical during the later RTE years. These were the definition of 'free' education, who would have the liability of ensuring the 'compulsory' component of education whether government or parents, meaning of quality of education, inclusion of private unaided schools in the ambit of RTE and strategies of dealing with possible avalanche of legal cases in situations where RTE was not being fulfilled.

<sup>54</sup> School construction both new and most importantly repairs became important but were limited to a quarter of the funding unlike earlier programs in which EE reform was about school construction.

<sup>55</sup> The support continued to the ninth five-year plan (Planning Commission, 1997) also. A working group for the ninth plan recommended steps to strengthen NFE systems (See Planning Commission, 1996).

<sup>56</sup> During the 1990s, many studies by academic researchers such as (Rao, 1999) as well as donor bodies such as World Bank highlighted the high teacher absenteeism in government school. For a useful listing of citations see (Sankar and Linden, 2014).

Teacher training was one of the key strategies for improving both the overall ‘quality’ of education and student learning. In-service and pre-service teacher training was to be provided, though DIETs and SCERTs were used only in some states. New training modules aligned with the objectives of DPEP, and also NEP 1986, around equity and joyful learning were developed. Teacher support structures in the form of Cluster Resource Centres (CRCs) and Block Resource Centres (BRCs) were created with the aim of providing ongoing mentoring, peer learning and supportive monitoring for teachers. Teachers actively participated in the well-funded trainings and peer meetings with the support of teachers’ unions. They distinguished between service issues such as pay and promotions, which they were discussing with the government, and pedagogy and learning issues which they were discussing with DPEP officials.

### **Classroom systems**

In principle, curriculum reform was not a part of DPEP as both educationists and bureaucrats were concerned about possible World Bank influence. But the reforms took place through changes in textbook content. Eventually, a DPEP specific curriculum evolved through textbook experimentation, which was different from the national and state curriculum. Skills-based textbooks were developed for Grades 1 and 2 using modules from the MP based NGO called Eklavya<sup>57</sup> and implemented in states like Assam, Kerala and Madhya Pradesh in DPEP-1 and in Gujarat in the second phase of DPEP. Recommendations of the Yashpal Committee report of 1993 were included in the guidelines of DPEP. These included simplification of syllabus and textbooks in elementary grades to move away from rote memorisation and exam focus towards improving the quality of learning (Department of Education Ministry of Human Resource Development, 1995).

Pedagogical interventions had a strong focus on child led learning and inclusion of marginalised and backward groups such as SC/ST and women. States like Karnataka developed the Nalli Kalli program based on the learning methodology designed by an NGO, Rishi Valley Rural Education Centre to cater to the varied paces of student learning particularly in multi-grade, multi-language classes<sup>58</sup>. A similar program called Activity based Learning (ABL) was piloted in Chennai municipal schools and then later scaled up in the entire state of Tamil Nadu.

Interventions for student learning were implemented using the MLL framework and DPEP project completion reports highlighted the progress towards learning outcomes (World Bank, 2003).

### **Exams, assessments and educational data**

Institutionally, this also led to the setting up of the EMIS system located in the National Institute of Education Planning and Administration (NEIPA) and annual data collection from the school level by the frontline bureaucracy such as the CRC and BRC. However, the overall project focus remained on access and equity based on the rationale that there was no level playing field among students to focus on learning measurement. The apprehensions about outcome measurements among educationists, bureaucrats, and academics continued in DPEP on grounds that poor achievement of outcomes may impact future funding. Learning outcomes were defined loosely so that poor achievement would not impact project funding. In relation to the BAS/MAS/TAS, the evaluation methodology and testing questions were changed in the MAS and TAS, and measuring exact progress from the baseline was not possible. However, the learning measurement approach laid the foundation for national achievement tests which was followed up in the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) project.

### **Governance and implementation strategies: Building the DPEP universe**

Decentralisation, specifically evidence-based district level planning, community mobilisation through VECs and SMCs building on the large mobilisation wave of the national literacy mission (NLM)<sup>59</sup> and an outcome focus were the key implementation strategies for DPEP. It’s important to note that DPEP

<sup>57</sup> See the discussion in the section on implementation strategies for the evolution of Eklavya.

<sup>58</sup> Multi-grade classes are where in a single class, teacher is teaching students from other classes also.

<sup>59</sup> NLM was a national level version of a long list of literacy programs implemented in India since the early 1950s. National Literacy Mission builds on previous national literacy programs which by their very nature have a concept of functional literacy as their objective. These are Social Education Programme (1951-56) and the Gram Shikshan Mohim (1950s), Farmers’ Functional Literacy Project (FFLP) (1967-68), Non-Formal Education Programme (NFEP) (1974-75) and RLFP (1978-1980).

was outside the planned expenditure of the national government as the eighth five-year plan was already under implementation (1992-1995). It was therefore not mainstreamed as part of the planning process. However, DPEP strategies listed above were detailed in both the eighth and the ninth plan with a focus on decentralisation, community mobilisation through VEC and SMC and engagement of NGOs. The plan called for making districts the unit of education planning; establishing District Boards of Education which could coordinate the EE interventions for both formal education, NFE and teacher training; and working in coordination with the block and village education committees. The ninth plan (1997-2002) continued with this focus. NGOs whose interventions were based on similar approaches were engaged across states.

DPEP's project design was led by national-level bureaucrats in the Department of Education, MHRD. Research studies were conducted on different focus areas of the project such as status of women and SC/ST students, teachers etc. and 'perspective plans' were developed as a background to the final project guidelines. The project office was based in NIEPA, New Delhi and was supported by a technical support group at the national-level composed of educationists, civil society leaders and bureaucrats. Short-term consultants from India and abroad were hired to support on specific issues.

At the state-level, DPEP created an innovative parallel structure for the implementation of the project, similar to earlier projects such as Shiksha Karmi. The project office was headed by the DPEP director and s/he was directly in touch with the national project leaders with regards to the project interventions. The state education bureaucracy was bypassed. A separate implementation structure was created to ensure that project finances were disbursed swiftly and there was no rerouting of the funds for other priorities of the state. In districts where DPEP was implemented, staff was hired as project personnel and the project interventions such as teacher training and monitoring systems were not routed through state-level bodies such as SCERTs, or DIETs in most states. Some states such as Karnataka did involve the DIET staff in the DPEP trainings but these sorts of detours were due to the initiative of the project leadership and not a regular feature of the implementation design across India. To illustrate, it's important to note that NCTE became a statutory body in 1995 and developed a new national curriculum for teacher education in 1998<sup>60</sup> in collaboration with university departments, SCERTs, teacher education institutions, school management members and principals, Indian Association of Teacher Educators and All India Primary Teachers Federation. The implementation of this framework, however, was not integrated in DPEP. DPEP is also credited with introducing the idea of joint review missions (JRMs). These were annual visits to project sites in which all stakeholders in the project from the funding and implementing sides were included in reviewing the project. Through joint review missions, DPEP brought in a culture of review and revision in project implementation.

## DPEP's reform legacy

DPEP was a small and selective program but it laid the administrative and ideational framework in which elementary education initiatives were implemented in the later years. It unleashed a reform thinking unmatched in earlier programs yet it failed to fundamentally transform elementary education system in India. Many of the reform ideas of DPEP were technically weak because they were not aligned with the ground realities of Indian elementary education system. For example, District level functionaries had limited experience in undertaking evidence-based planning and district plans came to follow a standard format<sup>61</sup>. On student learning, frontline functionaries were unclear about how interventions such as textbook revision, activity-based learning, improved infrastructure actually translated into learning improvement<sup>62</sup>. Supportive teacher monitoring through the CRCs and BRCs began as dynamic initiatives with active teacher's participation but lacked adequate staffing in terms of quality and numbers. States didn't want to take on the financial liability of adequately staffing the positions of the frontline bureaucracy after DPEP finished its tenure. Trainings in supportive supervision were inadequate both in terms of frequency and depth. Eventually CRCs and BRCs shifted

<sup>60</sup> Two earlier curriculum frameworks were in 1975 (National Council for Educational Research and Training, 1975) and then in 1988 (National Council for Educational Research and Training, 1988). The 1998 version had a dedicated section on teacher educators (National Council for Educational Research and Training, 1998).

<sup>61</sup> The impact of decentralization in school reform has been extensively studied. Village education committees as an aspect of decentralization receiving significant attention. As an overview, most studies highlight the elite/community capture of VECs and their descent into corruption (See Leclercq's (2002) analysis of VECs in Madhya Pradesh's Education Guarantee Scheme (EGS), Wankhede and Sengupta's (2005) study of VECs in West Bengal and Corbridge et al (2005) study of VECs in Bihar). Other aspects of decentralization that have been researched as its role in creating political credibility in reform (See Keefer and Kehmani, 2004, Devarajan & Shah, 2004; Chand, 2006, 2010; Banerjee et al., 2008; Clark & Jha, 2006).

<sup>62</sup> For a detailed study of the systems and processes for decentralization in DPEP (See Varghese, 1996).



their focus to data collection and monitoring. Many of the JRM policy recommendations were not implemented and the state political leadership as well as education bureaucracy remained aloof from the JRMs.

DPEP's most significant impact was on the state-level administrative system. DPEP created a parallel administrative structure which had weak links with the mainstream education bureaucracy. The learnings, both in terms of the reform ideas and the administrative systems of implementation, remained within the DPEP universe in most states. DPEP's large funding which was tightly controlled by the funders and the government of India stood in stark contrast with that of the finance strapped state education departments. There was limited incentive for collaboration and cross-learning among education secretaries and district officers on the one hand and DPEP project heads at the state-level and district-level functionaries on the other. It's key implementation strategy of decentralisation also remained administratively ineffective. DPEP was implemented only in select districts, and so its decentralisation interventions didn't change the overall administrative structure of the state and the elementary education administration remained centralised at the state-level. Politically, due to the parallel structure, the project interventions were not owned by the state-level political leadership. Project funds were tightly monitored by the funders and government of India which created mistrust between DPEP and the state political and bureaucratic leadership. There was limited incentive to effectively implement DPEP interventions in the non-DPEP states or to reorient the education system based on DPEP learning. DPEP failed to make elementary education a priority for the state-level political leadership.

## Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) 2001: Towards consolidation and standardisation

As the new century rolled on, and DPEP completed a five-year period, new developments at the national and international level led to a rethinking of the DPEP approach.

### The origin of intent

At the national-level, a government led by the BJP came to power in India 1999. Murli Manohar Joshi as the new HRD minister chaired the state education minister's conference which focused on the achievement of UEE. The conference report articulated the rising anxiety about the administrative fissures that had developed within the education bureaucracy from the national to the district level due to the parallel administrative structure created by DPEP. The 'dynamism' and 'flexibility' of the DPEP program as part of which external consultants were hired at the national and state-level, and new ideas and approaches were tested with significant state-level variation, was making the program an administrative challenge. The Joshi report called for a national-level program for UEE which would subsume all existing schemes and programs (Department of Education, 1999).

An important development within the civil society world bolstered the direction being taken at the national bureaucracy and government level. In 1999, the PROBE report (PROBE team in association with Center for Development Economics, 1999) on the state of primary schooling in India was launched which highlighted the dismal state of school education infrastructure across the sampled states of Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan, UP and HP. The survey was led by a group of civil society practitioners, bureaucrats and academics in 1996<sup>63</sup>. The report highlighted that the access problem of elementary schooling in India had not been 'solved' as claimed by the department of education. Limitations of the MLL framework in encouraging learning, with an overbearing curriculum, poor pre-service teacher training and failures of the DIET system were some of the key findings of the report. It also highlighted that targets as an instrument for improving teacher performance were ineffective. The report recommended that to manage teacher cadres, a supportive monitoring and accountability system which includes the community needs should be developed. It particularly called out the failures of the NFE model though it supported the approach of having alternative schooling models along with formal schools.

Internationally, in 2000 India became a signatory to the Dakar framework for action which was based on an extensive evaluation of EFA programs around the world. Signatories renewed their pledge towards achieving education for all in their countries.

### Purpose of the school system and objectives of the reform

SSA was launched in 2001 as an all-encompassing program which covered all districts in India as well as elementary education sector as a whole subsuming existing programs such as OB, SK, LJ and DPEP (See annex 2 for a summary).

SSA was designed as a 'mission mode' program with the national administrative machinery maintaining political oversight. Like DPEP, it also aimed to universalise elementary education in terms of access, retention, equity and education quality. SSA objectives resonated with the objectives school education reform in other policy milestones during the period of 2000-2010, reflecting a broader consensus on the direction of the reforms. This included the ninth and the tenth five-year plans (Planning Commission, 1997, 2002), the National Knowledge Index which was prepared by the newly constituted National Knowledge Commission (Kannan, 1999) and later the knowledge commission report (Government of India, 2007). During the early SSA years, 2000-2010, i.e. before the Right to Education Act was promulgated, multiple national-level policy milestones such as the ninth and the tenth five-year plan were completed.

Addressing poor school infrastructure, teachers and their training levels were highlighted as policy priorities. SSA was distinctive in that it took a targets-and norms-based approach. For example, one of SSA objective was that by 2010, all children were to be in school, an EGS/alternative school system

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<sup>63</sup> The PROBE team included economist Jean Dreze who is now one of the leading figures in the Indian development sector.

regardless of their social or gender identities and receiving an education of satisfactory quality (Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2004). In DPEP on the other hand one of the objectives was to “provide, according to national norms, access for all children, to primary education classes (I-V), i.e. primary schooling wherever possible, or its equivalent non-formal education” (Department of Education Ministry of Human Resource Development, 1995). Furthermore, financial norms were attached to key interventions in SSA<sup>64</sup>.

### **The school system**

Most of DPEP’s reform ideas continued in SSA. Important ones included the school system consisting of both formal and non-formal approaches, para teachers and strengthening of CRCs and BRCs.

### **Teachers**

The most prominent reform idea for the teacher cadre during the SSA years, though not implemented through SSA, was the National Curriculum Framework for Teacher Education (NCFTE) (National Council on Teacher Education, 2009). The ideational universe of SSA and other policy milestones during this period for the teacher cadre largely remained limited to teacher training and improving the stature of the teaching profession. Many of the ideas were from the 1983 Chattopadhyay commission, and later endorsed in the Ramamurthi committee in 1990 (National Committee for Review of 1986 Policy on Education (NPE), 1990), such as including practical internships along with taught component in the teacher education teacher degrees namely in that of Bachelor in Education (B.Ed.) and Diploma in Education (D.Ed). It also called for continuous professional development through projects and in-service training. The framework also emphasised the child-led approach in the teacher training curriculum and an overhaul of the teaching degree. Broad principles were established for curriculum development and pedagogy which were a continuation of those from the previous decades, i.e. constitutional values, local specificity in curriculum and child-led activity-based pedagogy. NCFETE also called out for teacher training institutions to undertake independent research on curriculum, pedagogy and student learning.

### **Classroom systems and learning**

SSA’s most significant departure from DPEP and that of the overall national-level policy thinking at the time of its launch was around student learning. The National Curriculum Framework for school education was revised in 2000 and it broadly retained the recommendations of NCF 1988 including implementation and evaluation of MLLs, a CCE approach to assessment at the primary level and removal of public examinations till class X. The ninth (1997-2002) and the tenth (2002-2007) five-year plans also focused on learning outcomes. The 9<sup>th</sup> plan commended the implementation of the MLL framework in 12 states which was undertaken in the eighth plan and also highlighted that low learning achievement was an area of concern. The tenth plan called for the achievement of learning outcomes by improving the content and the process of elementary education (Planning Commission, 2002 p.32). SSA’s approach to student learning marked a slight departure from an outcomes-based approach. In the program guidelines, achievement of learning outcomes was no longer the explicit focus of the reform interventions. SSA focused on providing a vaguely defined ‘education of satisfactory quality with an emphasis on quality of life’ (Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2004).

### **Exams, assessments and educational statistics**

SSA also laid the foundation for learning assessments at the national-level even though the program design and implementation didn’t include any provisions for redirecting interventions based on the achievement survey findings. DPEP learning assessments of BAS, MAS and TAS were developed into the National Achievement Surveys (NAS) in 2001. This was the first national-level student learning assessment conducted once in three years which was not specific to a project nor was it to address donor requirements. While the audience of the first few rounds of NAS assessments was the education bureaucracy, it impacted the elementary education sector as a whole as it established a system of routinely tracking the status of learning achievement. It was also under SSA that the elementary education statistical system was re-examined to ensure better implementation of the program

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<sup>64</sup> For example, “maintenance and repairs of Schools up to three classrooms will be eligible for maintenance grant up to a maximum of Rs.5000 per school per year”.

objectives. The Satyam committee report released in 2008 made important recommendations that DISE should be the only national-level database for education statistics and MHRD's select education statistics, which were released episodically, should be phased out (Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2008). Satyam committee also provided a financial norms framework for strengthening the DISE system and this included the provision of additional staff and its training in data collection and analysis at the frontline level.

SSA's approach of standardisation and consolidation of reform ideas was counteracted by other ideas in the national policy framework post 2004. In 2004, the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) implemented the CCE program for student assessment in CBSE board affiliated primary schools (I-V) and in upper primary (VI-VIII) in 2006. The CCE framework gained further prominence through the NCF-2005. The formulation of NCF-2005 was led by leading academics, educationists, civil society leaders. It brought to fore a liberal constructivist approach to elementary education according to which the role of curriculum, syllabi and textbooks is that of enabling the child to learn at her own pace. Use of mother tongue in elementary classes, softening of subject boundaries, activity led learning, and learning as a process of instilling curiosity, critical thinking and self-expression were the main pillars for curriculum reform. It's differed from NCF 1988 in that it was a clear move away from the learning outcomes and measurement approach.

Unexpectedly, alongside the constructivist approach to education that the NCF-2005 established, the learning outcomes approach and rights-based approach were also attaining prominence. NGO Pratham released the Annual Status of Education (ASER) report in 2005 which was based on the first independent survey on student learning in India. The accessibility of ASER findings for ordinary citizens and the clarity it brought around the dismal learning levels in public schools reignited the debates about the role of learning and outcome measurement of the 1990s again. The right to education movement also gathered pace alongside the implementation of SSA. The tenth plan and the NKC reports (Planning Commission, 2002; Government of India, 2007; National Knowledge Commission, 2009) called for implementation of a central legislation for the RTE. The 83<sup>rd</sup> constitutional amendment bill which was tabled in the parliament in 1997 was passed as the 86<sup>th</sup> constitutional amendment in 2002.

### **Governance and implementation strategies: A norms-based approach**

Decentralisation and community involvement in school management through VECs and PRIs remained the key strategies for implementing the SSA. Decentralisation in SSA included the distinct idea of district level perspective plans which mapped out the long-term approach to achieve UEE at the district level. The perspective plan was meant to be a dynamic document which would include scope for constant improvement. The perspective plan also included an Annual Work Plan (AWP) and a Budget which had an annual time frame of activities and funding. Community involvement was the most detailed strategy and it defined other implementation approaches as well such as community-based monitoring and data collection and habitation as a unit of planning to engage with community members in education goal setting. VECs were vested with increased powers under SSA such as the responsibility of maintenance of school grants. The parallel administrative systems set-up in DPEP continued in SSA, and so did the system of joint review missions for project monitoring. These missions consisted of education experts, representatives of donor agencies and SSA project officers with minimal involvement of the state education department and political leadership. Inclusion of financial norms for project interventions was also unique to SSA<sup>65</sup>.

### **SSA's reform legacy**

As a continuation of DPEP ideas and systems, SSA also carried the limitations of the DPEP years. Like DPEP, the technical elements of the reform agenda had many weaknesses. District based planning and community mobilisation were limited in actualising decentralisation in many states for much the same reasons as DPEP<sup>66</sup>. The ground realities were not receptive to these ideas. Frontline bureaucracy had limited training and expertise in developing district plans, much less for the long-term perspective plans that SSA framework called for. Capacities of the 'community' to undertake this or even the roles of the

<sup>65</sup> DPEP took the approach of ceilings (eg. civil works) and prohibitions (eg. permanent teacher's positions) on certain categories of project interventions.

<sup>66</sup> Rao examines implementation of SSA in the first phase in the tribal districts in Andhra Pradesh (V. S. Rao, 2009). Colclough and De (2013) examine the educational, economic and political factors contributing to the implementation of both phases of SSA. Rao highlight the limitations of SSA particularly that of community mobilization.

VEC and/or SMC were also limited and often further impacted by the local socio-political contestations. Other innovative ideas such as the NAS, JRMs were also somewhat limited in improving the reform outcomes. NAS findings were not designed in a way that teachers, parents, civil society leaders and researchers could engage with them. Its reach remained limited to the bureaucracy and it was not able to become an agent for advocacy or civil society mobilisation to demand better learning for students. In JRMs, the engagement of state-level political leadership was limited, therefore there was a lack of commitment to implementing the findings. The parallel administrative structures also continued and the split in the education bureaucracy at the state-level was further reinforced. Despite SSA's implementation in a mission mode, its political ownership by the state leadership continued to vary significantly across states due to which the innovative reform ideas, going back to DPEP, were not mainstreamed within the education bureaucracy. This was a problem that even the RTE act was unable to address.

## Right to Education (RTE) 2009: Old solutions to old problems

The inclusion of the Right to Education as a fundamental right in the constitution had been recommended in several government reports since the 1960s as I have discussed in the previous sections. Important civil society knowledge reports such as the PROBE report in 1999 also supported the inclusion.

### **The Origin of Intent**

The 1992 Mohini Jain case, in which the Supreme Court maintained that the right to education is part of the right to life, was critical to establish the *raison d'être* of the RTE even though it was not the focus of the case<sup>67</sup>. The aim of the case was to examine the provision of capitation fees charged by private medical colleges. The case led to further petitions and in 1993, during the Unnikrishnan case, the Supreme court stated that it was the responsibility of the state to provide free and compulsory education up to the age of 14. Still, the court rulings did not inspire mass civil society or grassroots action for the RTE. But civil society leaders, educationists and academics petitioned the national bureaucracy in various committees throughout the 1990s. This contributed to the 1997 bill on making elementary education a fundamental right which was tabled in the Rajya Sabha. In 2002, the constitutional amendment making RTE a fundamental right was enacted. After the right to life, RTE is the only other fundamental right included in the Indian constitution.

The constitutional amendment provided the enabling context for the RTE movement<sup>68</sup> which was led by a group of civil society organisations (such as CRY, Save the Children, etc.) called the National Alliance for Right to Education (NAFRE). While this wasn't a grassroots movement such as those on caste and gender, under the leadership of NAFRE, consultation and awareness building exercises were done at the grassroots level in small towns and villages. The movement demanded implementation of the RTE through a central government legislation, a view which was legally supported in the Law commission report 1998 (Law Commission of India, 1998). The driving rationale of the RTE movement was that despite a decade of reform, the state of elementary education continued to be very poor and only a binding legislation could ensure that the Indian state would achieve UEE.

From the constitutional amendment in 2002 to the actual enactment of the legislation in 2009, it was a journey of seven years and three draft legislations produced by the CABE, MHRD and finally a group of cabinet ministers, with inputs from the Law and the Finance ministry, at the national and state levels. Some of the draft versions were made available for public comments. The key ideas in the RTE draft were a patchwork coming from existing state-level legislations and previous national-level policy documents. The very idea of a central legislation was pushed back at first, even within the national policy circles such as the Saikia committee which supported the RTE but argued in its report that a central legislation around this was not required (National Institute for Education Planning and Administration, 1997). In the CABE discussions on the draft legislation in 2003 based on the Saikia committee report, State governments also didn't support a central legislation on grounds that a) most of the provision of elementary education in terms of infrastructure and financing is provided by the state government already and b) most states already have state-level legislations for free and compulsory provision of elementary education.

### **Purpose of schooling and objectives of reform**

The 2003 draft legislation reignited many ongoing debates within the elementary education space. Some had begun during the RTE movement itself, such as those around the primary focus of the RTE, and whether it should be addressing the enrolment challenge or improving the poor learning outcomes. A significant majority in the movement held that poor learning was due to weak enrolment and retention in the school system. The drafting process grappled with other similar questions. These included the scope of the central government legislation given that there were existing state legislations as well state government reticence were important areas of disagreement within the CABE drafting

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<sup>67</sup> The case was filed by Mohini Jain an aspiring medical student to challenge a Karnataka government notification which allowed private medical colleges to charge capitation fees. The Division Bench ruled that capitation fees were unconstitutional and that the right to education was a part of right to life.

<sup>68</sup> For a detailed overview of the constitutional history of the Right to Education see Mehendale and Mukhopadhyay (2018), for a history of the study from the perspective of the objective of social inclusion see Bhatta (2014).

committee. The drafting committee, consisting of civil society leaders, educationists, researchers, made a strong argument in the favour of a skeletal legislation which would serve as a model law for the states. The debates on the school system once again reiterated the importance of a common school system which was first discussed in the Kothari commission report 1964. This did not gain support of the majority given the prominent role that private sector schools were playing in the provision of elementary education. The extensively debated provision of 25 per cent reservation for students from disadvantaged backgrounds in private unaided schools was an important concession to meet this ideal. The provision also spoke to the objective of equitable access to schools. This was one of the most contentious provisions of the draft and the final RTE act. Its earliest mention is in the 1998 Law commission report which called for a 50 per cent reservation in private schools (Law Commission of India, 1998).

### **The school system**

The act set the standards of what denoted a school in order to standardise the range of educational establishments in the public and the private sector which were categorised as a school often with minimal infrastructure and staffing. Private schools were required to obtain a license to run a school and meet a set of minimal standards, though regulation of private schools was out of the act's purview. NFE centres were not included in this definition of schools, though special category schools such as KVs and NVs received an exemption. Similarly, 'free education' was also clearly defined in order to address the hidden costs of elementary education such as capitation fees. To ensure equitable access, provisions such as access to school for children with a varied range of disabilities and removal of bureaucratic hurdles such as transfer certificates, proof of age etc, were included.

### **Teachers**

RTE is credited with laying down the importance of a minimum eligibility criteria for becoming a teacher, which led to the introduction of Teacher Eligibility Tests (TETs). At the time of the act, only some states, such as Tamil Nadu, were hiring teachers based on a standardised test. The RTE also delineated the scope of teacher responsibilities<sup>69</sup> and actively sought to address the criticism from educationists and civil society leaders that teachers are deployed for non-teaching administrative tasks like elections management which eat into their teaching time. While the RTE didn't take an outcome or learning-focused approach, the teacher section lay down the relationship between teaching and learning. Under one of the responsibilities, teachers were to assess students learning levels and take appropriate actions. RTE, however, eschewed linking learning focused strategies to accountability of teachers performance or career progression.

The frequently stated solution to some of the most complex challenges of managing the teacher cadre was also discussed in the context of the RTE. The proposal was that teacher hiring and cadre management should be done by the schools themselves rather than by school education authorities. This view had strong resonance within the bureaucracy and some sections of the civil society. It was argued that this would prevent teacher absenteeism, improve school-community connections, and relieve the state education bureaucracy from the tedious and consuming task of managing the teacher cadre. Teachers would also have less incentive to request favourable transfers, which is one of the most politicised and contentious responsibilities that state education bureaucracy undertakes. However, despite such challenges, RTE retained the prevailing process where the state education bureaucracy managed the teacher cadre.

### **Classroom systems**

The RTE act took an explicit input-based approach to education quality issues including student learning. Supporters argued that legislation cannot guarantee an outcome alone. The provision of school infrastructure (including library and sports facilities) teacher qualification, teaching hours, PTR, community ownership of school, and continuous and comprehensive evaluation (CCE) instead of board exams as the mode of assessment were the main indicators for ensuring quality of education.

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<sup>69</sup> This was done by removing non-school teaching responsibilities including banning private tuitions.

## **Exams, Assessments and educational statistics**

The RTE act came into full force in 2010. In contrast to the RTE approach to reform were the eleventh (2007- 2012) and twelfth five-year plans (2012- 2019) and the public debates on ASER findings which continued to highlight the poor learning levels. In the eleventh plan, ASER findings as well as the achievement data from DPEP were used to set targets (Planning Commission, 2007, p. 5-6 ). These included enhancing learning levels by 50 per cent over baseline and curriculum and pedagogical interventions to attain the minimum level of learning<sup>70</sup>. The twelfth plan set out to achieve learning outcomes which were planned in a structured, target-based manner. While the MLL framework was not referenced, the interventions were similar in terms of teacher training, supportive supervision, curriculum and pedagogical inputs (Planning Commission, 2012). Public debates in national English media from 2010 onwards began to increasingly focus on the learning crisis and were mainly led by leaders of large, internationally funded civil society organisations, bureaucrats, educationists and academics at the national-level<sup>71</sup>. Other actors in the reform arena such as Teacher's unions at the state level were not active contributors in shaping public opinion in the English news dailies. The commitment to a learning outcomes-focused approach at the national policy level was also reflected in India's participation in the 2009 PISA tests. Two Indian states, Himachal Pradesh and Tamil Nadu, participated in the assessments. India's poor results, a ranking of 72<sup>nd</sup> out of 73 participating countries, brought greater attention to the learning challenge. Learning levels were also tested in the IHDS panel survey on human development in 2004-05. It was conducted by the National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER), a non-profit institute on economic policy in India and the University of Maryland, USA. The survey instrument on learning was developed in association with Pratham. This added to the ecosystem of organisations mapping and advocating for improving learning outcomes within public schools.

## **Governance and implementation strategies: Mainstreaming SSA in the education bureaucracy**

The implementation approaches of RTE included community-led monitoring and management of schools, as well as decentralisation of planning through, for example, school development plans. Advisory groups at the national and state-level were to be set-up to advise governments on effective implementation. The National Commission on the Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) along with their state-level counterparts were tasked with the responsibility of monitoring the implementation of the RTE.

SSA was identified as the implementation program for the RTE and norms for its harmonisation were recommended by the Bordia committee which submitted its report in 2010 (Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2010). One of the prominent recommendations of the committee was that the SSA implementation structure should be merged with the mainstream education bureaucracy. Though state education secretaries in their presentation to the committee argued against the merger to ensure efficiency of fund management, the need to have a consolidated and harmonised education structure prevailed in the recommendations.

## **The RTE legacy: The unrealised 'Right'**

Despite the transformative potential of having school education as a constitutionally guaranteed right, the RTE act itself had limited impact. The absence of an enforceable legal framework weakened the implementation system. This has perhaps been the most significant limitation of the RTE. The lack of penal provision in case of violation of the law particularly at the frontline level rendered it toothless. Fundamental rights can only be challenged in the Supreme court and the act doesn't specify who would be taken to court and to which court (High court or the Supreme court), in case the state does not fulfil the RTE mandate. Due to its focus on schooling, to the extent that the act was reviewed judicially, the focus remained on enrolments. The implications of its provisions on learning have not been examined systematically. The provision of no-detention in elementary classes also faced severe backlash from teachers, parents and school administrators as that led to lapses in teacher attendance and actual teaching practices.

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<sup>70</sup> MLLs here are not those of 1993 MLL framework developed by NCERT.

<sup>71</sup> This conclusion is drawn from brief study of opinion pieces published in four English language dailies published between 2010-2020.



Many of the other ideas of the RTE faced administrative challenges. Implementation of CCE became administratively challenging at the state-level partly because classroom practices had to be reoriented, which requires an overhaul of the administrative system and is time-intensive. This was not possible in the timeframe within which the CCE approach was implemented. The harmonisation of the SSA project structure within the education bureaucracy also remained limited given both the administrative challenges and weak political will at the state-level to undertake this.

Perhaps the biggest challenge that the RTE faced was with regards to the 25 per cent reservation of students from EWS in private unaided schools. This occupied a prominent space in public discourse around the act and discussions on the implication of other provisions remained largely ignored. At the state-level, the political ownership of the act dwindled once it became clear that the financial costs of implementing the act were to be borne by the state. The act was passed in the parliament without an accompanying money bill. In effect, the central government did not take financial responsibility for the act. Previously, multiple committee reports at the national-level since 1997 had brought to light the financial costs of the act and the RTE act draft of 2005 was rejected by the finance ministry due to lack of funds. This available knowledge about the financial implications was not used by the central government to create buy-in from the state governments or by the state governments to explore financing options.

The RTE was popularly discussed as a right to schooling rather than a right to education and its limitations provided an additional impetus to the calls for elementary education reform to focus on learning. In order to reorient the focus of the RTE act towards learning and address the findings from SSA JRM (Department of School education and Literacy, 2015) about poor learning levels, in 2017, NCERT developed another framework on learning outcomes for elementary stages (National Council for Educational Research and Training, 2017). The framework was to be implemented through teacher training programs, classroom practices, and the NAS 2017. From 2017 onwards, NAS was also restructured to include survey findings for individual states and districts in order to make the findings accessible to teachers, administrators at the frontline level, parents and researchers. Post-NAS activities were also conducted to undertake appropriate interventions for addressing learning gaps. However, both the 2017 Learning outcomes framework and NAS 2017 were criticised widely by educationists, academics and civil society leaders<sup>72</sup>. The learning outcomes framework was seen as prescriptive and minutely detailed, contrary to the way in which learning takes place in elementary grades. NAS 2017 was seen as being methodologically unclear and incomparable with other similar learning related datasets such as ASER and IHDS.

In the years post the RTE implementation, new actors came to be involved in engaging with the reform efforts. Instead of the civil society organisations, philanthropists, corporate consulting organisations along with the national bureaucracy began to take centre stage in policy-making and implementation. As the years moved closer to the New Education Policy 2020, ideas around a fundamental rethinking of the purpose of elementary schooling and that of the reforms started to gather pace.

## Run up to the NEP 2020

The ASER data continued to highlight poor learning levels despite near universal enrolment in public schools. Questions about the efficacy of providing additional inputs even in the ‘soft’ areas such as teacher training, improved pedagogy and reduced curriculum began to gain prominence<sup>73</sup>. New ideas on reform called for moving away from the age-grade structure of elementary education to ones defined by learning levels. This was also mentioned in the 12<sup>th</sup> five-year plan. The underlying rationale was that the age grade structure does not support the diversity of learning levels of students in the public-school system. Pratham developed the Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) program in which students in grades 3-5 are grouped according to their learning level in order to provide tailored instruction to ensure achievement of learning outcomes. This was implemented across multiple states such as Uttarakhand, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Bihar and Delhi. In Delhi, this approach was met with significant resistance from school teachers as well as educationists and academics involved in teacher education in mainstream

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<sup>72</sup> One of the most important review of the quality and reliability of ASER and NAS as learning outcomes data is a RISE program study led by Dough and Andres, 2021

<sup>73</sup> Many important studies over the last two decades have focused on the efficacy of various interventions to improve school learning and functioning. For the efficacy of community participation interventions, see (Banerjee *et al.*, 2010). See (Muralidharan and Sundararam, 2010; Karthik *et al.*, 2017) on teachers and learning. See (Kingdon and Datta, 2021) for a study on the impact of PTR on improvements in learning outcomes.

universities. They argued that the TaRL program closely parallels ability-based-segregation<sup>74</sup>. The argument went that the learning gains from this approach are marginal and are often not sustained in the long run. On the other hand, it leaves a lasting impact on the psychological well-being of students. Students also lose the benefits of learning in mixed ability classroom settings, one of which is motivation and peer learning through interaction amongst students of different learning abilities.

Within the national policy levels however, the emphasis remained on improving key inputs in the school education system such as teacher training, assessment approaches such as CCE (Department of School education and Literacy, 2015) and the utility of examination in relation to the No Detention policy (Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2015). In 2012, Justice Verma committee report (Department of School education and Literacy, 2012) examined the state of teacher education and among its key recommendations was the need provide a uniform system for measuring teacher performance across all states in India. Justice Verma commission was set up by the Supreme court. Alongside this committee, another committee constituted by the MHRD also submitted its report in 2012 on teacher training institutions and starkly highlighted that there was no link between SSA project teacher training and those provided by SCERTs and DIETs and recommended an administrative rehaul (Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2012).

Amidst these widely divergent approaches, preparations for a New Education Policy were underway. In 2015, MHRD constituted a committee under the Chairmanship of TSR Subhramaniam, a former cabinet secretary (Development, 2016). The committee submitted a draft report for public comments in 2016 with a directional focus on the achievement of learning outcomes in elementary grades. Other interventions such as teacher education and training were to be reformed for performance and efficiency rather than curriculum and pedagogy. Human resources systems at the state-level to manage teacher deployment based on school requirements rather than pre-appointed positions and management of payroll and incentives was the proposed approach. The policy expressly opposed recruitment of para-teachers. These recommendations stood in sharp contrast with reports on the implementation of RTE such as the CAG report in which basic issues such as low enrolment and retention, poor quality of learning and an overall violation of RTE norms were highlighted (Union Government (Civil), 2017). The Subhramaniam committee report was reviewed in a MHRD input document and revised by the Kasturirangan committee. The final New Education Policy launched in 2020 was based on the Kasturirangan report (Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2019). The Kasturirangan committee had no members with an elementary education background.

The final NEP 2020 made three distinctive reform transformations for elementary education under the overall policy focus on learning. First, an inclusion of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) in the formal education system to ensure that children are ‘school ready’<sup>75</sup>. This was supported by a new school structure which consisted of 5 years (preschool and primary) +3 years (upper primary) +3 years

<sup>74</sup> Ability based segregation is an influential idea for classroom design particularly from the perspective of improving learning and has a longer history of implementation across particularly in the US, UK, South Africa and New Zealand. There are multiple ways in which classrooms can be organised see Peterenas, Ignasi and Campdepadro’s, 2013). These are a) Based on ability, b) based on age and grade (which is prevalent in India) which is known as mixed classrooms. There is ability-based segregation which is called streaming in which classes are organised around intellectual and physical ability and lastly c) there is inclusion as classroom design in which multiple teachers,workbooks teaching styles are used in an age-grade structure to address the needs of all children. In recent years it has gained prominence in light of the large disparities in learning levels across students in the same grades. Ability based segregation has been most used in the context of physical disabilities (Sweeny, 2007) . During the 1970s-1980s, post its implementation ability based segregation was challenged on the grounds that inclusion was a moral right for children, as well as necessary for the creation of a democratic citizenry (Lefkowitz, 1972). However, other evidence particularly when Ability based testing is taken together with Standards Based Assessments does indicate that there can be improvements in learning levels. In the Indian context, while the ABL approach in Delhi schools was widely resisted by teachers and other stakeholders (Kalra, 2019) , there is evidence of its success in improving elementary level learning (UNICEF, 2018) . Classroom design interventions are closely, though not always linked with school education reforms on Outcome based Education (OBE) and Standards Based Reform (SBR). These too have been implemented since the 1980s in US, UK and Australia. The literature remains divided between the impact of these reforms, with some reporting improvement in learning levels but poor social outcomes (Jessica, Carrie and Beth A., 2016).

<sup>75</sup> Need for strong pre-school experience has been recognised within policy circles since 1975. It was articulated in the third five year plan (1961-66) which called for the construction of more Balwadis and training of Balsevikas (Planning Commission(Planning Commission, 1961). Kothari commission report which recommended the 10+2+3 years of education structure, talks about the need to have pre-school education and that this should not be left to private hands. “School readiness for first generation learners is discussion in the 1975 Curriculum also (National Council for Educational Research and Training, 1975). From the second NEP onwards ECE becomes more prominent in school reform story. Its included in the seventh five year (Planning Commission, 1985) and NEP 1986. Both the Ramamurthy committee and Reddy committee report talk about focusing on ECCE in schooling with the Reddy committee going so far as to state that it should be included in as Article 45 of the constitution. More recently, CAGE committee has examined the issue of extending the RTE to pre-school and secondary education (CAGE, 2012)

(secondary)+4 years (high school). Second, a clear and defined focus on foundational literacy and numeracy as detailed in the NIPUN Bharat Guidelines which lay out grade-wise outcomes to be achieved between grades 3 to 5 (Education, 2021). Third, consolidation of poorly attended primary schools into school complexes where child creches, primary, upper primary and secondary schools are housed together. The aim was to gain from the infrastructural and teacher deployment efficiencies.

Teacher cadre reform remains one of the weakest components of elementary education reforms in India. This is primarily because teacher cadre management is a state subject. While projects such as DPEP and SSA addressed teacher training, service issues such as deployment, transfers, career progression cannot be addressed through national-level projects/programs. At most an overall guiding framework can be developed nationally, as was done by the Chattopadhyay commission in 1983 and Justice Verma Commission, 2012. Broad principles were included in both NEP 1986 and NEP 2020. The focus has remained on teacher education for which two curriculum frameworks were developed in 1998 and in 2009 and three commissions have examined the ecosystem of teacher education, Verma Commission in 2012, MHRD report on Centrally Sponsored Scheme on Teacher Education (CSSTE) in 2012 and by the Department of Education in 2015.

Across the three states Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Tamil Nadu, where we examined the recruitment, deployment, transfer and performance policies for teachers, the variation was drastic and at times at odds with on ground implementation. In Rajasthan for example, elementary school teachers are officially recruited directly through the national-level eligibility test followed by the Rajasthan state level eligibility test. Despite a ruling by the Rajasthan high court that contract teachers violate constitutional principles, contract teachers are hired as 'guest teachers' on monthly contracts by panchayats. Similarly, according to official records, Tamil Nadu does not have contract teachers but at the ground level guest teachers are routinely hired. There is no publicly available policy on teacher management and teacher career progression.

## Unpacking the Political Settlement on elementary education reform

The political settlement around elementary education reform at the national-level is defined by a narrow, national-level elite. The reform settlement is itself a tenuous one, with multiple, conflicting ideas co-existing both within the policy ideational as well as the implementation space. Ideas become dominant not because there is a settlement arrived between opposing groups through co-option or consensus, it is merely that one set of actors are able to capture some ideational and implementation space. Actors have used a range of methods to do this, such as engaging with the political leadership, participating in national-level government constituted committees, involving civil society players with whom ideas overlap etc. Some ideas got side-lined, sometimes only temporarily, for example that of contract teachers. Others remained unimplemented despite having some support among a section of key actors for example that of Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation (CCE) as part of which students were evaluated on both scholastic and non-scholastic attributes throughout the year through a range of assessments techniques, rather than just one set of annual exams. Most reform ideas that we have discussed in this report have surprisingly long ideational roots and gestation periods. And within the same category of actors for example civil society, or national-level bureaucracy, the support for the same set of ideas oscillates to varying degrees, for example that of learning outcomes and their measurement. While many civil society actors support that learning outcomes should be defined, with regards to measurement of learning outcomes or its linking with teacher performance goals the support oscillates. Some ideas are acceptable but un-implementable i.e. one of a common school system. Others are implementable but deeply discomfiting for example the use of board examinations in elementary grades to ensure that the school system remains accountable and streamlined. However, barring some ideas, there is marked consistency in the range of policy thinking options across decades.

We unpack the political settlement around reform ideas by examining the interrelationship between a) the impetus for reform b) the actors involved in the initiation and ideation and c) implementation of ideas and the strategies utilised to identify the relevant key actors and to build consensus. The reform milestones we have discussed so far, namely, DPEP, SSA, RTE and NEP 2020 were led by a small select set of actors from the education sector in terms of initiation, ideation and implementation.

### **Impetus for reform**

The impetus for reform came from the larger political dynamics with the international and the national governance system. The resultant political settlement around these reforms i.e. disagreements around ideas and approaches and more importantly the manner of their resolution, sheds light on which reforms ideas became dominant and why, as well as the challenges in their implementations.

There are two categories of impetus for the reforms analysed in this report. In the case of the 1986 NEP, DPEP- 1994 and SSA 2000 a dynamic interaction between the international and the national context was critical for the reforms to take off. In the case of the RTE 2009 and NEP 2020, it was a set of disparate judicial decisions and activities of the civil society actors which congealed to create a reform context.

**Political and policy developments in the international and national contexts:** Many critical developments within the political and governance sphere coincided during the early 1990s. It's important to note that it's the coming together of these two levels that generated the reform context and it is less likely that developments at any one level would have been sufficient to produce reform. At the international level key developments included commitments made by the Indian government at international conventions such as the Jomtein conference in 1990 (DPEP) and the Dakar Framework for Action in 2000 (SSA), pressures from the global research community due to the very low levels of literacy in India (DPEP), the interest of the donor community particularly that of World Bank in lending to India for primary education (DPEP and SSA) and an enabling international ideological environment which laid high stress on the importance of primary schooling impinged on the government of India during important junctures (DPEP and SSA).

The national context dovetailed and enhanced the impact of the international developments. In the mid- 1980s, a new national government came to power led by Rajeev Gandhi who made education reform as a priority based on his personal commitment to education. Catalysing this priority was the

balance of payment (BoP) crisis in the early 1990s which led India to sign the Structural Adjustment Program. DPEP of 1993 was the culmination of the iterative interaction of all these international-national developments. In SSA, the global EFA commitments matched with a political and bureaucratic priority to have a centralised elementary education program. To this end, SSA was designed as an umbrella program in which all other national and state level projects were subsumed such as the DPEP, Shiksha Karmi, Lok Jumbish etc.

**Independent actions of the judiciary, bureaucracy and project interventions of the civil society:** These congealed over the longer duration which led to the formulation of the RTE in 2009 and the NEP in 2020. In case of the RTE, the Supreme Court judgement in the Unnikrishnan Case in 1993, in which RTE was declared as a part of the right to life to be provided by the state, became an important impetus for the reform. Five-year plan documents<sup>76</sup>, bureaucrat led committees (eg. Ramamurthy committee 1991, Saikia committee, 1994) in which civil society leaders participated also supported the inclusion of RTE as a fundamental right since the late 1980s. It was after the constitutional amendment that civil society leadership mobilised into a movement and began engaging with people at the grassroots level for a central government legislation picking on the stalled momentum towards UEE. In the case of the NEP 2020, the absence of an updated national education policy was prominent in public discourse and was repeatedly highlighted by civil society but the immediate impetus came from within the bureaucracy with the constitution of the Subramaniam committee in 2016. Within the civil society, multiple prominent initiatives were underway during this period. The Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) program by Pratham was implemented in Delhi, Gujarat, Maharashtra. Akshara Foundation had been implementing the CCE program in Odisha. Intense consultations were conducted with state-level actors and with such members of civil society. However, in the end the final policy formulation process remained within the bureaucracy. After the Subhramaniam committee report, an MHRD input document was developed which was further revised by the Kasturirangan committee report whose draft was finalised as the NEP 2020.

## Reform Initiation

Reform initiation was largely led by interested bureaucrats engaging with select national-level civil society leaders. Individuals in both of these categories had significant experience at the state-level. For example, in the state departments of education, bureaucrats such as RVV Ayyar in Andhra Pradesh played a leading role in DPEP project design. In case of civil society leaders, they had significant experience in elementary education system in state contexts. For example, leaders of Sandhan, an NGO in Rajasthan, were important players in the reform initiation. But these leaders influenced national reform efforts only once their professional positions allowed them a national scope. Personal commitment to elementary education, career growth within the bureaucracy, response to petitions by civil society leaders and educationists, and donor commitments have been some of the main reasons for the lead role that the bureaucracy has played in education reform. For example, during the formulation of the 1986 education policy, the ideas of the education secretary of Government of India, Anil Bordia were prominent. Similarly, Anil Bordia also supported the development of the MLL framework. It was his personal commitment to elementary education and extensive work in Rajasthan as part of the Shiksha Karmi, Lok Jumbish projects and the Bihar Education project that led him to shape the national-level policy discourse. The national political leadership has largely played a 'supporting' role towards the reform. That is, trusted members of the bureaucracy were given the space to ideate, design and implement the reform initiatives. The political leadership was not initiating reforms or playing the lead role in its ideation. Except for some cases, such as that of the Nitish Kumar government in Bihar from the 2000s and Arvind Kejriwal led Delhi government from 2014- onwards, education has not been a centre piece in their election campaigns<sup>77</sup>.

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<sup>76</sup> From the fourth five-year plan onwards, the provision of free and compulsory education up to the age of 14 has been on the policy agenda

<sup>77</sup> School education however does figure in multiple campaign 'manifesto' documents. However, these often remain just wordy paperwork which does not shape the political issues dominant during elections.

## Reform Ideation

Actors involved in reform ideation, i.e. ideas such as district-based planning, community monitoring and learning outcomes and their measurements, have been bureaucrats, educationists, academics, and civil society leaders at the national-level with occasional inputs from the judiciary. The broad categories of actors have remained the same but the nature of organisations and individuals within these categories have changed over the decades. Till DPEP, the national-level bureaucracy engaged with grassroots level NGOs working largely at the state-level on issues such as child labour (MV foundation, Andhra Pradesh), school education (Sandhan, Rajasthan), educationists heading national-level bodies such as the Mahila Samkhyia and academic departments such as the education department at Delhi University. External experts such as R Dave from UNESCO, who headed the MLL committee, were also part of this cohort of reform actors. Reform debates on formal versus non-formal education, common school versus segregated school system, learning outcomes focus versus input focus during these years unfolded within this cohort of reform actors. Within the government, Department of Education, MHRD headed by the education secretary, and the MHRD minister were key actors. Other government bodies engaged included the planning commission in which leading academics, researchers and civil society leaders were represented. NCERT which looks at curriculum development and NIEPA which leads training and capacity development among teachers and administrators were also closely involved in ideating reform ideas. For example, the ten-year school curriculum was developed by NCERT in 1978. The MLL framework was also developed by NCERT in 1991. The DISE system established during the DPEP was located in NEIPA. The Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE), an apex advisory body which is constituted at the request of the government includes academics, educationists and bureaucrats. CABE meetings became arenas where many competing viewpoints among the reform actors were debated and several draft documents were finalized.

From SSA onwards, the cohort of actors changed as large national-level NGOs began to play an active role in policy advocacy for reform. Pratham, with its work on the ASER report, was among the leading organisations. Government bodies involved in reform remained similar during the SSA period. In the RTE period a coalition of civil society organisations called the National Alliance for Fundamental Right to Education and Equity (NAFRE), which consisted of large, internationally funded civil society bodies such as CRY, were prominent. In the case of the RTE, while civil society leaders and bureaucrats were involved in developing the first draft of the bill, subsequent drafts were developed by the bureaucracy, with the final drafting done by members of the cabinet ministry. A significant transformation in the nature of reform actors started building up in the early 2010s. Key actors in policy ideation now include the MHRD, large consulting firms, philanthropists and foundations.

The national bureaucracy has remained at the heart of reform initiation and ideation across the decades while the role of state and below state-level actors has been marginal. Recall that Indian polity is a federal one, and school education is part of the concurrent list of the Indian constitution. Both national and state government can legislate on it but the delivery of school education is undertaken by the state. That is, setting up and managing the schools, hiring the teachers and school staff, conducting exams (in most part exams are done by state boards, with a smaller percentage of schools affiliated with central government boards), administrative monitoring infrastructure is under the state. The lack of involvement of the state-level in reform initiation and ideation is telling both of the nature and the process of school reforms. States are not entirely absent from the reform story. Many of the most innovative projects and ideas were tested in states such as Rajasthan (para -teachers), Tamil Nadu (activity-based learning) and Madhya Pradesh (Education Guarantee through minimal school facilities). And these ideas have made into national programs and have been mainstreamed across the country. The argument here is that while the national-level bureaucracy has picked up these ideas from the state-level, the states themselves have not led the momentum demanding more enabling reforms at the national-level.

State-level bureaucracy which includes secretaries of department of education or heads of training institutions such as SCERTs and SEIMATs participate in national-level committees, such as the state education minister's conference, or the specialist committee constituted by the government like the Bordia committee on the invitation of the national government. Other actors from the frontline bureaucracy such as DIETs are rarely involved in reform initiation or ideation. States rarely have their own policy on education reform and the role of most state-level organisations, such as textbook boards and state-level exam boards, state public service commissions or teacher recruitment boards, state-level Panchayati raj departments, is largely absent. Other actors at the state and national-level, such as teachers' unions, or private school's association also remain peripheral. Their role in reform is episodic

and reactionary largely limited to issues pertaining to their specific area of focus such as service issues with regards to teachers and regulation or the 20 per cent quota for EWS with regards to private schools as provisioned in the RTE. The reform milestone from 1990-2010s created a dual structure at the state-level with the national-level reform project being administrated through an institutional set-up separate from the state education bureaucracy. This reduced the political ownership, policy visioning as well as implementation capacity of the states. This was in continuation of the criticism of the central sector schemes (CSS) i.e. national-level programs such as DPEP by state-level actors, political leaders, bureaucrats etc. Their reasons were that this will stunt the state capacity to set its own educational priorities and implementation systems.

What has remained consistent across the decades are the mechanisms for decision making and consensus generation. Actors, whether civil society leaders, or educationists or academics were selected by the government in power and provided a formal, national-level platform to initiate and ideate about reforms. The overall process of reform initiation, ideation and implementation remained *a-political*, though it had the support of the national-level leadership. The reform ideas were not developed in response to a grassroots movement led by parents or teachers. Nor were they catering to the challenges of ground level implementation except for those in the aftermath of the RTE such as no-detention policy or the CCE. Both the process and ideas themselves remained somewhat technical, instrumental and institutional. The translation of the reform program into political prioritisation particularly at the state-level indicated by a financial commitment and political oversight over the state administrative architecture for implementation did not happen through the chosen cohort of actors and the chosen reform process.

## Conclusion

Elementary education reform in India is defined by four characteristics which has had deep consequences for reform sustainability and success.

**First, reform ideas in India have a surprising level of continuity and repetition.** Across the decades and the five categories in which we have discussed the reforms, origin of intent, purpose of the school system and the objectives of reform, the school system, teachers, classroom systems and learning, governance and implementation strategies, the range of ideas have remained largely the same from 1975 onwards.

**Second, there is a disconnect between actors involved in initiating and ideating for reform and those implementing it.** The federal structure in which both the centre and the state is involved in delivering school education is a defining context due to which the implementation is primarily undertaken at the state and below state-level however, neither the institutional processes set-up to include the state-level nor the culture of reform generation and policy making have been able to overcome this divide. Reform ‘thinkers’ and reform ‘doers’ operate in different orbits. India is long on commissions and in a sense, education has not really been forgotten, however, the disjuncture between reform ideas and implementation reality has not been bridged.

**Third, the reform space is defined more by various kinds of political ‘un-settlements’ and ‘less-settlements’ rather than settlements.** Consensus around key ideas on quality, learning, governance, has been lacking. Similarly, for reform objectives as well. There are two dimensions to this. Important actors are missing from the reform settlement process on the one hand, and on the other the ideas themselves emerge from a narrow set of actors and pressures of external circumstances. The failings of reform implementation do not generate a constituency either for better implementation or of new ideas. Different actors attempt to influence different bodies within the national and the state level governments to implement their ideas and conflicting ideas and approaches continue to remain in fray. The reform system lacks coherence and focus.

**Fourth, the administrative structure at the state and below level has not been designed around reform.** New ideas are outfitted on old structures with small tweaks made occasionally to align it with the overall system. This perhaps is the strongest indicator of weak political engagement and commitment to implement reforms. Administrative architectures at the state-level require significant political support to be realigned. But neither in the reform design nor in the process of developing the reform ideas have the structural foundations been laid out. The case of decentralisation is instructive. The local administrative bodies, i.e. the panchayats were increasingly involved in implementing new reform ideas but they were not supported with finances, personnel and training. This significantly curtailed their capacity to implement the reforms. Some broad trends in each of the five analytical categories can be summed up as below.

Purpose of the schooling system has focused on national integration, human resource development and economic development. Reform objectives revolved around the three pillars of access, equity and quality (at times defined in terms of learning). But access and equity have remained the most consistent of the focus areas. Reform ideas for the school system have focused broadly on formal and non-formal education system. Private schools were included in the ideas and debates, only in the context of including private schools under the ambit of RTE for licensing and reserving seats for underprivileged children. Ideas for teacher cadre reform also have had surprising continuity, oscillating between efficiency related reforms and quality related ones. For efficiency, ideas have been around hiring contract or para teachers and using internet technology to deliver training programs. For quality, reforms have focused on strengthening the cadre through merit-based hiring, improving teacher pay scales, cadre management and training activities and providing supportive supervision. Reforms have not gone beyond to change the role of teachers as a stakeholder category in the reform ideation or implementation or streamlining a clear career path. Reform ideas around classroom systems have largely remained the same and within the overall structure of the 10+2, age-grade system proposed in the 1968 NEP-2020. Classroom systems include curriculum, pedagogy, and Pupil-teacher ratios. Importance of learning basic reading, writing and maths was recognised as early as the mid-1970s and



the problems of low learning levels raised in the Indian parliament as part of the discussion on the Challenges of Education document in 1985.

Two board clusters of ideas around learning have been dominant to varying degrees in the national policy arena. First, is that of child-led, locally contextualised activity-based learning which engages with the child's innate curiosity, learning and knowledge creating potential irrespective of their social and economic location. In this idea set, the emphasis is on the process through which learning takes place and the child's engagement in that. The learning goals are not the prominent focus and are open-ended, but the capacity of the child to construct knowledge is. Second, is that of minimum levels of learning and standardised learning outcomes. In this idea set, the emphasis is on a pre-defined set of cognitive and non-cognitive learning that children must achieve and that on strategies to enable that. Both the idea sets take a conceptual, skill and understanding based approach to learning and are very much opposite to the learning forms largely practiced in Indian schools which are based on rote-memorisation. The exam system tests the capacity of the students to mechanically reproduce subject knowledge rather than learning which is particularly important in elementary grades. The key difference between the two is the extent to which learning outcomes are standardised. Both of these sets have overlapped and coexisted in the policy terrain since the 1970s with specific periods where one set has been become dominant. Student assessments have been a key area of reform thinking from the first education commission and again, a broad set of related ideas have emerged repeatedly across the years. For elementary grades, comprehensive and continuous evaluation (CCE), No-detention (NDP) and no board exams (NBE) have been recommended across the decades. The underlying rationale is to create an environment free of fear and social stigma associated with failing in exams. Provision of NDP was specifically added to prevent drop-outs and retain students in school and prevent their entry into the work force or child marriage. In implementation strategies and governance, three broad categories of ideas have been proposed around governance and implementation systems a) community ownership b) decentralisation c) separate bureaucratic structure. Across the decades these ideas have animated all reform milestones.

Politics around improving student learning has gone through many phases, but in the end, it remains beset within the structural characteristics detailed above. Just as other overarching reform ideas and reform objectives, it is one among many and it needs an enabling political settlement and administrative architecture.

## Annexure 1 Summary of key five-year plans

Author: **Ritu Kochar, Research Associate, CPR, India**

Objectives	Strategies
<b>7<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan (1985-1990)</b> <sup>78</sup>	
<p><b>UEE by 1990:</b></p> <p>Enrolments (5 crores) through formal schools and NFE centres and retention</p> <p><b>Learning:</b> Attainment of basic levels of learning</p> <p><b>Equity:</b> Focus on the education of girls and socio-economically backward children<sup>79</sup></p>	<p><b>Decentralisation:</b> More implementation for states; set block-wise or village-wise operational goals and duties to ensure appropriate strategies are adopted and monitored timely.</p> <p><b>Teacher training:</b> Development of teacher training facilities; use local part-time teachers or helper-teachers “on fixed salary”.</p> <p><b>Dropouts and Retention:</b> Incentivise uniforms, appoint women teachers etc., for girls’ enrolments; improving the quality of education by using training material from existing projects– population education, environment and wildlife education etc. and building schools under NREGA.</p> <p><b>Convergence with health nutrition programs:</b> Dovetail EE with nutrition, health care and social welfare through the Integrated Child Development Service (ICDS).</p> <p><b>Non-Formal Education:</b> Establish alternate schooling channels for children unable to attend formal schools<sup>80</sup>.</p>

<sup>78</sup> The Seventh Plan (Planning Commission, 1985) was published in 1985 under the Rajiv Gandhi-led Indian National Congress (INC). Elementary education was part of the Minimum Needs Programme (1974) to improve the living standards of people and decrease regional disparities.

<sup>79</sup> Seventh Five Year Plan (Planning Commission, 1985)

<sup>80</sup> (Planning Commission, 1985)

Objectives	Strategies
<b>8<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan (1992-1997)<sup>81</sup></b>	
<p><b>UEE:</b> Additional enrolment of 4.38 crores through formal schools, about 1 crore through non-formal centres and the rest through the open learning channel of the upper-primary stage</p> <p><b>Retention, Participation and Achievement<sup>82</sup>:</b> Focus on retention and achievement instead of enrolment and lay down specifications for Minimum Levels of Learning (MLL)<sup>83</sup>.</p>	<p><b>Decentralisation:</b> District as the unit of educational planning and allocating more management duties to Panchayati Raj institutions (PRI), Village Education Committees (VECs) and block groups</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• NFE channels (part-time evening schools, MP Model, IIE Pune Model, Integrated Model, Work Oriented Model)</li> <li>• District level monitoring and implementation of MLLs</li> </ul> <p><b>Convergence with existing programs:</b> Adapt existing state/district level programmes and merge welfare, women empowerment, ECE and health care programmes with the larger UEE target.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assimilation of schemes like Shiksha Karmi, Mahila Samakhya (MS) and Operation Blackboard (OB) in the overall education plan.</li> </ul> <p><b>Non-Formal Education:</b> Large-scale participation of voluntary agencies and members from local NGOs willing to teach at night/voluntary schools or similar volunteer organisations within walking distance of one kilometre of habitation.</p> <p><b>Teacher Training:</b> Through Centrally Sponsored Schemes, state training centres SCERT and DIETs.</p>

<sup>81</sup> Due to political turbulence at the centre between 1900 to 1992, the Eighth Plan was postponed by two years. Instead, two annual programmes were formed for the year 1990-91 and 1991-92 and an approach paper was published in 1990 and titled 'Towards Social transformation'. After some political stability, the Plan was then published in 1992 post the implementation of fiscal and economic reforms including liberalisation under Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao from the INC. The Eighth Plan was launched in the backdrop of acceptance of the recommendations of the Report of the Narasimha Rao Committee by the National Development Council and after the NPE was launched in 1986 during the middle of the 7th Plan (Planning Commission, 1985) .

<sup>82</sup> The Plan lacks details on the working targets for retention and achievement as there were to be laid out based on institutional capabilities and consultations with State Governments.

<sup>83</sup> Eighth Five Year Plan (Planning Commission, 1992)

Objectives	Strategies
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Develop complementary innovative and cost-effective programmes, including an open learning system (OLS) supported by distance education techniques for teachers and students.</li> </ul> <p><b>Learning:</b> Lay down MLLs for EE and regular monitoring and improve classroom teachings by introducing a comprehensive evaluation system and continuous in-service training of teachers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Set up District Boards of Education (DBE) and National Evaluation Organisation to monitor the learning outcomes and teacher training.</li> </ul> <p><b>Equity:</b> Scholarship for SC/ST, girls and economically backward communities to reduce the GER between different sections(Planning Commission, 1992).</p>
<b>Ninth Five Year Plan (1997-2002)<sup>84</sup></b>	
<p><b>Enrolments:</b> Additional enrolment of 2.5 crore children at the lower primary stage and 1.6 crore children at the upper primary level</p> <p><b>Infrastructure:</b> Construction of 75000 additional rooms /buildings at the elementary stage</p> <p><b>Teachers:</b> Additional appointments of 2,36,000 teachers at the lower primary</p>	<p><b>Decentralisation:</b> More power to local bodies, especially Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) and Urban Local Bodies (ULB); Utilising the existing non-formal channels, NGOs and volunteer bodies to prepare an action plan based on grassroots reality and micro-planning with a focus on ‘area approach’ or ‘target population’.</p> <p><b>Early Childhood Care:</b> Addition of ICDS to the education programme and community-supported creches and day-care centres attached to Anganwadis/Primary schools</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Support community-supported creches and day-care centres attached to Anganwadis/Primary schools</li> <li>● Mobilisation of local women's groups to set up and manage early childhood education centres.</li> </ul>

<sup>84</sup> The 9th Plan (Planning Commission, 1997) began under the PV Narasimha Rao-led Congress government in 1995/96 and reconstituted under the United Front (UF) led by Gowda and Gujral in 1997/98. It was finally released in 1999 under the Bhartiya Janta Party's Atal Bihari Vajpayee as the Prime Minister after much political uncertainty at the centre (Saran 1999).

Objectives	Strategies
<p>level and 1,75,000 at the upper primary level<sup>85</sup>.</p>	<p><b>Community Mobilisation:</b> Empower Panchayati Raj institutions and local bodies such as VECs and train them through DIETs, Block and Cluster Resource Centres and distance mode.</p> <p><b>Strengthening Teacher Education Programme:</b> Improve the physical infrastructure of teacher-associated institutions such as SCERTs, CTEs, IASEs, NCTE, and BRC/CRCs, especially in north-eastern states.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Better connectivity in remote/tribal areas or community provisions such as providing free accommodation to teachers when possible.</li> <li>• Curriculum development, upgrading the physical and academic infrastructure of teacher training and improving them through state and district bodies—SCERTs, CTEs, IASEs, DIETs, Block Resource Centres/Cluster Resource Centres and NCTE.</li> </ul> <p><b>Non-Formal Education:</b> Promote alternative modes of education and encourage open schools and similar systems, such as NFE centres run by the state and NGOs.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with the Ministry of Labour to focus on getting 11.28 million working children back to school</li> </ul>
<b>Tenth Five Year Plan (2002-2007)<sup>86</sup></b>	
<p><b>Universal access:</b> Schools within one km distance, ECE and basic facilities like toilets and electricity.</p> <p><b>Universal enrolment:</b> Total enrolment by 2003 and all children to complete five years of primary schooling by 2007—an additional enrolment of 25</p>	<p><b>Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA):</b> SSA to subsume existing programmes like Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya Scheme (KGBVS), DPEP, Lok Jumbish, Shiksha Karmi; run MDMS and Restructuring and Reorganisation of Teachers' Education as ancillary schemes.</p> <p><b>Community Mobilisation:</b> Dovetail implementation at the district level and include programmes for children in the 0-6 age group under the Department of Women and Child Development, sports-related interventions by the Department of Sports and Youth Affairs, establishing public libraries under the Department of Culture, nutrition and school health</p>

<sup>85</sup> (Planning Commission, 1992, 1997)

<sup>86</sup> Launched in 2002 under the BJP government's Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee (Planning Commission, 2002)

Objectives	Strategies
<p>million children in the primary stage and 16 million children in the upper primary stage.</p> <p><b>Universal retention:</b> Increase primary school retention and decrease dropouts for Class 6-8 by 2007.</p> <p><b>Universal achievement and equity:</b> Ensure reasonable learning outcomes especially in literacy, numeric and life skills and reduce social gaps by 5% for upper-primary by 2007<sup>87</sup>.</p>	<p>programmes of the Ministry of Health, and the employment generation/poverty alleviation programmes of Ministry of Rural Development.</p> <p><b>Learning:</b> Focus on discerning learning abilities and formulate a systematic learner evaluation mechanism to evaluate the impact and efficacy of measures taken;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improvements of textbooks and reading material as a main instructional aid and provision of better facilities like pucca school, blackboard, uniforms, toilets, meals.</li> </ul> <p><b>Teacher education and training:</b> Professional development of teachers for the adoption of child-centred methods</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strengthen teacher training institutions at the state and district level such as DIETs, CTEs and IASEs and SCERTs.</li> <li>• Pre-service training and strengthen below district level institutions such as BRCs and CRCs for academic support, networking of teacher education institutions and strengthening teacher education by expanding access to digital resources. The Plan demands a social revolution in education through social involvement to ensure UEE and improve the quality of education.</li> </ul> <p><b>Privatisation:</b> Partnerships with the private sector for monetary and material support; also suggests opening more private schools without compromising on quality and taking help from private companies to improve the functioning of government schools “within the broad parameters of state policy”<sup>88</sup>.</p>

<sup>87</sup> Tenth Five Year Plan (Planning Commission, 2002)

<sup>88</sup> Tenth Five Year Plan(Planning Commission, 2002)

Objectives	Strategies
<b>Eleventh Five-Year Plan (2007-2012)</b> <sup>89</sup>	
<p><b>Universal enrolment:</b> Bring 7.1 million OoSC back to schools and reduce the dropout rate from 50% to 20%.</p> <p><b>Quality education and infrastructure:</b> Improve learning outcomes and assessment. Open around 20000 new primary schools and upgrade about 70000 primary schools to cover the 6.87 lakh backlog of additional classrooms; Eliminate primary level dropouts and reduce the dropout rate at the elementary level from 50% to 20% by 2011–12.</p> <p><b>ECE:</b> Mandatory one-year primary school for children</p> <p><b>Equity:</b> Eliminate all gender and social disparity by 2011–12</p> <p><b>MDMS:</b> To be universalised at the elementary level by 2008–09</p> <p><b>Universal coverage of ICT</b> at UPS by 2011–12</p>	<p><b>Reorientation of SSA:</b> Good quality education of common standards, pedagogy, and syllabi to ensure minimum learning levels and improve teacher education and recruitment by introducing entrance tests:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure basic learning with a special focus on Maths, Science, and English (core) and universally introduce English in Class III onwards</li> <li>• Uniformity in curriculum with National Curriculum Framework (NCF) 2005 and the syllabi prepared by NCERT to be the guiding documents for States</li> </ul> <p><b>ECCE:</b> Mandatory pre-school education to enhance learning levels by at least 50% over baseline estimates (2005–06 District Information System for Education [DISE]).</p> <p><b>Equity and inclusion:</b> Helping children from SC/ST/OBC communities, girls, and other disadvantaged children unable to attend a formal system of schooling.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Set up 500 KGBVs in blocks with a higher concentration of SC, ST, OBC, and minority population, a special school in 35 cities, teacher sensitisation training, and improving learning levels of minority children through remedial coaching in schools and community contribution.</li> <li>• VECs and BRCs to help with programme implementation and Madrasas/Maktabas to be supported through modernisation to cover the 12000 odd madrasas.</li> <li>• Focus on improving the learning levels of SC, ST, and minority children through remedial coaching in schools and near habitations by educated volunteers from Nehru Yuva Kendra Sangathan (NYKS), NSS, Self-help Groups (SHGs), and local NGOs.</li> </ul>

<sup>89</sup> Prepared by the UPA government led by PM and Chairman of the Commission Manmohan Singh from the Indian National Congress. It aimed at “Inclusive Growth” after India demonstrated significant economic growth (7.7% per year) in the 2000s (Planning Commission, 2007).

Objectives	Strategies
<p><b>Strengthen BRCs/CRCs:</b> One CRC for every ten schools and five resource teachers per block<sup>90</sup></p>	<p><b>Convergence with other government programs:</b> Taking help from programmes, such as MDMS and Mahila Samakhya which are to work on a more decentralised approach</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• KGBV and DPEP subsumed within SSA</li> </ul> <p><b>Learning:</b> Improving syllabi and pedagogy and teacher training in SSA<sup>91</sup></p>
<b>Twelfth Five Year Plan (2012-2017)<sup>92</sup></b>	
<p><b>Access and equity:</b> Enrol OoSC and reduce dropouts: Especially kids with mental disabilities (48% out of school)</p> <p><b>Teachers:</b> Correcting the imbalance of teacher deployment: Get remaining schools under RTE Act's PTR norms and work on the teachers' professional qualifications (8.1 lakh untrained teachers nationally with four States—Bihar, UP, Jharkhand and West Bengal—accounting for 72 per cent of them).</p> <p><b>Learning:</b> Clear articulation of learning levels and improving school infrastructure based on RTE stipulations to align the entire elementary education</p>	<p><b>Learning and learning outcomes:</b> Continue the learning enhancement programme (LEP) under the SSA</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strong Focus on Early Years in School, especially in Class I with the most experienced teacher and design of the curriculum based on the Scandinavian school systems, make NCERT/SCERT books more engaging</li> <li>• Enhancing Facilities in Schools: Implement Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in elementary schools and provide networked computers, accessories and Internet connections</li> <li>• Encourage research projects on quality-related issues, including assessing the States' curriculum in the light of NCF-2005, students' learning outcomes, students' and teachers' attendance rates, the effectiveness of teacher training etc.</li> <li>• Rethink the age-grade instructional pattern and encourage activity-based learning (ABL) or multi-grade, multi-level learning (MGML)</li> <li>• Promote State-Level &amp; Local-Level innovations like ABL by Tamil Nadu, Gujarat's Gunotsav programme, and Punjab's Parho Punjab initiative.</li> <li>• Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation under the RTE.</li> </ul>

<sup>90</sup> Eleventh Five-Year Plan 2007-2012 (Planning Commission, 2007)

<sup>91</sup> (Planning Commission, 2007)

<sup>92</sup> The Twelfth Plan (Planning Commission, 2012) was prepared under the second term of UPA, under the leadership of Manmohan Singh. This was the last Five-Year Plan and it was not implemented. Planning Commission was dissolved by the BJP-led NDA government and replaced by the NITI Aayog.



Objectives	Strategies
<p>system around achieving learning levels<sup>93</sup>.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Encourage states to define transparent, meaningful and simple learning levels.</li> </ul> <p><b>Equity and inclusion:</b> Provision of residential schools for OoSC focus on SC/ST children and girls and children with special needs and provision of seasonal hostel facilities for children of migrating families both at the place of origin and of migration in urban and rural areas based on the norms in the KGBV scheme.</p> <p><b>Teachers:</b> Addressing teacher shortages, particularly improving the quality of pre-service teacher education and in-service teacher professional development, options for their upward career mobility with special attention to para-teachers.</p> <p><b>Convergence with other sectors and programmes</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) to build infrastructure with support from Member of Parliament Local Area Development Scheme (MPLADS) and MLA funds.</li> <li>● Integrated Action Plan (IAP) and Backward Regions Grant Fund (BRGF) for strengthening school infrastructure.</li> <li>● Set up a Council for People's Participation in Education (CPPE) as a registered autonomous body for institutionalising the partnership through well-defined structures involving government and voluntary agencies regularly.</li> <li>● Increase retention through MDMS and MS through a new monitoring system - MIS portal, with annual data of 2.7 lakh schools already fed into the portal by the time of the Twelfth Plan and utilised the mobilisation under Mahila Samakhya<sup>94</sup>.</li> </ul>

<sup>93</sup> Twelfth Five Year Plan (Planning Commission, 2012)

<sup>94</sup> (Planning Commission, 2012)

## Annexure 2 Policy Summaries

Author: **Ritu Kochar, Research Associate, CPR, India**

Objectives	Financing and Implementation
Operation Blackboard (1987-2000)	
<b>1987- 1992</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provision of at least two large all-weather rooms for all primary schools<sup>95</sup></li> <li>Provision of at least two teachers in every school, one preferably being a woman</li> <li>Provision of minimum essential teaching/ learning aids (TLAs) for every primary school.<sup>96</sup></li> </ul>	<b>Financing</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Centrally sponsored scheme launched as part of National Education Policy 1986</li> <li>Implemented nationally in four phases: 10% talukas by 1986-87, 20% by 1987-88, 30% by 1988-89 and 40% by 1989-90<sup>98</sup></li> <li>Centre allocated funds of £265 million for equipment and teachers' salaries for the plan period</li> <li>State Govts mobilised resources under JRY and other schemes<sup>99</sup> to construct school buildings, including headmaster/office rooms and toilet facilities.</li> <li>State Governments also provided contingency and replacement funds for equipment (Dyer, 1993)</li> </ul>
<b>1992- 2000<sup>97</sup></b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cover all schools in SC/ST areas within two years</li> <li>Expand to provide three teachers and three rooms to primary schools wherever enrolments exceed 100</li> </ul>	<b>Implementation</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Train teachers to use OB teaching materials under a specially designed teacher training programme</li> </ul>

<sup>95</sup> The classrooms should be approx. 30 sq. meters usable in all-weather with a deep veranda (approx. 2.4 meters. in depth) along with separate toilet facilities for boys and girls and a small library.

<sup>96</sup> These included a blackboard, science kit, maths kit, tool kit, 45 charts, maps, children's books, toys and other learning equipment. (Department of Education, 1988b)

<sup>97</sup> After the 1990 Jomtien Declaration on Education for all by 2000 and CABE called for strengthening the NPE to achieve this goal through a Programme for Action (PoA) 1992, OB was revised in 1992 to include the following three sub-schemes (Kumar, 2006))

<sup>98</sup> Dyer 1993, p. 41

<sup>99</sup> Jawarharlal Rojgar Yojna was a programme launched in 1989 for rural employment, which incorporated the National Rural Employment Programme and Rural Landless Employment Guarantee Programme.

Objectives	Financing and Implementation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Extend to upper primary schools with at least one room for each class/section; headmaster-cum-office room; separate toilets for girls and boys, essential teaching-learning facilities like a library; at least one teacher for each class/section; and a contingency grant for replenishment of consumable items (Department of Education, 1986)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide flexibility for purchasing teaching-learning materials relevant to the curriculum and the local needs</li> <li>OB to become an important part of micro-planning of projects</li> <li>Low-cost and locally available designs relevant to the local conditions of schools aligning with building centres and local technical institutes<sup>100</sup></li> </ul>
District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) 1994-2003	
<p><b>1994-2000<sup>101</sup></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reduce the gaps in enrolment, dropout rates and learning achievements between gender and social groups to less than 5%,</li> <li>Evolve suitable strategies to check overall dropout rates for all students at the primary level to less than 10%</li> <li>Raise average achievement levels by 25% through the achievement of basic literacy and numeracy competencies. At least 40% achievement levels in other competencies for all primary school children</li> <li>Provide them access to primary schooling or</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><u>Overview:</u> Centrally sponsored programme launched in 42 districts spread over the seven states of Assam, Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, and Kerala. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Later expanded to additional 28 districts - six in Gujarat, nine in Rajasthan, eight in Orissa, and five in West Bengal.</li> <li>2000- DPEP covered 214 districts (242 including bifurcated districts), spread over 15 states</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p><b>Financing</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>85% of the project cost was shared between the central government and 15% of the budgets of respective State governments</li> <li>Central government was the main funding source, provided by external donor agencies in the form of grants and credit:</li> </ul>

<sup>100</sup> (Department of Education, 1988b)

<sup>101</sup> The DPEP was launched in 3 phases. The first phase was from 1995 to 1996, which focused on setting up management structures with quality improved somewhat in the background. In the second phase (1996 to 1997), the implementation aimed to empower resource groups comprising practising teachers, CRC (Cluster Resource Centre) and BRC (Block Resource Centre) personnel, and trainers from different backgrounds, levels and institutions. In the third phase, post 2000, DPEP was subsumed in the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyaan

Objectives	Financing and Implementation
<p>its equivalent through non-formal education<sup>102</sup>.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ World Bank (Credit): \$1243.40 million</li> <li>○ DFID (Grant): £110 million</li> <li>○ European Community (Grants): €150 million</li> <li>○ UNICEF (Credit): \$25.8 million</li> <li>○ Government of Netherland (Grants): \$10 million.</li> <li>● Total Expenditure (up to December 2000)<sup>103</sup>: Rs 2923.42 crore</li> </ul> <p><b>Implementation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● The programme was implemented at six levels: national, state, district, block, cluster, and village<sup>104</sup></li> <li>● <u>National-level</u>: Included a National Level Structure (NLS) comprising of the Mission's General Council and a DPEP project Board with EdCil as a consultant<sup>105</sup>. NLS was responsible for facilitation, capacity building, appraisals of state/district level officers, coordination between them and providing overall direction</li> <li>● <u>State level</u>: Implemented in a mission mode through registered state level autonomous societies. These societies included a General Council (GC) with Chief Minister as ex-officio president, and Executive Committee (EC) under the chairmanship of Chief Secretary/Education Secretary of the State. The State Project Office (SPO) implemented the project, which included two civil works manager, four local architects and NGOs. The State Project Director</li> </ul>

<sup>102</sup> (Vargheses, 1994)

<sup>103</sup> (Government of India, 2000)

<sup>104</sup> (Department of Education Ministry of Human Resource Development, 1995)

<sup>105</sup> (Department of Education Ministry of Human Resource Development, 1995)

Objectives	Financing and Implementation
	<p>(SPD) acted as the member secretary of the GC and EC (Department of Education Ministry of Human Resource Development, 1995, p.5).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>District level</u>: Led by district DPEP committees headed by either the District Collector or the Chief Executive Officer of district elected council. The District Implementation Committee acted as the executive bodies to facilitate coordination between state and district committees. It included members from the district level officials, local NGOs, and institutions. The District Project Office was led by the DPEP officer with the District and Assistant Project Co-Ordinator's managing implementation and with the planning team. This team, also involved in monitoring, was a block level committee including the head of local governments, NGOs, educational institutions, and functional specialists at the district level. These were helped at the village level by village education committees, mothers-teachers associations, and parent-teacher associations<sup>106</sup>.</li> </ul>
<b>Sarva Shiksha Abhiyaan (2001-2014)   Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan (2018- present)</b>	
<p><b>2003- 2010</b> <sup>107</sup></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All children in school, Education Guarantee Centre, Alternate School, "Back to School" camp</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Overview</u>: From 2000-2014, the SSA was run in a mission mode and the project structure was largely same. It was then relaunched as Samagra Shiksha scheme in 2018 and has been aligned with the RTE Act and NEP 2020 guidelines with similar structure of the project.</li> </ul>

<sup>106</sup> (Department of Education Ministry of Human Resource Development, 1995)

<sup>107</sup> SSA was launched in two phases: from 2003-04 until 2006-07, and then from 2007-08 to 2009-10. Following the enactment of the Right to Education Act, 2009, the program was extended for a third phase, from 2009-10 until 2011-12. During this third phase, the objectives and strategies of the SSA were assessed and revised and aligned to the mandate of the RTE Act 2009. The SSA was functional till 2014 after which the Samagra Shiksha Programme was launched in 2018. It subsumed the three schemes of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA) and Teacher Education (TE).

Objectives	Financing and Implementation
<p>by 2003</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All children must complete five years of primary schooling by 2007</li> <li>• All children complete eight years of schooling by 2010</li> <li>• Focus on elementary education of satisfactory quality with emphasis on education for life</li> <li>• Bridge all gender and social category gaps at the primary stage by 2007 and at the elementary education level by 2010</li> <li>• Universal retention by 2010<sup>108</sup></li> </ul> <p><b>Post 2010 (RTE- 2010 comes in effect)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establishment of neighbourhood schools in three years, i.e., 31st March 2013</li> <li>• Provision of school infrastructure (like all-weather buildings, toilets, playground, library, one classroom-one teacher, storeroom, and room for office/headteacher room and fencing) in three years</li> <li>• Provision of teachers as per prescribed PTR within</li> </ul>	<p><b>Financing</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Sustainable financing approach</u>: Shared financing between center and state with progressive increase of the state share. Starting with 85:15 during the 9th FYP, 75:25 during the 10th FYP and 50:50 after that between the Central Government and State Governments/UTs—financed through both earmarked taxes known as “education cess”—and budgetary allocations from general revenues of the Government of India and the State governments.</li> <li>• Under Samagra Shiksha scheme, sharing pattern for State governments and UTs with legislature is 60:40 between the Centre and State governments; 90:10 for the Northeastern States—Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim, and Tripura—and the Himalayan States—Himachal Pradesh, J&amp;K and Uttarakhand; and 100% for Union Territories without legislature.</li> </ul> <p><b>Implementation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vertical and horizontal administrative structure which includes National, state, district, and village-level implementation structures parallel to the line departments of the State governments to ensure a smooth disbursement of funds. The approach has been “bottom-up<sup>110</sup>” emphasising a decentralised system of implementation with an increased focus on community mobilisation.</li> </ul>

<sup>108</sup> (MHRD, 1999)

<sup>110</sup> (MHRD, 2004) p. 2

Objectives	Financing and Implementation
<p>three years</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Training untrained teachers within five years, i.e., by 31st March 2015</li> <li>• All quality interventions and other provisions with immediate effect<sup>109</sup></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <u>National Body</u>: Comprising of General Body chaired by the PM, National Advisory Council comprising MHRD and DSE&amp;L, Executive Committee and the Project Approval Board (MHRD, DSE&amp;L, DEEL): Designed and released the framework</li> <li>● <u>State level</u>: Registered as a society and led by State Project Director, State Advisory Council and Governing Body and Governing Body and State Execution Committee to implement the several components in collaboration with district level bodies.</li> <li>● <u>District</u>: District Project Officers (DPOs), district committee and DIETS working with state departments and local governing bodies.</li> <li>● <u>Local (Panchayat level)</u>: The DPOs and the committee further work with the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs), Village Education Committees (VECs) and Schools Management Committees (SMCs) to monitor ground implementation</li> <li>● Micro-planning exercises through decentralization and community participation. These strategies included institutional reform, sustainable financing, community ownership, institutional capacity building, improving mainstream educational administration, community-based monitoring with full transparency, habitation as a unit of planning, accountability to the community, education of girls, focus on special groups, pre-project phase, thrust on quality, the role of teachers and district elementary education plans.</li> </ul>

<sup>109</sup> (MHRD, 2012)

Objectives	Financing and Implementation
	<p><b>Post RTE-Act, 2011 to 2017</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• UEE: School and social mapping, residential facilities, transportation, uniforms, training for deprived children and 25% reservation in private unaided schools were undertaken. For girls' education, special schemes like the National Programme for Education of Girls at Elementary Level, Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBV) and Mahila Samakhya (MS); underprivileged children were given academic support and training; reaching out to communities from where the children come and training members of SMCs and PRIs; and provision of free textbooks, uniforms, and other grants for staff.</li> <li>• Quality: Pre-school or Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE), teacher recruitment, placement and training, mandatory qualifications for both para and regular teachers, teacher re-deployment for rationalisation, training of administrative staff and community mobilisation. Introduction of the no-detention policy and Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation to eliminate mental harassment of children was the introduction of.</li> </ul> <p><b>After 2018-Present: Relaunched as Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Digital initiatives, National component (1% of total budget) support to NIEPA, NCERT, NCPCR, NIC and technical support group to monitor the scheme</li> <li>• Pre-school education, innovative pedagogies, school readiness modules, capacity building of teachers through training and new</li> </ul>



Objectives	Financing and Implementation
	resource material, monitoring, community mobilisation and programmes like DIKSHA for teachers.
<b>National Education Policy (2020)</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Universal provision of quality early childhood development care and education for all children from 3 years is to be achieved by 2030</li> <li>• Universalize school education (i.e. K-12 level) with a target of 100 per cent GER to be achieved in school education by 2030</li> <li>• Every student in grade 5 and beyond student will achieve foundational literacy and numeracy by 2025</li> <li>• Achieve access and participation in free and compulsory quality school education for all children aged 3-18 years by 2030</li> <li>• Integrate vocational education into all educational institutions; provide access to vocational education to at least 50% of all learners by 2025</li> <li>• Curriculum and pedagogy to be transformed by 2022 to minimise rote learning and instead, encourage holistic growth and 21st-</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Overview:</u> The first 10 years from 2021 to 2030 are the implementation period, and the next 10 years from 2030 to 2040 are the operational period. The implementation will occur in seven stages till 2030, and till 2040, the policy will operate on existing strategies, after which another elaborate review will be undertaken</li> </ul> <p><b>Financing</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 6% of GDP should be spent on education by both the Central and all state governments</li> <li>• Increase public expenditure on education by 10% in ten years</li> </ul> <p><b>Implementation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Restructuring school system to 5-3-3-4 from the 10 (elementary and secondary school) +2 (higher secondary) +3 structure (college)</li> <li>• <u>ECCE</u> to be incorporated into the school structure for 3-6-year-old, delivered through Anganwadi, pre-primary sections in existing primary schools and stand-alone pre-schools with national curricular and pedagogical framework for ECCE</li> <li>• <u>Achieving foundational literacy and numeracy:</u> National Mission on Foundational Literacy and Numeracy Mission and a Committee for FL&amp;N framework and codifying learning outcomes to be set-up</li> <li>• <u>Ensuring universal coverage and inclusivity:</u> Special education zones in areas with a significant proportion of such disadvantaged groups, gender inclusion fund for female and transgender students</li> <li>• <u>Professional Development of Teachers:</u> 50 hours of mandatory</li> </ul>

Objectives	Financing and Implementation
<p>century skills—creativity, critical thinking, scientific temper, communication, collaboration, multilingualism, problem-solving, ethics, social responsibility, and digital literacy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Achieve an inclusive and equitable education system to equalise opportunities, participation and learning outcomes across all genders and social categories by 2030<sup>111</sup></li> </ul>	<p>Continuous Professional development of teachers, under NISHTHA for in-service teacher training in online mode on DIKSHA platform</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Expanding E-learning</u>: Through DIKSHA–e platform access to curriculum-linked e-content in QR-coded Energized Textbooks (ETBs), courses for teachers, and quizzes</li> <li>• <u>Mental health and wellbeing of students</u>: Emotional support and counselling to students under distress, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic and includes issuing advisory guidelines, a web page and national toll-free number, interactive online chat options, and a national-level database and directory of counsellors</li> <li>• <u>Convergence</u>: with Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan, Mid-Day Meal and Padhna Likhna Abhiyan</li> <li>• States and UTs to constitute their own Task Force to steer the implementation of the NEP<sup>112</sup></li> </ul>

<sup>111</sup> (Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2020)

<sup>112</sup> (NEIPA, 2020)

## Annexure 3 Summary overview of key research studies

Author: **Ritu Kochar, Research Associate, CPR, India**

This study has sought to fill an important gap in the research on elementary education reform in India. Broadly, the scholarly focus has been on a) examining the political and economic dynamics of the emergence and design of specific policies, programs and projects such as Operational Blackboard, DPEP etc (Dyer, 1993, 1996; Kumar, Priyam and Saxena, 2001; Ramachandran, 2003, 2012) and b) on the implementation and impact of these reforms initiatives. How the reform ideas have evolved historically and what debates and contestations took place as the decades passed from one policy and program to the other have not received exclusive focus. Studies on the history of elementary education reform such as those by Ayyar (2016, 2017) focus not on ideas themselves as much as on mapping the history of reform itself, with all the complexities of events, institutions, actors and politics. By focusing on ideas my attempt has been to outline the ideational universe in which the reforms are located. I briefly summarise some of the important writings that have been reviewed as part of this study. The review is organised around four components from the analytical framework of this report namely: a) objectives of the schooling system and the purpose of reform b) teachers, c) classroom systems and learning and lastly, f) implementation strategies and governance.

### Objectives of the schooling system and the purpose of reform

Access, equity and quality have been three common objectives in the literature on reforms in elementary education systems. The earlier analyses of access, such as Psacharopoulos (1989) and Dreze and Sen (1989), saw primary schooling as a poverty reduction exercise and a means to enhance economic development through changes in aid policy. Even later studies support this argument that economic restructuring and public investment in education are crucial for societal change Buchert (1998) and education reforms are the “second stage” of reforms (Bank, 1997).

However, after the Jomtien ‘Education for All’ conference in 1990, quality and equity became equally important objectives to achieve the universalisation of elementary education. The literature highlights this shift with studies focusing on enhancing inclusion and quality of education through high public spending, better decentralisation and finding the right political settlement between local bodies, state-level bureaucrats, national actors and international development agencies.

Reports by development agencies such as the World Bank (1995, 1997) examine the strategies to achieve the three objectives through an analysis of enrolments, retention, dropouts, teachers’ performance, curriculum and material input in schools across India. These reports argue that heavy investment in primary education in India is a pathway to societal change and recommend decentralisation for better planning and management.

The relationship between access, quality and investment is also examined in Sipahimalani's (1997) and Dreze and Kingdon's (1999) analysis of low per-pupil expenditure in educationally backward states in India. These quantitative studies argue that the quality of schooling matters and high public investment in school facilities such as books, mid-day meals and teachers positively affects school participation, especially among girls and students from disadvantaged communities. Although specific inputs are necessary, the two studies show that quality also relies on household variables like parents’ education level and social status, such as caste.

While “quality” in education is an area of contestation among educationists, Govinda and Varghese (1993) note that quantitative improvement was not enough to fulfil the promise of UEE. Their study compares quantitative expansion (schools and facilities) and school effectiveness across MP to show that quality schooling depends on well-planned activities and effective internal management systems in schools, i.e. effective decentralisation. Their mapping of organisational arrangements between principals, teachers, district/intermediate level organisations and parents, especially those from the tribal communities, adds to our understanding of the politics-reform relationship in education by analysing local politics’ influence on access, equity, and quality.

Similarly, Dreze and Sen (1989, 1995), Thomas (2001) and Kurien (1995) showcase the impact of effective decentralisation and local politics on quality education in Kerala. Partly historical and political in their approach, the three studies highlight reforms by the colonial regime and the political settlements between politicians and local leaders that led to community mobilisation in Kerala in the post-independence era. It paved the way for education reforms in the state, leading to its exemplary performance in human development indicators in the 1980s that surpassed all Indian states.

Access, equity and quality are also examined in the literature by analysing the implementation of national-level programmes such as OB, DPEP, SSA, and RTE. Dyer (1993, 1996, 1999) (1993, 1996, 1999) leads the research on Operation Blackboard in India through a “background mapping” approach. She takes three case studies in Gujarat in her 1993 thesis, looks at teacher training material under OB in the 1996 paper, and works backwards to understand the implementation process from the local to state to the central government. Her thesis presents an interesting dichotomy between state and central relations to argue that the “implicit” agendas of the actors, whose decisions shape the “explicit” agenda of the policy are often neglected (Dyer, 1993, 234-5). She focuses on teachers in both her reports through an analysis of teacher-learning aids (see Teachers) to showcase that policies fail when their needs and capabilities are not considered during the policymaking process.

The research on DPEP by the World bank (2003) and Clarke (2003), Glinskaya and Jalan (2003) and the Middleton *et al.* (2007) are outcome-based assessments of the impact of DPEP on quality and equity. The reports argue that effective financial management, enhanced community participation through VECs and SMCs, and building institutional capacity can enhance school quality. Varghese (1996) on the other hand, focuses on the positive aspects of decentralisation that led to the success of DPEP. He asserts that DPEP led to effective decentralised planning and community mobilisation, which can enhance the right balance of centralised decision-making.

Rao (2009) examines SSA after its first phase in a tribal area in Andhra Pradesh. Colclough and De (Colclough and De, 2013) analyse educational, economic and political factors contributing to the implementation of both phases of SSA. Rao’s observations contradict Varghese’s analysis as he noticed that community participation had little to no effect on the quality of education in tribal areas, and most parents were unaware of the SSA or their role as SEMC members. Colough and De (2013) look at the politics-reform relationship more closely through the evolution of SSA to understand its full contribution towards access, equity and quality. They assert that SSA introduced new institutions and processes through the financial and “non-monetary influence of donors” (2013, p. 45) by augmenting the conversation between central, state and local leaders and effective privatisation, civil society action through NGOs, community participation at the ground level.

Studies on RTE such as Mehendale and Mukhopadhyay (2018), Bhatti (2014), and the PROBE (1999) report cover the equity aspect of education reforms. Bhatti analyses (2012) key national documents to discern the ideas on equity and inclusion and their translation into the constitutive directive. While her argument that the RTE is yet to attain its goal of social inclusion by providing equal opportunities to marginalised groups is an important one, its her tracing of policy documents has been crucial for our study. This historical analysis of changes in ideas through legal mandates, national education policies and initiatives such as SSA, DISE and NCF 2005, leading up to the RTE Act, enhanced our understanding of the government mandates, elite consensus and the role of civil society leaders in development and implementation of RTE. The NORAG 2019 study edited by Mehendale and Mukhopadhyay presents the global and national perspectives on the right to education and the efforts by international agencies and national governments to ensure this right through effective implementation. In the Indian context, it first lays out the constitutional history of RTE. It then highlights the implementation process, such as the role of institutional bodies such as the National Commission for the Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) and actors such as parents in increasing the demand to make education a constitutional right.

In the PROBE report access, equity, and quality are examined using a mixed-method approach in which actors—scholars, educationists, activists, and bureaucrats—together present perspectives of teachers, parents and children in the educationally backwards states of Bihar, MP, Rajasthan, and Uttar Pradesh. The report’s main argument is that elementary education should be a fundamental right and constitutive directive as there is a popular demand for it.

An interesting yet limited set of literature on the impact of foreign aid on education policy on quality and access is presented by Colclough and De (2010). They highlight that there have been major changes

in the number of agencies and aid volumes and major shifts in aid composition. They note these aids were limited to food initiatives, but in the 1990s, it was directed towards social sectors such as education.

## Teachers

Teachers are central to the learning process and essential to policy implementation. Nevertheless, the literature shows that their role is limited to “a powerless subordinate in a bureaucratic hierarchy” Kumar (1990). Few scholars like (Dyer, 1996) emphasise the issue of technology-aid as a learning material and its minimum effect due to unawareness among teachers. Other qualitative and quantitative studies focus on teachers, especially the politicisation of the cadre and their impact on learning. Ramachandran and Bêteille (2018) analyse the status of teachers across Indian states and institutions to determine teachers' eligibility based on official requirements, teacher recruitment policies and processes, benefits, transfers and promotions, and professional growth of teachers and lastly, the grievance redressal system. Placing policy against the practice, Ramachandran and Bêteille argue that the issues teachers face during their profession and the institution's inability to tackle these hidden problems remain among the primary reasons behind poor teacher performance. The study follows the analysis from Ramchandran et al. (2011)), where the scholars looked at the classroom environment in the development of teachers. They argued that teaching must be recognised as a professional field rather than just a measure to improve schooling; education planning must be holistic to define vertical links between central and state departments clearly, and teachers must be identified and rewarded to teach and not focus on the administrative part of the profession. The most widely researched topic in the literature on school teachers is that of para and/or contractual teachers. Studies such as Kingdon and Sipahimalani-Rao (2010), Govinda and Matthew (2018) and (Ramachandran *et al.*, 2016) bust some myths around contract teachers that they are less qualified than regular teachers, are paid less and have fewer benefits. These studies argue that while it is true that contract teachers are paid less and do not enjoy the same benefits, they have almost similar qualifications to regular teachers, and as local volunteers, they can influence learning better. While a majority of literature supports this view, a study (EdCil, 1999) points out that contract teachers' low salaries and insecure working (Kumar, Priyam and Saxena, 2001) conditions negatively impact the education system, and that the quality of education has suffered. Another study notes that teacher absence rates do not depend on the type of contract of teachers, and para teachers are no more or less likely to be absent from work than regular school teachers (Kremer *et al.*, 2005) (also see the section on “Classroom Systems, Learning and Assessments).

Quantitative studies (Kingdon and Muzzamil, 2003, 2009; Bêteille, 2009) present the trend in the rent-seeking capabilities of teachers to further their professional growth. Kingdon and Muzammil (2003) depict how teachers are embedded in the political environment of Uttar Pradesh through democratic methods of raising demands, such as strikes and unionised action. They argue that while teachers have been able to demand better pay, benefits and job security successfully, their actions have had a limited impact on the quality of schooling. Bêteille (2009) looks at teacher absenteeism and transfer to the power interchange between teachers and politicians. She argues that most government interventions focus on teacher-based strategies like training and incentives to account for teacher absenteeism and accountability. She highlights that the focus should be on the environment they operate in and the other stakeholders influencing their occupation, especially politicians and government officials. These studies show the negative role played by politics. However, while these studies show teachers as a part of the system, studies like Ramachandran and Sheshaghave (2008) have shown that teachers are often the victims of corruption when they have to interact with the state for their transfers, promotions and contracts.

Recent quantitative studies analyse the reality behind teacher shortage in India. Scholars such as Kremer *et al.* (2010) analyse decentralisation as an effective measure to find that community help and higher pay do not necessarily reduce teacher absenteeism. They argue that daily incentives, such as a proper road and school infrastructure, are more likely to motivate teachers. Other studies, such as Kingdon and Datta (2021) and Muralidharan et al. (2017) show that an increase in public spending does not necessarily mean better performance. Both look at this issue from the lens of teacher absenteeism to show that there is hardly any teacher deficit in India and an extreme pupil-to-teacher ratio. It leads to unnecessary overspending on teacher recruitment and fake enrolments. Kingdon and Datta (2021) advocate for an evidence-based approach to economic efficiency, while Muralidharan et al. (2016) argue that policies that suggest a decrease in public education spending might yield higher marginal returns than those that increase inputs.

## **Classroom systems and learning**

There is limited literature on classroom systems in elementary education. Majumdar and Mooji (2011) focuses on social inclusion and learning in age-based classrooms. Their study largely accepts the 10+2 structure of classrooms. The previous section covered the qualitative studies that focus on quality. However, in recent years, national and international organisations have focused on measuring quality through learning outcomes using randomised controlled trials (RCTs). Economists use this method to suggest focused reforms rooted in the context of the region. Organisations like Pratham have taken the lead in this effort through their annual ASER reports (2005-2021 (ASER Research Centre, 2021)). These reports led by Rukmini Banerji and Madhav Chavan began as an exercise to measure the learning levels of children in randomly selected villages and assess their quality. Gradually, other variables like household income, parents' education, provision of school facilities such as toilets, and technology available at home, were added to add depth to this analysis. These survey findings are crucial to the literature on elementary education systems. These studies laid the foundation for a systematic quantitative analysis of learning outcomes, later adopted by national institutions (NAS), present the broad trends in education in terms of access, enrolments and retention and draw conclusions that can be applied to multiple contexts (Priyam, 2012).

To trace this literature briefly, in the Banerji et al (2007) analyse the adoption of Pratham's models of community volunteer teachers in Haryana and UP. They examine the effectiveness of this approach through learning camps and argue that other governments can replicate these models as they successfully improve learning. Banerjee et al. (2007) also follow this experimentation model to hire young women to teach children with low literacy and arithmetic skills and a computer-assisted learning program to teach maths. They observed that these programmes significantly impacted children's learning levels.

Banerjee et al. (2010) explore the impact of community participation on learning through three interventions, i.e., providing more information and training community members and youth volunteers to hold remedial classes. They find that community participation has a negligible impact on children's learning outcomes. However, the third intervention, where local youth taught children to enhance learning, had a positive impact. Similarly, Muralidharan et al. (2019) explore the ways to increase learning and suggest well-designed, technology-aided instruction programmes as the solution to improve productivity in delivering education. Datta and Kingdon (2021) look at class size to improve learning and observe that only classes beyond 40 in science and 50 in non-science can lead to lower learning gains. This analysis has vital policy implications for formulating cost-effective interventions and avoiding overspending on teacher recruitment.

## **Implementation strategies and governance**

Four key aspects of governance in school education have been examined in the literature, decentralisation, financing, incentives and accountability and political ownership of reform. Most research on governance has been examined from a political economy approach (Priyam, 2012)

Decentralisation as an approach to reform on the one hand has been good for increasing political credibility around reform objectives but has not improved educational outcomes as Keefer and Kheemani (2004) in their work in Kerala and UP. Among other limitations of the impact of decentralisation has been on reduced social polarisation between students from different genders, classes and castes Banerjee et al. (2008).

However, like Banerjee et al. (2010) they also highlight that decentralised governance has insufficiently increased public awareness or reduced social polarisation between students from different genders, classes and castes.

Other studies (Devarajan and Shah, 2004; Keefer and Khemani, 2004; Chand, 2006, 2010; Banerjee *et al.*, 2010; Clarke and Jha, 2018) highlight that weak governance and the absence of education being on the electoral agenda has created a lack of political credibility. These studies note that service delivery in India is failing due to inefficient public spending, weak incentives and a lack of demand for public goods such as education, especially in the elections. They agree that it is significant to build a system of

accountability—from the public to the policymakers— and have visionary political leadership that invests in public welfare.

However, Keefer and Khemani (2004) also explain that the situation is complicated from both ends and the poor in India also seek short-term benefits, such as direct debits and subsidies, instead of long-term investment services, such as education.

Nelson (2007) offers a similar analysis and argues that democracy increases public spending, but it has little or no impact on education and health outcomes. He asserts that better results in education “require reallocating resources and institutional reforms, i.e. changes in the sector organisation, administration, and incentive systems” (Nelson, 2007, p. 80).

Nelson (2007) makes a relevant point in this regard on the literature on decentralisation. He observes that while several studies analyse the impact of decentralisation on education and health, research on the influence of decentralised planning on the politics of institutional reform is scant. Nonetheless, research on VECs has significantly contributed to understanding the role of politics in education reforms. Leclercq’s (2003) analysis of VECs in Madhya Pradesh’s EGS reveals that decentralised management procedures lead to decentralised corruption by local leaders—sarpanches in MP who controlled the recruitment of para teachers in MP (Leclercq, 2003, p.71). Wankhede and Sengupta’s (Wankhede and Sengupta, 2005) research on VECs in West Bengal highlights the structural and functional problems of VECs with the community emerging as a rival site of authority. Priyam (2003) highlights the phenomenon of elite capture through a decentralised process with the poor in Bihar and AP struggling to communicate with the state. Corbridge et al. (2005) also observe this elite domination of VECs by upper castes and rent-seeking in the districts of Bihar. These studies note that decentralisation does not necessarily provide autonomy or support to local communities with little or no knowledge of their participation in programmes. Further local actors do not have decision-making mechanisms, making the added responsibilities of bringing the community together burdensome.

Priyam (2012), Dyer (1993, 1996), Sharma (2000), and Ramachandran and Sharma (2008) are other pieces of literature central to our analysis. These scholars follow the institutional approach based on the actions of collectivities in a specific context guided by leadership, ideas, actors, institutions and outcomes. Priyam (2012) focuses on the cases of AP and Bihar to argue that outcomes vary depending on the political interactions and strategies. The relationship between the centre and the state officials in AP changed with the changes in the state’s development agenda and led to new partnerships between the different plates. However, similar efforts failed in Bihar due to local actors’ lack of political support and “elite capture” of the system. Dyer’s (1993, 1996) approach is similar and emphasises the importance of political will in the successful implementation of OB. She finds that the actors involved in policymaking have implicit and explicit motives that affect policies and institutions, and the often-overlooked implicit agenda shapes the explicit motives. These personal motivations determine the success and failure of policies, depending on the actor and their reasons for supporting them.

Sharma (2000) is strictly historical in her approach to analysing politics and decentralisation in MP’s “weak” institutions, i.e., the teacher training and block-level organisations. Sharma argues that the limited development of elementary education and its institutions relied on the policies left by the British, which soon deteriorated after 1947 due to lack of development of local institutions. She views this lack of institutional change as the reasons behind MP’s poor performance in education in the 1990s. Sharma and Ramachandran (2008) take an institutional perspective to look at the system as a whole and understand the growth through institutions. They argue that while economic and socio-economic factors are crucial to understanding the issues in elementary education, they have been unsuccessful in fully presenting the factors hindering the universalisation of EE. They push for an analysis of the system as a whole—institutional structures, capacities, processes and dynamics—rather than blaming failures on simplified reasons, such as lack of political will and poverty.

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