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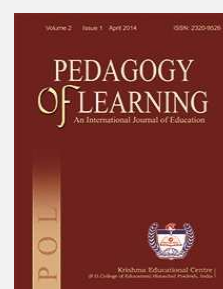
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Rural Elementary Education in West Bengal: Problems and Strategies

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Abstract

This paper is field-based on rural elementary education (Class-I-VIII) in West Bengal in particular and in India in general is regulated by the indicators of school education like school enrolment and out of school children, reading abilities of school children, type of elementary schools and tutoring, school observations, RTE norms and standards for a school performance levels etc. In West Bengal the problems like, teachers' accountability, inadequacy of TLMs, teachers appointment and transfer, mid-day meal administration, teaching and training, diversion of funds, absence of school inspection in regular intervals, unsatisfactory physical infrastructure, child labour, spread of private tuitions etc. have been observed in the rural schools of West Bengal. In order to mitigate all these problems, the strategies have been devised such as: implementation of RTE Act, 2009 with a prepared road map accompanied by a time framework; enhancement of functional literacy; increasing enrolment and retention in rural schools; removal of child labour; proper implementation of mid-day meal programme with effective monitoring mechanism; promoting girls education for the backward communities through KGBV; accelerate the launch of special schools under NCLP for working children in the age group of 9-14 years; establishment of additional schools in remote areas of rural population, xi. Improving the school infrastructure with stress on ICT based infrastructure etc. Besides, proper implementation of the RTE indicators with quality assurance measures of school education and effective management as well as governance will visualize rural development of West Bengal through school education as the key for rural development of India in 21st century.

Keywords: Rural Education, Elementary Education, Problems, Strategies.

INTRODUCTION

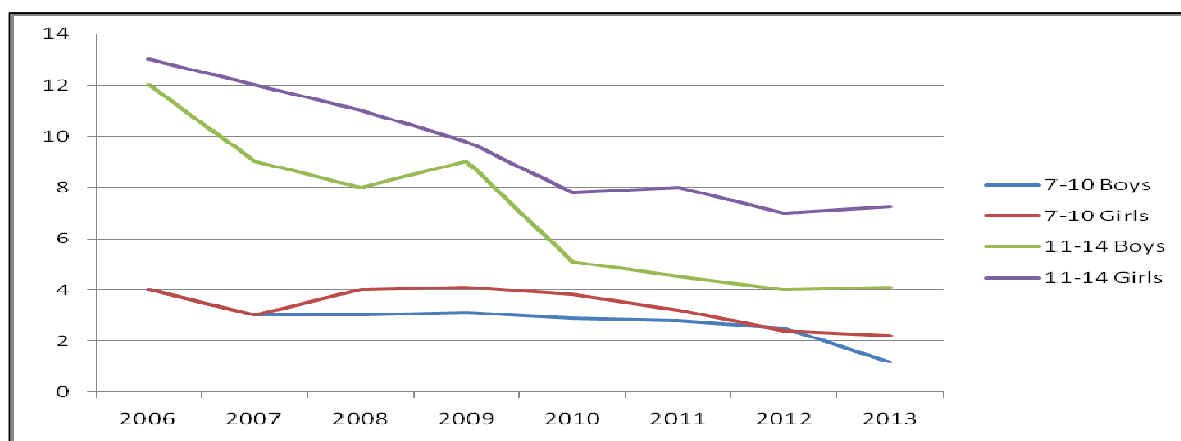
The State, West Bengal is ranked 17th (68.11%) in the rural population of India (68.84%) as per the Census-2011. It reveals a positive trend in the proportion of the rural population which has been declined from 72.19% in the Census – 2001 to 68.84% in the Census-2011. The literacy rate of West Bengal (77.08%) is more than the India’s literacy rate (74.04%). The literacy rate of the rural population of West Bengal is 72.97% as compared to that of India’s rural literacy rate (68.91%). Promotion of rural education by every State and U.T in India is essential for inclusive development of our country. Rural Elementary Education(Class-I-VIII) in West Bengal in particular and in India in general is regulated by the indicators of school education like school enrolment and out of school children, reading abilities of school children, type of elementary schools and tutoring, school observations, RTE norms and standards for a school performance levels, pupil – teacher ratio, classroom teacher ratio, drinking water provision and availability, availability of toilets and usability with facilities for girls, availability of library facilities with books and computers etc. Some of these data are as under.

Table -1 : % of Children’s School Enrolment in different Types of Schools -2013

Age group	Govt. (%)	Pvt. (%)	Other (%)	Not in School(%)	Total(%)
Age: 6-14 (All)	88.2	7.0	1.7	3.1	100
Age: 7-16 (All)	87.1	5.1	1.7	6.1	100
Age: 11 -14 (All)	90.2	2.5	1.9	5.5	100
Age: 11 – 14 (Boys)	88.3	3.0	1.7	7.1	100
Age: 11 – 14 (Girls)	91.9	2.0	2.2	4.0	100
Age: 15 – 16 (All)	79.5	1.1	1.4	18.0	100
Age: 15 -16 (Boys)	74.1	1.2	1.2	23.6	100
Age: 15 – 16 (Girls)	84.6	1.0	1.0	12.8	100

(Source: Annual Status of Education Report -Rural, 2013)

This table reveals that the enrolment of children in the Govt. schools is high at all the age groups and indicates that not in school position in the age group 15-16(All) and 15-16 (Boys) is quite dismal which needs improvement.



(Fig. – 1 : % of Out of School Children by Age group and Gender (2006 – 2013)

(Source: Annual Status of Education Report - Rural, 2013)

This figure indicates gradual improvement in the reduction of % of out of school children in rural schools of West Bengal which is very impressive in case of 11-14 years Boys.

Table – 2: % Children’s Reading Level (Class I – VIII)

Std	Not even letter (%)	Letter (%)	Word (%)	Level 1 (Std I Text) (%)	Level 2 (Std II Text) (%)	Total (%)
I	35.9	33.3	17.3	8.4	5.2	100
II	17.2	30.9	19.6	14.1	18.2	100
III	12.0	18.8	22.2	19.0	28.0	100
IV	8.1	15.7	16.2	19.0	41.0	100
V	3.6	11.3	15.9	18.2	51.0	100
VI	1.9	7.8	10.7	22.9	56.7	100
VII	1.3	4.5	10.1	16.5	67.6	100
VIII	0.6	4.0	5.9	13.3	76.3	100
Total	10.3	16.1	14.9	16.5	42.2	100

(Source: Annual Status of Education Report –Rural, 2013)

This table reads that except the percentage of “Not even Letter Reading”, the performance of children in other forms of reading is not encouraging from class I – VIII, which requires improvement in the context of West Bengal – Rural.

Table 3:% of Children undergoing Tuition in relation to their School Type (2010 – 2013)

Class	Category	2010	2011	2012	2013
Class I-V	Govt. no tuition	31.7	29.0	30.2	29.9
	Govt. + Tuition	61.4	62.4	60.4	61.2
	Pvt. No tuition	2.4	3.1	2.9	2.5
	Pvt. + Tuition	4.6	5.6	6.5	6.4
	Total	100	100	100	100
Class VI-VIII	Govt. no tuition	20.1	19.1	18.3	18.9
	Govt. + Tuition	78.5	78.9	79.6	78.6
	Pvt. No tuition	0.4	0.9	0.7	0.6
	Pvt. + Tuition	1.0	1.2	1.4	1.8
	Total	100	100	100	100

(Source: Annual Status of Education Report –Rural, 2013)

This Table results in the fact that the percentage of no tuition of children from class I – V reading in Govt. Schools is higher than the children from class VI – VIII, where as the result is reverse case of children from class VI – VIII reading in the Govt. Schools with tuition facilities. However, the percentage of children from class I – VIII reading in private schools with and without tuition is very low which is a good sign of the teaching-learning transaction in the privately managed schools in the rural areas of West Bengal.

Table – 4 : Schools meeting selected RTE Norms (2010-2011)

% of School meeting following RTE norms :		2010	2011	2012	2013
PTR & CTR	Pupil-teacher ratio (PTR)	26.2	34.3	33.2	41.4
	Classroom-teacher ratio (CTR)	64.8	64.5	67.4	67.2
Building	Office/store/office cum store	79.0	80.9	78.3	82.6
	Playground	42.1	50.5	54.3	51.4
	Boundary wall/fencing	34.5	42.2	44.0	46.1
Drinking water	No facility for drinking water	19.3	21.1	16.9	16.9
	Facility but no drinking water available	13.5	15.5	11.2	10.3
	Drinking water available	67.2	63.4	71.9	72.9
	Total	100	100	100	100
Toilet	No toilet facility	7.6	8.6	6.9	3.7
	Facility but toilet not usable	40.3	42.0	34.3	28.3
	Toilet usable	52.1	49.5	58.8	68.0
	Total	100	100	100	100
Girls' Toilet	No separate provision for girls' toilet	44.5	26.1	33.5	21.9
	Separate provision but locked	14.5	19.2	13.6	17.2
	Separate provision, unlocked but not usable	17.4	13.4	8.9	7.3
	Separate provision, unlocked and usable	23.7	41.2	44.0	53.7
	Total	100	100	100	100
Library	No Library	50.5	39.2	35.3	33.8
	Library with no books being used by children on day of visit	17.8	18.8	24.0	24.7
	Library books used by children on day of visit	31.8	42.0	40.7	41.5
	Total	100	100	100	100
Mid-day meal	Kitchen shed for cooking mid-day meal	86.3	86.8	90.2	91.4
	Mid-day meal served in school on day of visit	63.4	54.3	59.7	63.0

(Source: Annual Status of Education Report –Rural, 2013)

The data reflected in Table – 4, indicates a developing trend in all the sub components of the Norms of the RTE, 2009 except a) lack of facility for drinking water, b) facility but no drinking water available, c) no toilet facility, d) facility but toilet are in unusable condition, e) no separate provision for girls' toilet, and f) library but no books being used by the children on the day of visit in the rural schools of West Bengal.

PROBLEMS IDENTIFIED

- **Teachers' Accountability:** Elementary Education in the rural areas of West Bengal is facing with the problem of teachers' accountability. The teachers use to neglect in their duties not by taking classes, not doing cultural and sports activities as per the annual calendar of the institution. There is neither transparency nor accountability in their works and take leave without record and leave the school as early as possible. As a result, they negatively interpret teaching as a mission and then as a profession not adhering teaching is the democratic of all the professions.
- **Inadequacy of TLMs:** Teaching-Learning Materials (TLMs) although developed are not properly available to the students. The use of the TLMs is poor and not popular.

The activity based and innovative methods of teaching are not used by the teachers which makes the teaching uninteresting and dull.

- **Problem of Teachers Appointment and Transfer:** There are many schools in the rural areas of West Bengal running with one / two teacher (s) where there is the urgent requirement of more teachers as per the student strength. The concept of sanctioned post in one point and teacher transfer in another point does not follow any rule and the temporary arrangement of teachers as para or part time teachers is renewed year – after-year to meet the requirements.
- **Mid-Day Meal Administration:** In October, 2007, the Mid-Day Meal, Scheme (MDMS) was extended to the children of Upper Primary Classes (VI – VIII) initially in 3,479 Educationally Backward Blocks of the Country including West Bengal. From 2008 – 09 i.e., w.e.f. 1st April, 2008, this scheme covers all children studying in Govt., Local Body and Govt. Aided Primary and Upper Primary Schools and the EGS/AIE Centers including Madarsa and Maqtabs supported under SSA of all areas across the Country. In addition to this, although the Govt. of India have brought up some changes in the scheme for its effective implementation of the scheme, the following problems have been observed in the rural primary schools of West Bengal.-
 - i. Lack of management of the scheme because of poor interest and attention,
 - ii. Delay in receiving money / materials of MDMS by the head of the schools even if after giving the requisition,
 - iii. There lies differences in the quality of rice between urban and rural schools, and
 - iv. Inability of the teachers to retain the students in the schools after Mid-Day Meal is served which is acute in the rural areas.
- **Unsatisfactory Physical Infrastructure:** The Physical Infrastructure in the rural schools of West Bengal is still in unsatisfactory condition. With regard to boundary wall, drinking water facility, usability of the toilet facilities, separate provision for girls' toilet, library facilities etc. are the unsatisfactory aspects of the physical infrastructure of the schools.
- **Teaching and Training:** The Teachers in order to make their teaching activity based and joyful for the elementary school learners are required to be exposed to the orientation programmes. In West Bengal there are 1, 50000 (One Lac Five Thousand) in-service teachers out of which 75,000 (Seventy Five Thousand) in class I – V and 30,000 (Thirty Thousand) in class VI – VIII are serving in different Primary and Upper Primary schools are untrained. In order to mitigate this backlog of untrained teachers, the West Bengal Board of Primary Education (WBBPE) in agreement with the NCTE, New Delhi is providing in service training to those teachers for their job security and stability to be completed by 31st March, 2015 and again extended up to April, 2019 through ODL mode as per the RTE, 2009. Although teachers training is the most important intervention of SSA with the provision of; a) 10- day in-service training for all teachers each year, b) 30 – day induction training for the newly recruited teachers, and c) 60 – days on job-training for the untrained teachers for their professional development and pedagogical enrichment, this creates a problem for the

teachers to deliver good teaching in the class room. It happens due to the following factors in the context of West Bengal.

- i. ill planning of the teachers training programmes,
- ii. several agencies are engaged in providing the training programmes which lacks consistency,
- iii. many teachers do not take initiative and interest to implement the pedagogy learnt during training period in their classroom teaching and
- iv. many teachers feel that training is not always effective for which they do not become motivated to implement the learning strategies they learnt in the training programmes.

Besides, training has been the mandatory criterion for appointment of teachers for which the teachers will be appointed only with the requisite professional training degree and academic qualifications fixed by the NCTE. It is a problem severely observed in the rural primary schools of West Bengal, which is on the spot light of discussion to be solved in near future as per the regulation mandated by the RTE, 2009.

- ***Diversion of Funds:*** SSA, the Centrally Sponsored Scheme of the Govt. of India provides financial support for; a) Construction of building for Primary and Upper Primary Schools, b) Construction of additional classrooms, drinking water and toilet facilities, boundary walls, kitchen shed etc. c) Construction of KGBV and residential hostels, d) Repairing works for school buildings, e) Teacher training etc. are not utilized properly in time. The funds earmarked for different purposes under the SSA are being diverted. It creates a big problem for the progress and development of elementary education in West Bengal in time.
- ***Absence of School Inspection at regular intervals:*** In the educational administration and supervision at the elementary school level in West Bengal, the Sub-Inspector of Schools (SIS) are entrusted with the inspection of the schools. Each SIS would have been given more than '80' schools for inspection and supervision. It is a matter of great concern that they are engaged in attending the meetings which are supposed to be held in summers, to fill-up a variety of evaluation forms, keeping the service books of elementary school teachers and disbursement of their salary and pension and also used to manage the salary / pension related queries etc. As a result, they fail to discharge their main functions-inspections of schools, monitoring of classroom transaction and teachers effectiveness. As there are many vacancies in the S.I of Schools posting for a long time, the existing S.I of Schools do not get considerable time to visit most of the schools even once in a year.
- ***Spread of Private Tuitions:*** It has been revealed from the Annual Status of Education Report (RURAL) – 2010 -2013, the trend of private tuition is more in the Govt. Primary and Upper Primary Schools as compared to the Private Schools in the rural areas of West Bengal. The main reason behind it is parents being imitated by the city / urban areas parents have developed the tendency to send their children to private tuition for better results and guidance. It is empirically found that the tendency to send children to private tuition has low correlation with the quality of teaching in the school as poor teaching in the school is the main reason for sending children to private tuition.

- **Lack of Transparent Governance** : Although as per the RTE, 2009 the Primary responsibility for the effective and transparent governance lies with the School Management Committees of Schools, their functions are not up to mark and a failure in the rural areas of West Bengal. It has been proved from the previously prevailed Village Education Committees (VECs). This committee do not spend time in the academic and quality education and if possible spend most of the time on the matters relating to finance and physical infrastructure. Even if the Head master being the academic leader of the school is not aware of the latest Govt. Orders / Regulations which is highly evident in the rural schools of West Bengal.

Apart from this, the problems such as lack of awareness among the parents of poor children, child labour, lack of co-ordination between DPSC and DPO, non-availability of pukka road, electricity, post office, bank, PDS, primary health centre, internet café, solar energy, private schools, news paper and other reading materials have also been observed as problems in the rural schools of West Bengal.

STRATEGIES FOR SOLUTION

- **Implementation of RTE Act, 2009 with a prepared Road Map:** The West Bengal Govt. has prepared a road map encompassing all quality interventions and other provisions, provision of teachers stated in PTR, Training of untrained teachers with the infrastructure. The developed road map in West Bengal as per the RTE Act, 2009 is as under;
 - i. The formulation of State RTE Rules as per RTE, 2009 is under process,
 - ii. Fixation of limits of neighborhood for Primary and Upper Primary school are to be done,
 - iii. Teacher recruitment becomes necessary to follow the PTR as per guideline. Vacancies should be within 10% of sanctioned strength and sanctioned strength should be as per enrolment,
 - iv. The minimum qualifications of teachers should be as per the NCTE notifications,
 - v. Teachers need be engaged in non-academic activities (except census, election, disaster management); also not be involved in private tuition,
 - vi. EGS centers are to be closed gradually and formal education is to be made available only through recognized schools eventually,
 - vii. Every primary schools are to be provided with i) Library, ii) games equipments and play materials,
 - viii. All unaided schools are to be registered at DI Office, and
 - ix. All unaided schools to be instructed to reserve 25% seats for children of weaker sections / disadvantaged groups from neighborhood.
- **Implementation of the revised framework of SSA:** The main objective of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) has to provide useful and relevant elementary education for all children in age group of 6-14 years by the end of 2010. The RCFCE Act,2009 (RTE) makes implementation of compulsory education legally binding in all States / UTs. Accordingly, the National Level Committee's report on, "Implementation of

RTE Act and Resultant Revamp of SSA -2010”, the principles such as – a) Holistic view of Education as per the NCF-2005, b) Equity, c) Access, d) Gender Concerns, e) Centrality of Teacher, f) Moral Compulsion, g) Convergent and Integrated System of Education Management are focused in the revised framework of SSA for its implementation in the line with the RTE, 2009.

- ***To enhance functional literacy with emphasis on Adult Literacy:*** Although the literacy rate of West Bengal is enhancing which is 77.10% as per the Census, 2011 and is more than the Census 2001 (68.64%)? The enhancement of functional literacy with stress on adult literacy carries much for development. The National Literacy Mission (NLM) was established in the year 1988 for promotion of adult education in a mission mode which was started functioning in West Bengal in the year 1990. The focus of this movement was to make the adults of 15 - 35 years of age functionally literate. Initially and gradually this programme was covered all the districts of the State (West Bengal) with making improved performance in the literacy level of the adults with varying levels of achievement. This programme progressed well with generating zeal and interest among the parents of rural areas of West Bengal to educate their children with demand from the different social groups of the State especially in the rural areas as of West Bengal who are deprived of getting school facilities earlier. However, this programme did not succeed well through its post literacy campaign and arrangement for continuing education due to lack of monitoring and intervention of Self Help Group (GHG) movement in the rural areas of West Bengal. In order to reduce the literacy gap between Urban and Rural areas, Sakshar Bharat Mission, a Centrally Sponsored Scheme of the Govt. of India developed in 2009 with the purpose to remove the gender and regional disparities in the adult literacy as well as the literacy gap between Urban and Rural adults. Thus, this scheme being the developed form of the NLM focuses on the women and the disadvantage groups in the rural areas is operating now for enhancement of functional literacy among the adults. It will continue up to the 12th Five Year Plan Period (2012-17) with focus on the young adults (15-19 years) and will raise the literacy to 80% and to reduce the gender gap to less than 10%. It aims to achieve 100% literacy in 365 low literacy districts where the adult female literacy rate is below 50% as per the census 2001. Nine districts of West Bengal – Cooch Behar, Jalpaiguri, Uttar Dinajpur, Dakshin Dinajpur, Malda, Murshidabad, Birbhum, Bankura and Purulia come under this category.
- ***To increase the Enrolment and Retention in Rural Schools :*** The Govt. of West Bengal launched a special enrolment drive programme called– Bharati Sunishchikaran Karmasuchi-2007 for rural areas in particular and of the State in general. The purpose was to cover the huge number of out of School Children (OOSC). During enrolment drive special attention was given to the enrolment of girls, minorities, SC, ST along with the enrolment status of primitive tribal groups. This was done with the involvement of VEC/MTA, Gram Sansads with the help of Child Census through special monitoring in the rural areas of West Bengal. For the retention of children up to the completion of elementary education along with the mid-day meal facilities free school uniform, free text books, other TLMs , residential facilities, scholarships etc are being provided in the rural areas of West Bengal.

- **Improving the School Infrastructure with stress on ICT based Infrastructure:** The RTE harmonized SSA is in the keen process to have all weather school buildings, toilet and drinking water facilities, barrier free access, library with ICT access, playground, boundary walls etc. in the schools including the rural areas of West Bengal.
- **Special Measures for Elementary Education in the Educationally Backward Blocks:** In West Bengal, there are '85' Educationally Backward Blocks (EBBs) in which special measures need to be under taken for the elementary education children especially in rural areas. These are;
 - i. Conversion of at least 5% of Govt. elementary schools in all EBBs with more than 50% tribal population into Residential School Complexes (RSCs),
 - ii. Special support to ensure retention and improved learning for children from SC communities that are socially, economically and educationally deprived and discriminated ,
 - iii. To provide pre-matric scholarships and incentives given by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment to the rural talents, and
 - iv. Partnerships with the Dalit Civil Society Organizations for support of Dalit Children.

In West Bengal these special drives for the rural children are being under taken in line with the central initiatives advanced by the 12th Five Year Plan (2012 – 17).

- **Proper implementation of Mid-Day Meal Scheme:** The Mid-Day Meal Scheme (MDMS) after being universalized in the year 2008, some changes have been made for its proper implementation through effective monitoring mechanism. These are;
 - i. Revision in food norms in order to ensure balanced and nutritious diet to children,
 - ii. Revision in the cooking cost in order to facilitate meal with quantity and good quality, and
 - iii. Standard honorarium for cooks and helpers etc.
- **Promoting Girls' Education for the Backward Communities through KGBV:** Kastruba Gandhi Balika Vidyalay (KGBV) Scheme was launched by the Govt. of India in August, 2004. The purpose was setting up residential school at Upper Primary School Level for girls belonging predominantly to the SC, ST, OBC and Minorities in different areas. However, it focuses on the rural areas as it is applicable to the EBBs covering the Educationally Backward Districts of West Bengal-Bankura, North 24 Praganas, Purulia and West Midnapore.
- **To Accelerate the Launch of Special Schools under NCLP for Working Children/ Child Labourers :** The special schools under National Child Labour Project (NCLP) in West Bengal are run by NGOs, local Self-Government Bodies, or directly by the Project Society. The school enrolls working children of the age group 9-14 years and is given education for a period of maximum three years or till their attainment of 14 years of age. This type of schools run with 50 in take with two educational instructors and one vocational instructor with facility of both basic education and vocational

training. Thus, this NCLP programme addresses the issue of child labour through survey and rehabilitation of children withdrawn from work through special schools established by the project society.

It is a matter of shock for the State of West Bengal like women's safety that the State cuts a sorry figure in the implementation of the NCLP despite having a huge reserve of volunteers. It has been obtained that between 2010 and 2013, the State has come up with one of the least number of rehabilitated child labourers. It means in 2010 – 11, it could bring only 2,215 child labourers and in 2011- 12, 7,456 to the mainstream and it was expecting that in 2012 – 13 only 3,117 children could be brought to the mainstream. Of the 19 States under this project, West Bengal was allotted the highest number of volunteers to help in bringing child laborers to the mainstream. There are two main problems as per the view of the Labour Ministry, Govt. of West Bengal- a) Non availability of residential schools and the no. is far from being enough, and b) Non availability of funds which should be taken care of by both the State and Central Govt. (The Times of India, Kolkata Edition, June16, 2013).

- ***Establishment of Primary Schools in the remote areas of Rural Population:*** In West Bengal out of the 20 Districts there are places in the rural areas which don't have any Primary / SSK within 1 km. of habitation. The estimate by 2010-11 shows that there is the need to set up 1,557 new primary schools and 14,165 Upper Primary Schools in order to ensure adequate access with the availability of schools within 1 km. of habitation in the rural areas of West Bengal.

In addition to this, the strategies such as fulfillment of the teacher requirements, strengthening inspection, capacity building of teachers through training programmes, effective monitoring system and good governance etc. will ensure the development of elementary education resulting in the rural education as well as the development of elementary education of West Bengal. As a result, rural education will be a major parameter for development of the Nation by taking the rural segment of West Bengal as a case.

CONCLUSION

The problems faced in the rural schools of West Bengal will be solved gradually through proper implementation of the RTE, 2009. Accordingly, the strategies will be more geared up in the light of problems to make India a full literate Country by 2020. Among the problems observed in the rural areas focus should be on sanitation and drinking water facilities, and functional literacy. Although West Bengal is recognized as a good performer (48.70%) like the States- Kerala, Manipur, Mizoram, Punjab, and Assam which is more than the rural India average (32.67%), poor performance in the States - Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Odisha, Bihar, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka for which strategies stated above should be properly undertaken in providing sanitation and drinking water facilities in these States. In addition to this, it can also be highlighted that 28% of the households have unemployed members as per the Census, 2011 which was 23% in the Census, 2001. Out of this 28% households, over 20% of youths between 15-24 years of age are seeking work as per the Census, 2011. It has also been revealed that in most States including West Bengal and nationally, the employment situation is relatively better in urban areas than in rural areas. For improvement in this condition of rural adults, there is the necessity of proper acceleration of Sakshar Bharat Mission. As a result, India will be open defecation-free by 2019 and the mission to make Skill India will be successful.

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