

Roadblocks to be cleared to remove setbacks in learning



- Sukiertharani, poet and government school teacher. For contact: sukiertharani@yahoo.co.in

The Tamil Nadu government has been implementing several schemes with a focus on development of education. Yet the Annual Status of Education Report, 2022 (ASER) released recently has raised several questions over the status of education in Tamil Nadu. This report has brought to light the growth and inadequacies of the students' learning at the national and state levels, backed up with statistical figures and data.

What ASER says

After 2018, it was in 2022, that is, after a gap of four years, that ASER was released. In the intervening period, a survey was conducted with 30,737 students in the 3-16 age group in 920 villages spread over 31 districts in Tamil Nadu. The learning rate of class 5 students who could read the class 2 Tamil textbooks has fallen from 40.8 per cent to 25.2 per cent. The percentage of class 3 students who have acquired the basic mathematical skill of subtraction is just 11.2 and that of class 5 students who know how to divide numbers is 14.9. The percentage of class 5 students who have the skill of reading English phrases has decreased from 37.2 to 24.5. The message hit home by ASER is that post-pandemic, the students' learning, reading skill and basic mathematical skill have not been up to the mark.

It is a hard and harsh reality that the schools were dysfunctional during the Corona times and even the online classes held on the government's guidelines have not paid rich dividends. So, the survey held during this critical period can hardly be taken as reflecting the overall status of education in Tamil Nadu.

Factors behind learning inadequacies

At the same time, it cannot be denied that even during the period before the Corona pandemic set in, there had been learning inadequacies among students who were lacking in the basic learning and mathematical skills. In fact, there were several social factors behind the lack of good learning outcome such as the fact that most of the rural students were first-generation learners from their families, their poor economic background, parents' indifference, schools with just single or two teachers in rural areas, teachers being overburdened with work and so on.

Reforms needed

The task of introducing the Tamil letters to the children in the classes from 1 to 3 is replete with difficulties. The way the

students identify all 247 letters in the long Tamil alphabetic system and pronounce the words with short and long sounds with stress on their differences is not up to the mark.

So, letters not much in practical use can be avoided and the teachers can focus on teaching other letters to the students. For instance, in the series starting with ட, letters such as ட, ட and in the series starting with எ, letters such as எ, எ, எ alone shall be taught and others in these two series can be omitted.

practice of pronouncing letters with short and long sounds can be taught online. When a student touches a letter on the computer screen, the pronunciation must be amplified through speakers so that the phonetics will deeply be etched in the students' memory.

When the activity-based learning (ABL) scheme was brought in, words were first introduced to the students and then letters constituting the words were spelt and taught. The method of moving from words to letters is something like going upside down. How can children memorize the letters? So, the system of first teaching letters and later words must be revived.

As for the basic mathematical skills, the table is the sine qua non. Simple methods of teaching tables to the children must be adopted.

Need for reforms

Computer lab facility must additionally be provided in each and every school. Similarly, labs for language and other subjects must also be created in the schools. The students must be facilitated to go to the labs and learn on their own.

The teachers of languages, particularly Tamil, have a vital role to play. They must be well trained enough to have an expertise in phonetics, differentiating between long and short vowels and consonants, use of auxiliaries and etymology of words. Tamil

teachers must be appointed in a large number right from the primary school.

Besides, the habit of reading must be perpetuated as a movement in all villages. If a family has a taste of reading and cultivates the habit, it will rub off on other members of the family who are students. Psychology must be taught as a subject from lower classes. Education in psychology is a must because it helps the students understand themselves, friends around and the society they live in. Psychology is important in that it will spark in the students a keen focus on studies.

The teacher training syllabus must be changed or toned up every year. It must be designed anew in sync with the dynamic society and the government's education schemes.

Importance to teachers

Though it is officials who implement and monitor progress of the government's education schemes, it is teachers alone who are at the grassroots level connected with schools and students. They do one better than the officials, familiar as they are with advantages and disadvantages of an educational scheme. Hence, they must be accorded due importance and their viewpoints taken to consideration. They must have no blocks in airing their opinions to the government and suggesting alternative schemes.

The government must consider sparing the teachers other works except teaching, their forte. It must appoint exclusive officials for implementation of welfare schemes in the schools. All hurdles standing in the way of the students' cultivation of basic learning skills and enhancement of their education must be cleared.

It is welcome that since last year the government has been implementing with passion schemes for improving the education system such as 'Naan Muthalvan', 'Pudumaip Pen,' 'Kalaith Thiruvizha,' 'Puthaka Kachi, 'Nam Palli', 'Foundation' and so on. Apart from these schemes, the suggestions given above must also

be considered and implemented. Then the government schools will shine with enhanced standards.

Translated by V. Mariappan.