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Elementary Education in Rural Areas of West Bengal with Special Reference to their Issues and Effective Strategies

Kanai Sarkar

Research Scholar (JRF),
Department of Education,

Cooch Behar Panchanan Barma University (West Bengal, India)

E-mail: kanai1997sarkar@gmail.com

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Abstract:

The Right to Education Act (2009) intends to provide free and compulsory Elementary Education to children between the ages of 6 to 14, irrespective of their gender, caste, creed, or family status. The Elementary school system in rural areas has undergone numerous revisions and adaptations. In the modern era, there have been developments and improvements to the rural education system. However, there is still a need for improvement in the rural Elementary education sector in West Bengal as well as in India, and it is not on par with the metropolitan education system. Rural inhabitants are better equipped to recognize the significance of education and sustain their way of life as the rural elementary school system is improved. Students now have more opportunities than ever before to further their educational knowledge and abilities. The key topics addressed in this paper are the goals of rural Elementary education, the current state of the rural elementary education sector in West Bengal, and the steps that can be taken to improve rural Elementary education, as well as initiatives undertaken by the Indian government to advance rural Elementary education in West Bengal and throughout India.

Keywords: Elementary Education, Present Status, Issues, Development Strategies.

Introduction:

Elementary education is extremely important since it lays the basis for a person's learning. There have been initiatives and programs put in place that emphasize the beginning of primary education for children from deprived, marginalized, and socioeconomically backward elements of society. Elementary education is recognized as the cornerstone for not only individual growth but also for the well-being of the entire nation. In India, elementary education is regarded as the basis of obligatory schooling that is considered vital for individuals. It is preceded by pre-school or nursery education and followed by secondary education. Since India's independence, the central and state

governments have been interested in expanding elementary formal and non-formal education in order to achieve the aim of Universalization of Elementary Education (UEE, 2018). The "Destiny of a Nation is shaped in its Classroom" The Indian Education Commission stated in its Kothari Commission report from 1964, "Primary education for all people was the fundamental goal of this commission." The Indian Education Commission also advocated for girls' education, which was an important factor. According to the Education Commission, education determines an individual's level of income, well-being, and security. As a result, the future of India is being shaped in her classrooms. According to Mahatma Gandhi, "India lives in her villages." Despite India's rising urbanization, the statement made by the Father of the Nation many years ago still holds true today. Even while India's literacy rate has improved dramatically in recent years, it is still unable to provide the type of education that the twenty-first century requires. According to the Census-2011, the State of West Bengal is placed 17th (68.11%) in terms of India's rural population (68.84%). The percentage of the rural population, which fell to 68.84% in the Census-2011, shows a favorable trend. West Bengal has a higher literacy rate (77.08%) than India's literacy rate (74.04%). In comparison to India's rural population, which has a literacy rate of 68.91%, West Bengal's rural population has a literacy rate of 72.97%. For our nation to flourish inclusively, every State and Union Territory in India must promote rural education (ASER, 2021). There is no universally accepted definition of elementary education, and defining it extensively would be too complex. The International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED, 1997) defines it as "the first phase of a child's formal education, often referred to as primary education." It often begins around the age of five or six and lasts until the age of ten or twelve. The basic goals of elementary education are to support children's social, emotional, and physical development, as well as to teach them the essentials of reading, writing, maths, and social sciences. This type of education serves as the foundation for all subsequent learning and information. In most countries, it is normally needed and provided in a planned, methodical manner."

Table- 01

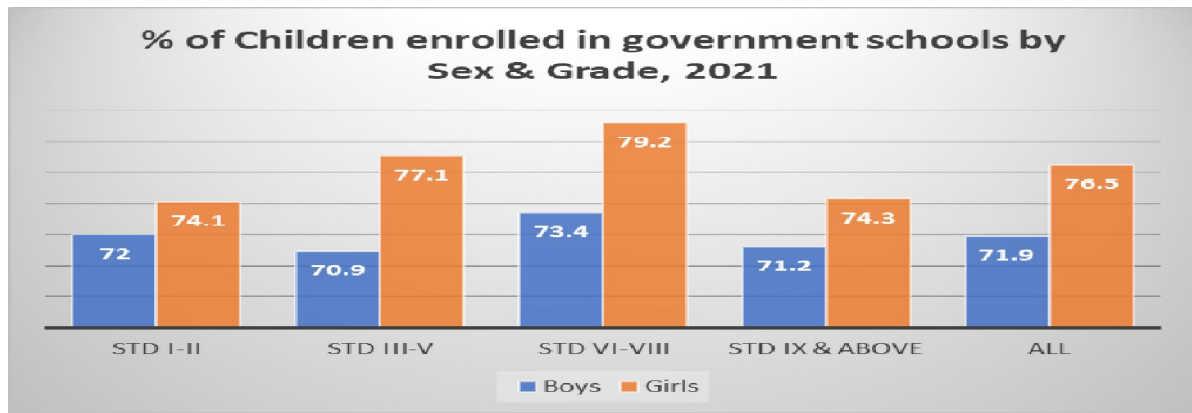
% of Children enrolled in government schools by sex & grade, 2021*

Std.	ASER 2021	
	Boys	Girls
Std I-II	72.0	74.1
Std III-V	70.9	77.1
Std VI-VIII	73.4	79.2
Std IX & above	71.2	74.3
All	71.9	76.5

(Source: ASER Report-2021*. As on 09/08/2023)

The above table depicts that Girls' Children enrolled in government schools are significantly greater than Boys' children, and the highest enrollment of girls children is those who are studying at Standard VI-VIII, and it makes clearer through the graph, which are below-

Figure-1



(Source: ASER Report-2021*. As on 09/08/2023)

Modern knowledge can be obtained through schooling. Literate and educated people are essential for the preservation and advancement of civilization. Access to education in a range of sectors, including social, political, economic, and scientific, might act as a catalyst for change in West Bengal's rural education. Many castes in rural India today have been successful in eliminating social and cultural stigmas associated with their castes through education, which has also benefited in their economic upliftment (Barter, 2008). From the moment of birth until the moment of death, a human goes through a constant learning process. Learning is an essential social process. It assists individuals in their ability to adjust to environmental changes by drawing on earlier knowledge. Learning is the process of accumulating knowledge that guides one's behaviour and judgements. Furthermore, it is regarded to be a learned, generally permanent change in behaviour or capability.

Table-02

% Children enrolled in school, by Age Group, Sex & School Type, 2021*

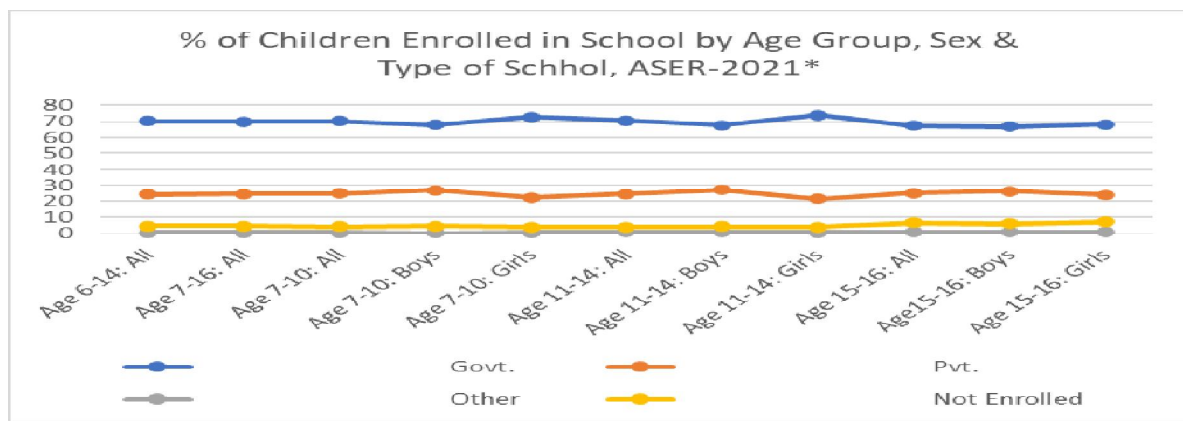
Age group and sex	Govt.	Pvt.	Other	Not Enrolled	Total
	Age 6-14: All	70.3	24.4	0.7	4.6
Age 7-16: All	69.9	24.7	0.7	4.7	100
Age 7-10: All	70.3	24.8	0.6	4.4	100
Age 7-10: Boys	67.9	26.9	0.5	4.7	100
Age 7-10: Girls	72.8	22.3	0.7	4.1	100
Age 11-14: All	70.5	24.5	0.8	4.1	100
Age 11-14: Boys	67.5	27.3	0.9	4.3	100
Age 11-14: Girls	73.9	21.5	0.7	3.9	100

Age 15-16: All	67.4	25.2	0.9	6.6	100
Age 15-16: Boys	66.7	26.3	0.9	6.1	100
Age 15-16: Girls	68.1	24.0	0.8	7.1	100

(Source: ASER Report-2021*. As on 09/08/2023)

This chart shows that enrollment in government schools is high across all age groups and that the situation for students who are not enrolled in school is particularly darkening and requires improvement for the age groups of 15 -16 boys, age group 15-16 all, age 11-14 boys and age 7-10 boys.

Figure-2



(Source: ASER Report-2021* As on 09/08/2023)

The education system in rural areas must be compatible with the education system in urban areas. In remote areas, schools and training facilities have been established, raising the level of living for local residents. The goal of Elementary Education in Rural areas is to-

- a. Offer free, public education to children who live in rural areas.
- b. The kids should have help paying for their further education.
- c. Advising and helping students with their academic growth.
- d. The implementation of new instructional strategies and the evaluation framework in the school curriculum.
- e. Encouraging a fearless, friendly, enjoyable learning environment in all schools set up.

Objectives of the Study:

For conducting the present study the researchers formulated some objectives on the basis of reviewing different International and National studies and you will be able to know about the topics through this study, these are-

1. To study Elementary Education in Rural areas of West Bengal.
2. To know the Present Status of Elementary Education in Rural areas of West Bengal.
3. To analyze the different Issues of implementing Elementary Education in Rural areas of West Bengal.

4. To explore the Strategies for the Implementation of Elementary Education in Rural areas of West Bengal.

Research Questions of the Study:

On the basis of the above objectives the researcher formulated some research questions for conducting the study, and the research questions are-

1. What is the Present Status of Elementary Education in Rural areas of West Bengal?
2. What are the Issues of implementing Elementary Education in Rural areas of West Bengal?
3. What are the Strategies for the Implementation of Elementary Education in Rural areas of West Bengal?

Method and Materials of the Study:

The current study is based mostly on the review and analysis of numerous policies, papers, survey reports, etc. as well as other relevant literature and statistics linked to the Elementary education development of rural areas in India and as well as West Bengal. The information was gathered from a number of studies issued by the Central and state governments, including the most recent ASER (2021) reports, numerous papers from the Ministry of Education, and reports on various government initiatives to support Elementary Education in Rural areas of West Bengal.

Analysis and Discussion of the Study:

In West Bengal:

West Bengal, a constituent republic state of India, has 62,183,113 residents (2011 Census), 40,782 inhabited villages spread among 341 blocks and 23 districts. When India was on the verge of becoming independent in 1947, it was split. The capital of West Bengal is Kolkata. A general summary of this state can be found in the table below-

Table-3

State	West Bengal.
Capital	Kolkata.
No. of Districts	23 (5 divisions).
Total Area (Census, 2011)	88,752 km ² (34,267 sq mi).
Population Density (Census, 2011)	1,028 per square km.
Total Population (Census, 2011)	9.13 Cr. (91,276,115).
Male Population	46,809,027.
Female Population	44,467,088.
Total Population (Census,2011)	

Urban	29,093,002.
Rural	62,183,113.
Urban Male Population	14,964,082.
Rural Male Population	31,844,945.
Urban Female Population	14,128,920.
Rural Female Population	30,338,168.
Sex Ratio (Census,2011)	
Sex Ratio in Urban	944 Females per 1000 Males.
Sex Ratio in Rural	953 Females per 1000 Males.
Literacy Rate (Census, 2011)	
Average Literacy in Urban	84.78%
Average Literacy in Rural	72.13%
Male Literacy in Urban	88.37%
Male Literacy in Rural	78.44%
Female Literacy in Urban	80.98%
Female Literacy in Rural	65.51%

(Source: <https://www.censusindia.co.in/states/west-bengal>, As on 09/08/2023)

Present Status of Elementary Education in Rural Areas of West Bengal:

The Annual Status of Education Report (ASER, 2021), according to the survey there are 4.6% of children between the ages of 6 to 14 are not currently enrolled in school. The incidence of kids not currently enrolled in school fell from 9.9% in 2020 to 6.6 in 2021 among kids aged 15 to 16 years old, the age group thought to be most prone to drop out of school. Between 2018 and 2021, there were 71.9% more girls enrolled in government schools than there were in 2018. Although females have historically enrolled in government schools at a higher rate than boys, this gender disparity has decreased during the pandemic. In government schools, boys now make up 72.8% of the student body, up from 62.8% in 2018. An increase in kids enrolling in private tuition has been noted. 28.6% in 2018, 32.5 in 2019, and 39.2% in 2021 were the respective years for this rate. Students in classes 9 and up who pay tuition make up about 41.1% of the student body. According to the report, in 2020, 74.9% of kids had learning assistance from their parents and older siblings; by 2021, that number had dropped to 66.6%. The percentage of Class 1-2 students who received tutoring from family fell from 81.5 percent to 74.3 percent between 2020 and 2021. For kids in Class 9 and 10, this percentage was reported to be 68.3% and 56.7%, respectively, in 2020 and 2021(ASER, 2021).

Table-04

% Enrolled children who are facing challenges in studying at home, by grade and school type

Std.	Govt.	Pvt.	Govt. & Pvt.
Std I-II	27.5	28.5	27.7
Std III-V	31.6	29.9	31.2
Std VI-VIII	30.9	27.7	30.2
Std IX & above	28.7	26.8	28.2
All	30.0	28.3	29.5

(Source: ASER Report-2021*, As on 09/08/2023)

The above table depicts that those students studying at Government schools they are more facing challenges in studying at home, and the students in Govt. Schools studying at standard III-V, they are mostly facing challenges regarding their education. The above-mentioned proportion of students and the causes which they facing problems in studying Government Schools or Private Schools in West Bengal is shown below in a table, which is given by the ASER report 2021.

Table-5

If facing challenges, then the type of challenges faced (%), by school type, 2021*

School Type	No Smart phone	Phone not available for child to use	No one to help child at home	Network connectivity issues	Electricity issues	Child not able to learn remotely	Child not interested	Child is too young so needs help	Other
Govt.	34.7	20.4	9.4	27.1	12.8	20.3	8.3	10.0	1.9
Pvt.	20.5	14.9	7.4	37.9	14.3	26.9	9.9	10.9	2.1
Govt. & Pvt.	31.1	19.0	8.9	29.8	13.2	22.0	8.7	10.2	1.9

(Source: ASER Report-2021*, As on 09/08/2023)

From above the table, the table depicts that the childrens who are studying at Govt. schools have to face the problem mostly due to they have no Smartphones, similarly In private schools the students are facing the problems due to Network Connectivity Issues in West Bengal.

Different Developmental Issues of Elementary Education in Rural Areas of West Bengal:

The different issues for improvement of Elementary Education in Rural areas of West Bengal (Gardiner, 2008), are -

1. **Teacher Shortage:** Teachers who join and start teaching in rural areas schools, they always try to transfer to schools in urban areas as soon as possible, resulting in a shortage of teachers

in rural schools and disrupting the education process. At present many teachers are transferred through the Uthashree Portal of the West Bengal state Government, due to which many schools face a shortage of teachers, which is a hindrance in rural education.

2. **Ancestry Occupation-Oriented Education:** Parents in villages do not provide curriculum-related assistance to instructors or teachers. Rural parents want their children to get agricultural or parental occupation-related schooling so that they can help their children. This style of thinking makes it difficult for parents to enroll their children in school.
3. **Classroom Space:** Many rural schools do not have enough space to accommodate all of the students. In rural areas, parents' illiteracy is sometimes a hindrance to attracting students.
4. **Number of Schools:** In remote locations, the number of schools is limited. People from rural regions must travel to cities to pursue higher education because there are no higher education facilities in those areas. The construction of training institutions in rural areas is currently underway, with the goal of improving people's abilities and knowledge in a range of subjects such as technology, agriculture, agricultural practices, handicrafts, child development, health care, and so on.
5. **Professional Skills:** Teachers in rural locations do not always give their all because their remuneration is much lower than that of teachers in urban or suburban schools. Students in rural locations are disengaged in education since they do not have access to computers, laptops, or the Internet.
6. **Transportation:** Students in rural areas must either walk or use their own automobiles to get to school. The bulk of the time, bicycles are utilized to get to distant schools where walking is impractical.
7. **Civic Amenities:** In rural schools in India, vital facilities and municipal amenities such as clean restrooms, drinking water, classrooms, infrastructure, furniture, machinery, and technology are lacking. As a result, educational attainment is suffering detrimental consequences. The government has drafted regulations and procedures to provide restrooms, midday meals, technology, infrastructure, machinery, and equipment in rural schools, and steps are being taken to put them into practice.
8. **Co-Curricular Activities:** Cocurricular and creative activities, such as sports, exercise, dancing, music, singing, artwork, handicrafts, and so on. Furthermore, picnics, contests, and events are organized, allowing pupils the opportunity to showcase their abilities and expand their knowledge. Rural schools, on the other hand, only provide a basic level of instruction and do not yet have a well-developed system for providing extracurricular activities.
9. **ICT-Based Education:** In today's environment, technology has grown in importance. The use of computers has considerably aided the ability to learn. Students utilize the internet

extensively to learn about a wide range of topics and to complete homework and projects. There aren't many schools in rural locations that offer computer education to children. It is a serious issue in ICT-based education in rural areas because schools often do not provide computer education.

10. **Communication and Connectivity:** Students connect with one another in group classes, exchange ideas and opinions, and learn more as a result. To put it another way, group interactions are preferred. They even work together on projects and assignments from time to time. Students are better able to give answers to problems and challenges in group sessions. Rural schools frequently lack group classroom organization. The students speak and discuss their challenges and concerns with the lecturers and other students in order to discover solutions, although group courses do not take place.
11. **Teaching-Learning Resources:** Teachers employ technology such as laptops, computers, and printers to provide pupils with notes and other learning aids. Technology has aided students' learning, but it has also provided teachers with greater control over their teaching practices. One of the primary benefits of technology is the availability of a wealth of information and knowledge in a wide range of sectors. Teachers at rural schools, on the other hand, do not use technology and instead read aloud from textbooks to students to explain lesson plans.
12. **Infrastructure:** When compared to rural schools, urban schools have significantly more advanced infrastructure. Classrooms are outfitted with proper seating arrangements, desks, technology, and other heating and cooling equipment that is employed in line with the weather. While basic infrastructure, furniture, and equipment are not given in remote schools, forcing children to sit on the floor. It is critical to establish enough infrastructure in schools in order to facilitate learning. A lack of infrastructure may impede the student's capacity to study.
13. **Knowledge and Skills:** Teachers in rural schools typically lack the requisite skills and expertise, are unsure of how to carry out their work obligations, and are uninterested in the effective growth of their students. Overall, teachers in rural schools are dissatisfied with their jobs.

Development Strategies for Improvement of Elementary Education in Rural Areas of West Bengal:

After the analysis of different issues of Elementary education in Rural areas of West Bengal, and the initiatives which are taken by concurrently the State and Central Governments as well, now here are some of the major strategies that will be taken for the development of Elementary education in Rural areas it should be more helpful for the changing in the overall scenario of education in Rural

areas in India (Gibbs, 2005), this are-

- a. **Equity and Equality in Education:** There are still many rural villages in India that are plagued by deprivation, illness, starvation, unemployment, and injustice. Even while the administration has attempted to improve the situation and certain triumphs have been announced, there is still a long way to go. The state is acting effectively in this regard; the various places where one should concentrate are as follows (Atchoarena& Gasperini, 2003).
- b. **Introduce Vocation-oriented subjects in the School Curriculum:** Vocational education exposes students to a wide range of vocations and instills an appreciation for all forms of work. As an obligatory or elective course in the curriculum, pupils learn a new profession or talent, which may help them recognize their innate ability and natural proclivity for a certain line of employment (NEP, 2020). They will learn about the dignity of work as they try our manual labour and acquire direct experience.
- c. **Compulsory Teaching of all Teachers in the Schools of Rural Areas:** Just as all soldiers of the Indian Army are required to go to border security in Kashmir for at least 3years, similarly all teachers should be required to teach in rural schools for a certain period of their teaching career and only after completing this compulsory year of teaching, the teachers can apply and should be transferred. But in this case extra incentives can be given to rural school teachers like soldiers of the Indian Army.
- d. **Quality Development of the Teachers:** Training each of the teachers is the first and most crucial stage. Teachers should be familiar with student psychology in order to manage and develop their pupils efficiently. To ensure that the most basic demands can be met, training instructors should be the first step taken.
- e. **New Appointment of the Teacher:** Education is fundamentally a relationship between the instructor and the student, and a skilled teacher is critical to that education. If education is to progress, teaching must advance. Every reform movement must recognize the importance of teachers. Teaching is a discipline that requires both academic and moral rigour. Teachers must be viewed as independent, competent, and accountable professionals in terms of their professional identities and areas of competence.
- f. **Provide Supportive Incentives to the Students:** For kids from low-income households, the mid-day meal is the ideal chance to go to school. In order to give pupils motivation to attend class each day, the government should develop more of these programs.
- g. **Renovation of Rural Transportation:** Because it's so difficult to get to class, most students and professors skip it. Some rural settlements lack direct railway connections, making travel difficult. It goes without saying that improvements to rural train infrastructure will benefit the educational system.

- h. **Proper Sanitation Facilities:** Toilets that are suitable for use and a clean environment are a must in each school. The number of school students would increase if there were sufficient lavatory facilities for both males and girls.
- i. **Increase Digital literacy among both the teachers and students as well as Parents:** Digital literacy is an essential component of education, especially in a culture where technology is the primary driver of change. High-quality, creative technical solutions that can improve educational delivery systems are just as crucial as infrastructure (Moulton, 2001). The student body has shown a strong interest in accessing electronic resources. As internet usage grows, and online programs and services help remote and rural places, this holds immense promise for the future.

Conclusion:

The administration is working around the clock to make significant adjustments to the country's educational system so that kids receive excellent instruction (NEP, 2020). To make India a technological powerhouse and to address the workforce shortage in science, technology, academia, and industry, efforts are being made to give its students the essential skills and knowledge. In order to improve educational opportunities, the central government and states are also constructing high-quality infrastructure, particularly in the northeastern region. The government is especially committed to improving the educational infrastructure of the country's rural and undeveloped regions through a number of initiatives, policies, and programs. Every nation's development is dependent on the level of education of its people. The various programs and policies meant to provide universal access to education demonstrate the government's commitment to inclusive growth. The tremendous effort to reform and expand India's educational system in recent years has had far-reaching consequences. Digital ventures, big online courses, and aggressive marketing Although some of the projects, plans, and programs are special to rural areas, landmark initiatives such as "Samagra Shiksha" are expected to have a substantial impact on the upgrading of teachers' qualifications and the development of rural areas' infrastructure. The 'Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan' (SSA), 'Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan' (RMSA), and 'Teacher Education' (TE) are three key initiatives that have been integrated into the ambitious program 'Samagra Shiksha' to promote comprehensive education. This umbrella program provides specific provisions for districts affected by Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas. One of the strategies objectives is in-service training.

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