

**Access and Equity in Equivalency Courses: An Analysis of Challenges Confronted by Learners**

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**ABSTRACT**

Equity and access are the major aspects in equivalency courses in all over the place. Equivalency courses are provided for those who have no chance to get school education or cannot complete school education. Equivalency programmes are organised with view to provide an alternative education that is equivalent to the existing formal system of education, be it related to formal or vocational education. This programme is targeted towards those neo- literates who aspires to continue their education and acquire certificate that would place them equal standing with others who have successfully completed their studies from the formal system of education. The present study is an attempt to find out how far this target is achieved by the equivalency courses conducted in Kerala through a case analysis of a few learners. The results show that the learners of the equivalency courses are confronted with challenges to access and equity.

**Key Words:** access, equity, equivalency courses, neo literates, drop-outs

**INTRODUCTION**

A learning society is one in which all agencies of a society are educational providers; not just those whose primary responsibility is education. It would be such a set up where all citizens are engaged in learning, taking full advantage of the opportunities provided by the learning society (National Literacy Mission, 2000). It is well known that Kerala has always been a learning society. The educational and social reforms of the rulers of erstwhile Kingdoms, the persistent efforts of Christian missionaries, the educational pursuits of Nair Service Society, the contribution of Sree Narayana Movement and a host of social reforms effected in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> Century laid a strong educational base in Kerala. The socio-political movements, freedom struggle and trade union movements have in their turn played a very significant role in creating a suitable environment for people's participation. Excellent network of rural libraries brought by Library Movement, better transport and communication facilities, people's perception towards education, social mobility, political commitments are some major factors which triggered a cultural climate for the people in Kerala to learn. (State Planning Board, 1992).

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**CONTEXT OF THE STUDY**

Literacy, the foundation of all education and lifelong learning, is an essential component of the right to education. However, according to the latest EFA Global Monitoring Report – 2012, adult literacy remains an elusive goal. The world will miss the target of having adult illiteracy between 2000 and 2015. While the number of illiterate persons has fallen over the past decade, 775 million adults of which 64% are women, still lack basic reading and writing skills and out of world's total illiterates 37% live in India. The gender inequality in adult literacy is major barrier to many efforts to advance human development and reduce poverty in many parts of the world.

Youth and adult literacy with specific focus was on gender equality issues. That high level of political commitment and higher financial allocations for adult education were required. It was also suggested to build systematic, instructional and assessment innovation to move the field forward by creating

an institutional base for literacy and lifelong learning at various levels. Suggestions were made to the effect that clear focus has to be on the women to reduce gender disparities and to focus on their literacy for empowerment. In order to reach out to women exclusively a gender -specific literacy programme with curriculum development on holistic approach to women’s literacy advancement was suggested. The next issue was to make literacy programmes more inclusive. It was agreed that there was a need for a detailed mapping of excluded groups. Finally, it was felt to periodically disseminate best practices from countries which have successfully managed the literacy programme, through advocacy, networking and communication.

How to inculcate the need of the equivalency course is a big question before the policy makers. The suggested solutions were to improve the quality of those who enter into literacy courses through complete process of re-engineering by: making literacy a learning continuum; provide equitable access and quality; institutionalisation & decentralisation; good governance; scientific learner assessment; monitoring & evaluation and the need for forming community structure at grass root level. In various places in the state, Haryana has organised. “Adult education as an independent alternate approach to education of all adults, literate as well as non-literate, supported by a legislative framework”. The vision for the mission is to redefine literacy and adult education; strategic shift from functional literacy to Life Long Learning (LLL); institutionalisation, professionalization and sustainability of functional literacy programmes and provide access, quality & equity. Reducing gender disparities, is also one area which attracted a lot of discussion resulting in, a clear focus on women to reduce gender disparities and to focus on their literacy for empowerment. The strategies for lifelong learning were suggested in order to bring structural changes in education system, e.g. administrative framework, prioritizing of adult literacy and need of strong policy. It was also felt to bridge equivalency link with the formal education so that one could enter and exit from non-formal education system. It is in this backdrop that the present study gets significance.

### **The study**

The access and equity are the two major challenges faced by the learners who pursue the equivalency programme. In order to obtain a clear idea of the extent of difficulties experienced by the learners, the investigators approached a few learners of equivalency courses and interviewed them.

### **Objective of the study**

To analyse the learners views about challenges in equity and access confronted by them in equivalency courses.

### **Analysis of the opinions of the learners**

The excerpts of the points emerged from the interview with the learners in equivalency programmes are summarised. It was found that the learners were experiencing various problems during the course time and throughout the completion of their equivalency course. The opinions expressed by the learners were:

Learner 1: The 4<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> level equivalency courses are not conducted in specific time period. The teachers are not coming in regularly; the classes are not in proper order. Government schools are the centres for the equivalency courses. The students only get few classroom teaching in the course period. The students get text books in the proper time. Sometimes the portions are not completed.

Learner 2: Some people cannot access the classes, because they don’t have enough money to pay the fees, some people cannot access the place of class. because they are living in some remote areas, hilly areas etc. Many people were interested in equivalency course but experience difficulty in access.

Learner 3: Clearly, education systems need to provide strong education for all, giving priority to early childhood provision and basic schooling. Public provision of education can foster equity if it counterbalances poor home circumstances at the outset of children’s lives. But it may increase inequity if it offers a common resource that is primarily claimed by those in need of it.

The major areas identified from the interaction with the learners included:

**Textbooks:** The people who participate in equivalency courses get proper textbook for the study which included their specific curriculum. Most of the people only depend upon the textbooks, so the textbooks will be provided at the proper time.

**Faculties:** The major issue faced by the successful completion of this programme is lack of proper teachers or trained persons. The some teachers or subject experts did not properly work and therefore has problems in the completion of syllabus. At the end of the course time, the faculties try to complete the lesson by taking extra classes. This creates difficulty for the learners to imbibe the portions systematically.

**Infrastructure:** There is no specific centre for the classes. In each taluk there will be a government school, which is the centre of equivalency courses. Some classrooms of those schools will be made available for equivalency courses on Sundays.

**Method of teaching:** Only lecturing method is followed in the equivalency course, due to lack of time and lack of availability of resources they follow only lecture method. In some schools, the discussions method is also used. Just like in the school teaching, the learners of equivalency courses also get assignments and seminars and other extra works for their academic improvement.

**Examination:** The examinations are conducted by the literacy mission every year. Class tests are conducted by the co-ordinators with the help of class teachers. Exam based orientation classes are conducted here.

### **The challenges for equity in education**

Equity in education has two dimensions. The first is fairness, which basically means making sure that personal and social circumstances – for example gender, socio-economic status or ethnic origin – should not be an obstacle to achieving educational potential. In the case of equity, when compared to normal school classes there is no equity in delivery of lessons, providing infrastructural facility and even in providing school facility at learner's conveniences.

The second is inclusion, in other words ensuring a basic minimum standard of education for all – for example that everyone should be able to read, write and do simple arithmetic. The learners right to have equal opportunity to get mastery learning is denied in many cases. Those who can follow with pace of the instructor is blessed. Others are lagging behind and may lead to failure or drop out or both. The two dimensions are closely intertwined: tackling school failure helps to overcome the effects of social deprivation, which often causes school failure.

### **CONCLUSION**

Basic education remains an equity priority because it includes the entire cohort. Within this sector, particular attention should be given to efforts to sustain the performance of those with learning difficulties. Existing education resources are already being reallocated in ways that may not help equity in basic education.

### **REFERNCES**

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