

STUDY OF RURAL FUNCTIONAL LITERACY PROGRAMME (1985-86)

1. The Study

Elimination of illiteracy has been a major concern of the Government since independence. But due to country's vast size, huge population and limited resources the appreciable increase in the level of literacy is yet to come. The number of illiterates in the age group 15-35 years increased from 27 million in 1951 to 111 million in 1981. One of the main characteristics of the problem of illiteracy in India was that while the literacy rate had been showing steady and gradual improvement over the decades, the number of illiterates had also been progressively increasing. The Government, therefore, recognised the need of adult education as an instrument of Social change and economic development.

In 1979, the programme of Functional Literacy for youth in the age group of 15-25 years was merged with the Farmers' Training and Functional Literacy Project to constitute 'Rural Functional Literacy Programme' (RFLP). The RFLP aimed at developing the abilities of learners in reading, writing and computing, raising their functionality or functional capability and creating awareness among them regarding their personal and social predicaments.

At the instance of Planning Commission, in 1985-86 the study of the Rural Functional Literacy Programme (RFLP) was undertaken by the Programme Evaluation Organisation

2. Objectives of the Study

The main objectives of the study were the following:

- i) to study the organisational and administrative aspects of the programme at different levels,
- ii) to examine the working of adult education centres,
- iii) to assess the impact of the programme on the learners, and
- iv) to suggest improvements for better functioning of the programme.

3. Sample Size/Criteria for Sample Selection

The study was taken up in 18 major States namely, Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Gujarat, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir, Karnataka, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Meghalaya, Orissa, Punjab, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal.

The number of districts/projects selected from each state depended upon the number of projects functioning in the State during 1981-82. In a State having less than 10 projects the project in the district having State's average literacy rate was selected. In the state having 10-20 Projects two projects were selected from two districts one district with the highest literacy rate and the other with the lowest literacy rate . For the states having more than 20 projects each, three projects per State were selected from three different districts one with the highest, one with lowest and the third with the near average literacy rate. On the basis of the above criteria 30 districts/projects were selected from 18 States. From each project, three supervisors were to be selected while from each supervisory circle three Adult Education Centres were planned to be selected. A sample of 10 respondents with varied profile were to be selected from each Adult Education Centre. However, the actual sample selected for the study was 18 states, 30 districts/projects, 89 supervisors, 262 AE centres and 2459 respondents/learners.

4. Reference Period

The data for the study were collected for the Sixth Five Year Plan Period especially for years 1981-82 to 1984-85. The study was launched in the field in June, 1985.

5. Main Findings

1. In eight of the States covered under the study the State Boards for formulating plans and securing coordination among various agencies were either constituted late or had been reconstituted. In eleven States meetings of the State Boards were either not held regularly or members were inadequate in number.
2. While in Madhya Pradesh, Punjab and Rajasthan District adult education committees were not constituted, in another three States namely Haryana, Jammu & Kashmir and Uttar Pradesh their constitution was either delayed or these were reconstituted.

3. In nearly two-thirds of the selected States, the staff was inadequate at various levels. In view of vast areas of operation and lack of transport facilities, candidates in some States were reluctant to accept the field posts and work in remote areas.
4. The functionaries at various levels, namely; at the Instructor, Supervisor, and Project levels lacked interest and motivation in performing their duties.
5. Most of the staff members (around 90 percent) namely Project Officers, Supervisors, and Instructors had undergone training in adult education. While all the Project Officers and most of the Assistant Project Officers and Supervisors were graduates, majority of the Instructors were either matriculates or below matric.
6. There were delays and irregularities in payment of honorarium in a number of States. Over one-third of the Instructors had not been paid honorarium at the prescribed rates.
7. In four States, there was hardly any involvement of the State level officers in supervision and guidance on the implementation of the programme. 44 percent of the States and 70 percent of the districts covered under the study did not find the field visits of functionaries as effective.
8. In large number of selected States, there was lack of coordination and cooperation from development departments, like Agriculture, Health and Family Welfare, Small Scale Industries, Rural Development and Panchayats with the on-going activities in the field of adult education at any level.
9. Apart from cases of incomplete and irregular submission of returns, there was delay in submission of progress reports/returns at various levels in most of the States and the progress reporting system appeared to be lacking in authenticity, reliability and credibility.
10. Three States, namely Himachal Pradesh, Meghalaya and Punjab did not have resource centre of their own. Late, inadequate and irregular supply of resource materials was reported by many States. It was further noticed that the capacity of the State Resource Centres was not utilised to the optimum by many States.

11. In a large number of cases, adult education classes were being held at the houses of instructors. About one-fourth of the centres were located in private buildings and about 16 percent were in public/school buildings. Lighting as well as sitting arrangements at the centres were found inadequate by over fifty percent learners.
12. Fortyseven per cent of the selected learners were men. Two-third of the selected learners were in the age group of 15-25 years. 62 percent of the learners belonged to backward classes - 25.3 percent Scheduled Castes, 11.4 per cent Scheduled Tribes, and 25.3 per cent other backward classes.
13. The duration and timings of the classes at the centres were found to be convenient by the majority of the learners.
14. The main reason for low attendance as reported by 95 per cent of the Instructors was pre-occupation of the learners with work. The other reasons advanced were lack of interest, no economic benefits accrued, financial difficulties, and parents objecting to attending the classes.
15. More than two-fifths of the learners admitted that they were not regular in attending the classes because they were required for domestic work, apart from being pre-occupied with other work and problems.
16. About one-third of the centres reported no drop-outs. About 84 percent of the learners dropped out after attending the classes for about 30 to 90 days.
17. Occupational pressure and domestic responsibilities were the major factors advanced for dropping out in the midst of the session by the learners. The other reasons were lack of interest, migration for employment, marriage/delivery, illness, lack of incentives, no economic benefits accruing, poverty and discouragement by the family members.
18. Out of those contacted for rejoining, 97 per cent had been contacted by the Instructors themselves and the remaining were contacted by supervisors, village leaders, and relatives or friends.
19. Transport difficulties and coverage of large areas involving bigger jurisdiction were the major reasons hindering the smooth supervision of the programme.
20. The village level committees had been constituted in only 50 per cent of the selected centres. By and large, village level committee did little in solving the problems at the centres.

21. The main brunt of motivation work was taken by the Instructors who contacted the potential learners individually and also in group meetings. The functionality aspect of the programme for motivation of learners, however, was not covered to the desired extent as reported by 77 per cent of the learners and 45 per cent of the Instructors.
22. Majority of the Instructors and learners had reported that the local leadership and the development departments did not play any active role in motivating the learners.
23. Only about one-third (32 percent) of the selected learners of the past course and about 16 percent of those in the present course were capable to read properly and meet their day-to-day requirements. About 21 per cent of the past learners and 8 per cent of the present learners were able to write passages.
24. The percentage of present learners who were taught to multiply and divide was very low as compared to the past learners.
25. Over 90 per cent of the learners reporting coverage of various topics under social awareness, informed increase in their knowledge. Similarly, over three fourths of the selected learners felt that they had a better understanding of their general day-to-day problems, whereas nearly half of them were of the opinion that they had improved their knowledge about various development programmes. The learning at the adult education centres was responsible for a feeling of higher social status for over 60 per cent of the learners (both past and present).
26. More than half of the past learners (53.3%) reporting any system of follow-up were not satisfied with existing arrangements. As many as 94 per cent of the dissatisfied learners were of the view that improvement in the post-literacy and follow-up programme could be effected by opening centres for neo-literates, organisation of refresher courses, etc. They also wanted improvement in the supply of books and setting up of libraries.

6. Major Suggestions

1. State Advisory Boards/Steering Committee should be constituted where these had not already been constituted, and their meetings should be held at regular intervals. Necessary effective steps should also be taken at various levels for providing adequate staff for implementing the programme successfully.

2. Utmost care should be taken in recruiting appropriate personnel possessing requisite motivation, aptitude and spirit of social service for implementing the functional literacy programme in rural areas. The instructors should be from among the local population, educated and respected in the village and having some source of income other than the meagre honorarium.
3. Resource support mechanism including training to the grassroot functionaries should be strengthened. In service training should also be organised from time to time.
4. The concept, methodology and strategy of field visits should be improved/re-designed with a view to ensuring regular and effective supervision of adult education centres.

5. In order to have effective linkage and involvement of development departments, rural functional literacy and other adult education programme should be meaningfully dovetailed with such on-going programmes as the IRDP, DWCRA, TRYSEM, ICDS, family welfare, etc.

6. The reporting system should lay more emphasis on qualitative aspects and should be diagnostic and participatory in nature so that corrective measures could be taken at different levels to improve the situation and to get a correct feedback regarding the functioning of the programme.

7. Village level committees should be constituted with influential and zealous members who would take interest in solving the problems of the centres by holding regular meetings.

8. Functionality aspects of learning should be taken up seriously and appropriate steps taken to see that the local leadership and the personnel from the development departments take active interest in motivating the learners to attend the classes regularly at the centres.

9. Panchayats should be made responsible for providing suitable accommodation, electricity or alternative lighting arrangements.

10. Effective steps should be taken to avoid inadequate and untimely or delayed supply of teaching/learning materials and equipment to the centres.

11. RFLP curriculum should cover the functionality aspect also with a view to improving their employment and income in their traditional professions/vocations or by making an addition to the income through new crafts, etc.

12. Specific efforts need to be made to improve the standard of teaching at adult education centres and to motivate the target group of learners to attend the classes regularly and attentively.

13. Post literacy and follow-up programme should be taken up earnestly if the adult literacy programme is to have an impact of literacy on the rural masses, especially the target group in the productive age group of 15-35 years.