



Needs and Importance of Non-formal Education in India

Devasis Chakma (Triple MA, B.Ed, UGC NET, NE-SLET, DCA)

Social Science Teacher, Govt. Borapansury High School

Abstract: The primary objective of this paper is to explore the needs and importance of non-formal education. Various measures and programs have been formulated to contribute effectively to upgrading India's non-formal education system. Non-formal education benefits individuals from deprived, marginalized, and economically weaker sections of society, the elderly, and those who lacked opportunities to enroll in educational institutions and training centers. Through non-formal education, these individuals can acquire knowledge and enhance their skills and aptitude. Non-formal education operates outside the formal education system. This study examines the need for non-formal education, importance of nonformal education, objectives of non-formal education and its role within the framework of education commissions.

Introduction

Non-formal education refers to educational programs delivered outside the formal education system. It is characterized by simplicity, flexibility, and convenience, allowing learners to access education at any suitable location. This type of education is designed to meet the basic learning needs of disadvantaged communities, marginalized groups, and economically weaker sections of society. Children who have dropped out of school, working children, and those who lack opportunities to acquire academic skills can benefit from non-formal education programs. Non-

formal education provides a relaxed learning environment, free from rigid rules and regulations, allowing learners autonomy in decision-making.

Non-formal education encompasses systematic educational activities outside the formal education framework, catering to individuals of all ages and backgrounds. These programs may take place within or outside educational institutions. Non-formal education focuses on various aspects, including adult literacy, basic education for out-of-school children, life skills, work ethics, values, and principles. Through collaborative learning, individuals can enhance their understanding and abilities, acquiring essential skills for productive living.

Unlike formal education, non-formal education lacks systematic procedures and strategies. Programs are flexible, with variable durations, and may or may not offer certification for learning achieved.

Need for Non-formal Education

An educated and enlightened citizen is essential for a successful democracy. At the time of India's independence, only about 15% of the population was literate, highlighting the need for education. Article 45 of the Directive Principles of State Policy mandates that the state provide free and compulsory education to all children until the age of 14 within 10 years of the constitution's commencement. However, achieving universal elementary education remained elusive due to social, political, and economic reasons.

The formal education system proved inadequate for catering to the growing number of disadvantaged children. To address this, the NonFormal Education scheme was launched to:

1. **Universalize elementary education:** Non-Formal Education provides multiple entry points for children who cannot attend school or have dropped out due to irrelevant curriculum, unsuitable timing, or location.
2. **Address resource constraints:** With increasing population and limited resources, setting up formal primary schools in every village is impractical. Non-

Formal Education solves this problem with parttime teachers and flexible schooling hours.

3. **Serve scattered and sparsely populated areas:** Formal education is not economically viable in forest, hilly, or desert areas. Non-Formal Education bridges this gap.
4. **Supplement formal education:** Formal education cannot meet the changing needs of individuals. Non-Formal Education addresses diverse needs, providing lifelong learning opportunities.
5. **Enable pupils to learn while earning:** Many children must work to support their families, making formal education inaccessible. Non-Formal Education provides an alternative, allowing children to learn while earning.
6. **To meet the needs of older learners:** Circumstances or lack of interest may force some children to drop out of school. Later, even if they wish to continue their education, they may be unable to join formal schools due to their advanced age or psychological alienation. Non-formal education provides an alternative for such individuals.
7. **To provide education to socially and economically deprived classes of society:** Non-formal education serves the needs of rural communities, girls, housewives, and out-of-work youth. It enhances their vocational competencies and improves their quality of life.
8. **To promote national development:** National development encompasses not only economic growth but also social, cultural, and political progress. Non-formal education contributes to this development by catering to disadvantaged sections of society, providing literacy, numeracy, vocational education, citizenship training, leadership training, and empowering them to resist social, economic, and political oppression.

Objective of Non -formal Education

The Government of India has outlined the following objectives for Non-Formal Education:

1. To motivate dropouts or children who have not attended primary school to join non-formal education programs.
2. To develop linguistic skills in children, enabling them to listen, speak, read, and write effectively.
3. To enhance children's productivity by promoting expertise in work experience and occupations.
4. To foster an understanding and appreciation of scientific phenomena in everyday life among children.
5. To instill skills, habits, and attitudes necessary for healthy living in children.
6. To promote an understanding and appreciation of the country's cultural heritage and traditions among children.
7. To develop functional numeracy skills in children.
8. To cultivate a sense of citizenship, national integration, and secularism in children.
9. To raise awareness among non-formal education learners about current national issues and problems, and to develop their competence to address these challenges.

Importance of Non-Formal Education

Non-formal education is a vital instrument for economic, political, social, and cultural development. Its importance lies in the following:

1. **Promotes Literacy:** Non-formal education fosters literacy among individuals, empowering them to participate fully in society.
2. **Improves Productivity:** By providing relevant skills training, non-formal education enhances productivity, contributing to economic growth.
3. **Increases Accessibility:** Non-formal education brings learning opportunities to the doorstep of disadvantaged and socially vulnerable groups.
4. **Caters to the Excluded:** Non-formal education addresses the needs of millions of children and adults excluded from the formal education system.
5. **Optimizes Resources:** Non-formal education helps economize resources by providing cost-effective learning solutions.
6. **Strengthens Democracy:** By promoting civic awareness and participation, non-formal education contributes to a stronger, more vibrant democracy.
7. **Enriches Lives:** Non-formal education enhances the quality of life for individuals, families, and communities.
8. **Yields Faster Results:** Non-formal education often produces faster results compared to formal education, as it focuses on practical skills and knowledge.
9. **Integrates Developmental Programs:** Non-formal education incorporates various developmental programs related to health, sanitation, family planning, environmental protection, industry, and agriculture into its curriculum.
10. **Fosters Community Participation:** Non-formal education encourages active community involvement, promoting a sense of ownership and responsibility.

11. Supports Disadvantaged Groups: Non-formal education primarily benefits disadvantaged sections of society, including rural poor, urban slum dwellers, and women.
12. Empowers the Disenfranchised: Non-formal education enables marginalized communities to break free from social, economic, and political oppression.
13. Promotes Social Justice: Non-formal education strives to achieve equality and justice for poor and deprived sections of society.

Recommendations for Non-Formal Education in Kothari Commission, 1964-1966

The Education Commission of 1964-1966, set up by the Government of India was known as the Kothari Commission. It recommended nonformal education for children, who have dropped out of school prematurely. The Commission highlights the role of literacy, continuing education and correspondence courses. All economic and social development plans have their human aspect and involve large number of persons, who have not been enrolled in schools before. The Commission has recommended correspondence courses for individuals, particularly for those, who are unable to attend classes. Libraries have been established all over the country to benefit the public. Universities can also make a significant contribution in the development of non-formal education. The Commission recommended that each university should have the department of Adult and Continuing Education. The universities can assume the role of open universities and make provision of education to those, who aim to augment their skills and abilities. It is necessary that it is connected with employment and impart vocational education, which possess the potential for future development. Within this framework, there are certain functions that are performed by the universities. These include, social, economic, culture and bringing about development of the society. The workforce is provided training in terms of various aspects. Furthermore, individuals also were made aware of in terms of cleanliness and hygiene.

National Policy on Education (1968)

Based on the Kothari Commission Report, the National Education Commission was established to review the education structure and develop a national education policy. Eradicating mass illiteracy is crucial for promoting national development.

Key Provisions:

1. **Functional Literacy:** Employees in commercial, industrial, and other concerns should acquire functional literacy within a specified period.
2. **Literacy Campaigns:** Educators, students, and educational institutions should actively participate in literacy campaigns.
3. **Sustaining Literacy:** Adequate reading materials and library services should be provided to new literates.
4. **Part-time Education:** Part-time education facilities should be available to smoothen the transition from school to work, reduce education costs, and provide opportunities for aspiring individuals.
5. **Correspondence Courses:** Emphasis should be placed on developing correspondence courses for individuals from various occupations, categories, and backgrounds.

National Policy of Education (1986)

The Indian Constitution's directive principles provide free and compulsory education to children up to 14 years old. Despite establishing numerous institutions for elementary education between 1951 and 1986, the objective was not fully achieved.

Key Provisions:

1. **Non-Formal Education:** A systematic program of non-formal education was initiated for school dropouts, children from regions without schools, working children, and girls.
2. **Eradicating Illiteracy:** Non-formal education was proposed for rapid eradication of mass illiteracy.
3. **Utilizing Non-Formal Channels:** Focus was placed on utilizing nonformal channels of education, such as television, radio, and postal coaching.
4. **Centrally Assisted Schemes:** Schemes were established for operating non-formal education centers in ten states, including Uttar Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, Rajasthan, and others.

Eradicating Illiteracy: The schemes aim to eradicate illiteracy and ensure education for all individuals, regardless of occupation, category, status, or background.

5. Upgrading Competencies: The schemes enable individuals to upgrade their competencies and improve their living conditions.

Conclusion: Non-formal education encompasses a broad spectrum of activities deliberately planned and organized to cater to the specific needs of diverse groups, including farmers, street children, housewives, and others. It comprises:

1. Adult Education: Programs designed for adults who have not had access to formal education or require additional skills.
2. Continuing Education: Initiatives that provide ongoing learning opportunities for individuals to enhance their knowledge and skills.
3. On-the-Job Education: Training programs that focus on developing skills and competencies in a work-based setting.

Non-formal education is regarded as a complementary system to formal education, providing an alternative pathway for individuals to acquire knowledge, skills, and values.

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