

An Analysis of Select Models of Rural Education in Developing Nations and Their Possible Applicability in India

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Abstract This study conceptually analyses select rural education models which have been implemented successfully in various developing countries. The models chosen for the study possess distinct features- administrative, financial, academic as well as ideological- which have led them to achieve better qualitative standards in education for rural and underprivileged children. The paper points out those features which resonate the most with the Indian socio-economic scenario and discusses the possibility of applying the same in the Indian rural education system. The study is based on the review and analysis of secondary sources. The researcher has accessed scholarly articles, research papers, published reports and online literature for the study.

Keywords: Rural Education, Fe y Alegria, Escuela Nueva, Child-to-Child Program.

1. INTRODUCTION

Education can be regarded as one of the most pressing issues for developing countries (or even developed countries, for that matter) across the world. Although, substantial improvements have been made at all levels in the past two decades, ensuring access to quality education for all citizens continues to be a challenge for all developing countries - irrespective of their economic, social or political set up.

The problem of literacy in India can hardly be understated. There have been numerous efforts by the government, state bodies and other institutions and agencies to tackle the same. The efforts have obviously yielded visible results, but the situation remains far from comfortable. The literacy level has gone up to from 64.84% in 2001 to 74.01% in 2011 and there is an improvement in net enrolment ratio as well. (Census 2011). However, if these figures are compared with the world average of 84% or other developing countries like Cuba (99.8%), Argentina (98.1%), Indonesia (90.4%) or Sri Lanka (91.2%), it becomes evident that a lot more needs to be done. Even China, with a population more than India, achieved 92.2% literacy by 2007. (CIA World Factbook).

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Once we consider the qualitative aspect of the issue, the situation gets darker – especially in the case of schools in rural areas. Several reports and surveys have pointed towards an alarming gap in the expected and actual levels of learning in government schools. According to a report published in 2008 by *The Economist* on India- half of the 10-year-old rural children could not read at a basic level, over 60% were unable to do division, and half dropped out by the age 14. An extensive study carried out by the World Bank in Pakistan showed a wide gap in expected and actual levels of learning among primary level students. The paper stated that very low learning achievement was not a Pakistan-specific problem and required a serious South- Asia wide policy response. A parallel analysis with data on government schools from the state of **Uttar Pradesh** in India helped in contextualizing the results from Pakistan within a broader South-Asian context. The results of the parallel analysis revealed similar problems in education and learning. (Das, Pandey and Zajonc, 2006, pp. 5)

More often than not, rural education turns out to be the missing block which keeps developing nations from achieving cent percent availability of, and access to, standardized education. Reasons behind this shortfall are many. Cogan (1982, pp. 2) traces the roots of this steep difference between urban and rural education to the colonial past of third world countries. He states as follows:

“One of the direct outgrowths of the colonial educational system is the tremendous imbalance between the schooling of rural and urban areas in less developed countries. Colonial powers were established in urban areas; inhabitants of rural areas received no schooling but instead, were put to work on plantations of wealthy colonizers”.

Other reasons given by him include the highly selective nature of education in developing countries, lack of trained and motivated teachers and implementation issues.

Despite rapid urbanisation which has taken place in post-liberalised India, more than half of the Indians continue to reside in villages. With the current pace of urbanisation and globalisation, the society is becoming rather exclusionary in nature for those who do not have access to relevant information and education. It is, therefore, inevitable for rural children to comply with prevailing standards of knowledge and skills in order to survive in the future. However, with the current status of rural education in India, an entire generation is on the verge of getting excluded from the mainstream society. There is an urgent need for further research on rural education approaches which can enable the future generation to cope up with the challenges of a rapidly changing society.

2. THE STUDY

There is obviously no ‘one-size-fits-all’ solution to achieve the required quantitative and qualitative standards in rural education. The only way forward is further research and experimentation on the development of new models which address these issues. However, given the fact that many similar researches and experiments are being carried out in different parts of the world, studying them thoroughly would surely help in understanding the multifaceted problem of rural education.

Three models have been chosen to be analysed in this study:

- Fey Alegria of Venezuela
- Escuela Nueva of Columbia
- Child-to-Child Learning Model of UNICEF (*implemented in six countries of Asia and Africa*)

The prime consideration for the selection of these models was the fact that they were developed to address certain issues which resonate, up to a great extent, with the educational problems of India. The socio-economic environment in which these models were implemented was also quite similar to that of India. Besides being implemented in different countries, these models were developed in three different time periods, a fact which gives this study a fair amount of diversity in terms of environmental factors. Another very important factor was the scalability and flexibility of these models- a quality which is crucially important for implementation in different regions.

Based on the available information and scholarly literature, the models have been analysed and explained. Further, the paper identifies those characteristics which correspond to the needs of the Indian education system and can be implemented initially on an experimental basis in rural schools.

3. ANALYSIS

3.1 The Fey Alegria Model

The official webpage of Fey Alegria refers to it as “a movement for integral popular education and social development whose activities are directed to the most impoverished and excluded sectors of the population”. Founded in 1955 in Caracas, Venezuela, it began expanding to other countries of Latin America in 1964. Presently, it functions as an NGO dedicated to education in 17 countries serving more than 1,000,000 students. Its mission is the transformation of society through quality education for the poorest.

Not unlike India, Latin American countries also deal with limited public education budgets. A significant part of this budget is leaked out in the execution

procedures and administrative corruption. Private sector investments may be free from such issues but they are profit oriented and hence cannot be invested for social purposes which do not yield sustainable profits. Cela (2005, pp. 2) says that it was these reflections that led thinkers at Fe y Alegria to rethink the concept of public and private and rather see themselves as an organisation in the *non-governmental public sector*. It represents the social rights and duties of the members of society and it creates a link between public and private that helps to develop the consciousness of social responsibility and confidence in the private sector for its socially responsible investment and management and its cooperation in common good actions.

Fe y Alegria schools are highly sought after and receive many applications on a limited number of seats. The selection is done on the basis of the students' economic standing- the child from a financially weaker family is given a place first. Besides educating many underprivileged children, Fe y Alegria also comes out strong in qualitative evaluations. Allcotty and Ortegaz (2006, pp. 10-12) prove in their studies that students from underprivileged sections of the society are likely to score significantly better in standardized tests if they have been schooled in Fe y Alegria. In many cases, they also tend to outscore their counterparts from privileged sections of the society.

Cela (2005, pp. 3) explains that the business model of Fe y Alegria is one which benefits from economy of scale through a decentralized structure. It does not spend more money per pupil. Infact, the annual budget of the federation for the year 2006 was US\$ 388,962.00, which translates to just US\$ 0.39 per student a year. Also, as Allcotty and Ortegaz (2006, pp. 10-12) point out that even though teachers have wages at par with other schools but they do not receive retirement benefits and may even have longer working hours. It is evident that financial inputs are not the reason behind the success of Fe y Alegria.

The organisational, management and cultural characteristics of Fe y Alegria are very different from other public or private schools. Martiniello (2001, pp. 5-7) has detailed the three level organisational structure of Fe y Alegria in her studies. In all the countries, a national level deals with the national government on issues of subsidies and direct allocation and distribution of funds to schools. This level is usually responsible for developing teacher training, and promoting the communication and exchange of information. In countries, where the program is large, regional offices help coordinate the work of the centres. In addition, an international umbrella organization assists national offices with international fundraising, organization of conferences and networking activities, and production of printed materials. It works on a partnership model that involves multiple participants from the local communities, the national and

regional governments, Catholic congregations, and civil society. Throughout Latin America, Fe y Alegria schools are privately managed, yet financed with public funds. In Venezuela, the government has covered the payment of teachers' salaries for Fe y Alegria schools since 1990. (Martiniello, 2001, pp. 9)

Allcotty and Ortegaz (2006, pp. 12) observe that the management structure is decentralized and gives school principals the budgetary authority and the ability to hire and fire teachers. Each school has the autonomy to plan, budget, procure funding for, and execute infrastructure investments. Although most fundraising activities for large projects are centrally coordinated, the initiative almost always comes from school-level administrators. As a result of this decision making process, the organization has succeeded in instilling a family feeling in teachers, staff, and students that contributes to qualitative betterment in services and outcomes.

Labor flexibility is yet another factor which differentiates Fe y Alegria from other schools. Their teachers are not unionized and are hired by the school principal directly and given a one-year trial period before being offered more permanent positions. During this trial period, besides evaluation on usual activities, teachers are monitored in the classroom every quarter and are coached by their more experienced peers. This flexibility results in a selection process that produces higher teacher quality. (Allcotty and Ortegaz, 2006; pp 14)

Martiniello (2001, pp 14) attributes the success of Fe y Alegria to a convergence of seven features: emphasis on community development; emphasis on cross-cutting cleavages and bridging links among different groups; fostering a very strong and coherent popular education ideology among its members; developing a sense of family and community in schools (which includes stability of teachers); promoting democratic participation in schools; creating partnerships between governments and civil society, and targeting very poor communities with emphasis on equity principles.

3.2 The Escuela Nueva Model

The second model chosen to be studied in this paper is Columbia's Escuela Nueva, meaning New School. The reason for choosing this model to be analysed is that the scenario within which it was designed is very similar to what India has today. To begin with, Latin America also struggles with extreme inequalities between and urban and rural areas. The income disparities between urban and rural areas lead to a significant difference in the quality of education accessible to people. Escuela Nueva was designed to overcome such disparities in educational opportunities. It started as a grassroots initiative in 1976 with the funding and support from UNICEF and USAID and has progressed to a

national reform coordinated by the Colombian Ministry of Education. (Kline, 2006, pp. 1). The Escuela Nueva model was recognized by the World Bank as being one of the three most successful public policy reforms in developing countries around the world (1989). More than 40 countries have studied and visited Escuela Nueva to learn how to implement this model and it has worked as inspirational model for education reforms in 16 nations. (Escuela Nueva official webpage)

Escuela Nueva, or the New School, is defined as a system of primary education that integrates curricular, community, administrative-financial and training strategies; and allows for the provision of complete primary education as well as qualitative improvement in the nation's rural schools. The major components of the Escuela Nueva model are discussed:

Curriculum: The EN model addresses the technical problems of rural education through several inputs aimed directly toward the classroom. The materials are adaptable to the local context and to the needs of the students and teachers so that the program functions as an ongoing exchange between students, teachers, and the community. They were designed to encourage active engagement of students in the learning process. Kline (2006) opines that the self-instructional EN learning guides are a key component of program flexibility and adaptability to the local context and students' needs.

Training: The training of teachers is a vital component of the EN model. This includes workshops, Teacher Study Groups, School Visits and Demonstration Classrooms, Internships and an online community. Three one-week teacher trainings take place during their first year, paralleling the students' learning activities. Teacher learning is then continued in micro-centers, where teachers meet once a month to exchange ideas and help each other solve teaching problems or involve their communities in reform efforts. (EN webpage)

Community: Rugh and Bossert (1998, pp. 104) in their study on involving community participation education observe that EN teachers are taught to think of the Escuela Nueva School as an information centre and focal point for community integration and development. The school and community are reciprocally a learning resource for one another. Some standard activities include teacher visits to the homes of their students and collection of information to prepare monographs about the community. These monographs serve as a basis for enriching teaching and instruction by the sharing of community skills and interests. Efforts are made to involve parents to support their children's learning and to make their learning more relevant to their day-to-day experiences.

The uniqueness of Escuela Nueva is that it develops different approaches for different needs. For example, besides standard modules for urban children,

it has different provisions for rural areas and displaced children. **Escuela Nueva Rural** is a flexible educational model addressing the needs of populations which are widely dispersed or transitory as the result of social or employment factors, and supports them to improve their lives. Similarly, to address the educational needs of migrant and displaced children, **Escuela Nueva Activa Learning Circles** were introduced in 2001. Learning Circles help such children in transitioning back to formal education through an association with ‘mother schools’ while carrying out teaching in sites which are more accessible to such children with modules more conducive of their vulnerable social situation.

Schiefelbein (1992, pp. 48-51) analyses studies on the workings of Escuela Nueva which show that it operates as a combination of approaches applicable to all school activities and which are gradually better implemented as the teachers become more and more accustomed to their roles. Some of the major approaches include seeking involvement and benefit of all stakeholders, linking skills based tasks with everyday life, learning to read by understanding meaningful messages, decision making for greater motivation and systematic thinking and efficient and flexible use of teacher’s time.

Rugh and Bossert (1998, pp. 133) cite the fact that educationists have pointed out that being a value-added model, cost estimates for Escuela Nueva show the program to be more costly than the conventional education system. However, considering the extra costs of study guides, libraries and additional teacher training (which are offset by the somewhat fewer numbers of teachers required for the primary cycle), costs of Escuela Nueva were shown to be only 5 to 10 percent higher than unit costs in conventional schools.

3.3 Child-to-Child Model

The third model chosen for this paper is UNICEF’s fairly recent Child-to-Child Project. Implemented in six countries with low enrolments and learning achievements, the project is a low cost approach wherein children themselves act as facilitators of education. As the name suggests, this initiative is conceptually built upon the sharing of learning from one child to another. The Child-to-Child approach is based on two assumptions. Firstly, young children are strongly influenced by other children, especially older siblings or playmates. Secondly, education systems can build on this fact to systematically influence *school readiness* and on-time entry. Basically, this approach encourages older primary school children to help preschool children develop early learning competencies and start school at the right age.

Under the strategic framework of UNICEF for the Child-to-Child program (2008), the term ‘school readiness’ reflects the interaction between three domains- the child, the school and the family:

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- Children's readiness for school focuses on learning and developmental outcomes.
- School's readiness for children focuses on school-level outcomes and practices that foster smooth transition into primary school and advance all children's learning.
- Families' readiness focuses on the attitudes of parents, caregivers and older siblings, and their involvement in children's early learning and development and transition to school.

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Two interventions which were designed by UNICEF to achieve these goals were: *Helping the Little Ones/Helping My Own Learning* and *Getting Ready for School*. While the first intervention was concerned with children in the early primary school who have younger siblings or relationships with younger children (0-5 years) in the community, the second intervention involved children in upper-primary school and how they relate to siblings and children in the community who are around the age of school entry. The initiative aimed to increase on-time enrolment for both boys and girls while ensuring that children arrive at school with a strong foundation in language, early literacy and numeracy besides having the social and emotional skills required for learning. Decreasing drop-out rates and enhancing overall primary school performance was also important (UNICEF Strategic Framework- Child-to-Child Program, 2008; pp. 5-6). The Child-to-Child Approach was implemented in collaboration with six countries: Bangladesh, China, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Tajikistan and Yemen.

The reports released by UNICEF's evaluation office in February 2012 showed overall positive impact of the program in all countries. The evaluations also identified some critical facilitating factors or strengths. It was seen that in order to maximize the impact, a high dosage of interaction between young learners and facilitators was needed along with an initial involvement of families and communities. The following recommendations were presented for the future development, sustainability and expansion of the program:

- Provision of Getting Ready for School programme to children as often as possible – preferably twice a week or more and supplemented by extra practice at home or in the community.
- Early involvement of family and community should be included in all future Getting Ready for School programming.
- Early advocacy with government educational officials to situate the programme within the country's early childhood education goals.

4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The conceptual analysis of Fe y Alegria, Escuela Nueva and the Child-to-Child project reveals certain traits of each model which can be incorporated in the schools located in rural areas in India. The study suggests ten such characteristics on the basis of their relevance in the socio economic context in India. The same are discussed as follows:

4.1 Rethinking Public and Private Sector Roles

As seen in the Fe y Alegria system, public sector investments were adequately coupled with private management. The concept of public-private-partnership (PPP) is not new in India, but it is yet to take off in the education sector, especially in case of rural schooling. Although PPPs in vocational education are being promoted by the government in some states wherein a fixed amount of capital is provided to a private concern having expertise in the desired trade to manage an ITI (Industrial Training Institute) for a certain period of time. ITI's are listed for 'adoption' by private concerns which are willing to take up the assignment. A similar model may be developed for rural education under which the management of administrative and academic activities of village schools can be given to private schools. Although, this strategy requires transparency in the selection of the private school and stringent monitoring in order to avoid mismanagement of public funds.

4.2 School Autonomy

It was seen in Fe y Alegria schools that autonomy in school operations, especially with qualitative activities may have a very positive impact on teacher morale, teaching practices and student achievement. The authority of the principal to hire and fire teachers in the Fe y Alegria system was crucial in ensuring attentiveness of teachers. This can be practiced in India but with some initial caution in order to ensure that complete autonomy does not give rise to unfair or corrupt practices. Such issues could be addressed through a strong student/parent feedback system under which their views could be voiced directly to authorities who are senior to the principal.

4.3 Labor Flexibility

It has been observed both in Fe y Alegria and Escuela Nueva that flexibility within employment contracts makes the teachers more responsible and improves overall teaching standards. In India, para teachers are appointed on contractual basis and, as expected, their performances have been found

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to match the desired standards too. But unlike the Fe y Alegria or Escuela Nueva, where contractual teachers are paid at par with public sector teachers, para teachers in India are paid much less than their tenured colleagues who, according to various studies, fall short of both quantitative and qualitative expectations. This gap should be taken care of by the responsible state governments on priority basis.

4.4 Ongoing teacher development through peer interactions

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The emphasis laid on teacher trainings in Escuela Nueva can be imbibed by any educational system. Peer interaction method is very relevant in the rural context as mostly teachers are placed in isolated villages where they do not have any professional interactions. Arranging for regular meetings between such teachers promotes a healthy dialogue and ideation process. This interactive approach proves to be more effective than usual lecture based trainings which are common in the Indian education system. The peer interaction method not only improves teaching quality but also promotes a sense of collective involvement and empowerment among the teachers. This goes a long way in keeping teachers positively motivated in the long run.

4.5 Standardised teaching material

As seen in Escuela Nueva, teaching material is not limited to curriculum and books. It includes detailed learning manuals, chapter plans, course material, etc. Hence, the time teachers have to spend on planning classes and preparing support material is saved. However, there is also chance that centralized development of such material may lead to rigidity and teachers may not be able to innovate or adapt to the requirements of their surroundings.

4.6 Developing learning curiosity

It was seen that UNICEF's Child-to-Child model works on very basic principles. It focuses on preparing the children to make the most out of school by orienting them with the basics of education. In a way, the model also teaches the child about what to expect from school and hence he/she goes to school as an individual who is alert and absorbing. Cultivation of similar attitudes among children in villages would be very helpful as these children, unlike their urban counterparts, usually do not come from educated families and hence don't have any idea pertaining to what education is all about. The right kind of interventions at the right time will surely lead to higher learning achievements among young children who are about to start school are in the early years of their education.

4.7 Involving the children

The most relevant feature of the Child-to-Child model was probably the involvement of children as facilitators which works both ways- it helps the younger children they facilitate and strengthens their own learning process. They become a beneficiary as well as an active party within the whole process. This results in a sense of responsibility and higher confidence in all children- whether they are the very younger ones who are being guided by older siblings/children or the older ones who are facilitating the learning process of children younger to them.

4.8 Community Involvement

All the three models discussed in this paper emphasize on the role of the community in order to create an environment which is conducive to a child's learning and overall development. This is an area where a lot more efforts can be made in public sector education as there are a huge number of parents in villages who, despite sending their child to school, do not understand their own role in his/her education. This best way of achieving this involvement is by cultivating this sense of involvement in the teachers first as they can prove to be the most influential opinion leaders within the communities in which they operate.

4.9. Customized approaches for diverse needs

In Columbia, Escuela Nueva has different teaching models for rural and urban schooling as well as schooling for displaced children. Considering India's diverse socio-economic milieu, it would be wise to at least train teachers according to the areas in which they would be teaching, e.g., a teacher teaching in tribal areas should be trained differently from the teacher who would be placed in a crowded urban location.

4.10 Focs on the poorest sections

As it was seen with Fe y Alegria, when faced with a situation of multiple applications on a single seat, the child with the weakest financial standing is taken in. A similar approach is required in India as well with government schooling. Although with the Right to Education (RTE) in place, no child can be denied admission, but even the focus in the classroom needs to shift from privileged children (those with better economic standing or higher caste) to the ones belonging to the weakest sections. It has been cited in various reports that economically poor children or children belonging to backward castes often face discrimination by the teachers and classmates alike. Therefore, when focus on poorest sections is discussed, the policy-making and implementation authorities must not limit themselves to mere enrollments.

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