



Don't review 'no-detention' policy

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The recommendation on HRD to reconsider "no-detention" provision is myopic and ill-conceived.

The very first meeting of the Central Advisory Board of Education following a gap of almost two years (the previous meeting was held on October 10, 2013) after the new government assumed power at the Centre, deliberated on the CABE sub-committee report on assessment and implementation of continuous and comprehensive evaluation (CCE) and No Detention provision. As reported in the media, there was consensus among majority of the states to revoke the provision of “no-detention” introduced under the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009 (RTE).

After the Juvenile Justice Act, the government is now planning to dilute the provisions of the RTE Act. The sub-committee headed by Geeta Bhukkal, Education Minister of Haryana, for assessment and implementation of CCE in the context of the no detention provision under the RTE, advised 'reconsideration' of the policy of “no-detention” up to Class VIII under RTE Act, arguing that such a practice works against the interest of children.

Section 16 of the RTE prohibits holding back and expulsion of child. The provision in the Act reads as “No child admitted in a school shall be held back in any class or expelled from school till the completion of elementary education”. In fact, several primary stakeholders, including teachers and parents were agitated about the provision in the Act and sought for reintroducing the detention policy since the day the RTE Act was implemented.

The issue also echoed in the 59th Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE) committee meeting held on June 6, 2012 and it decided to constitute a panel for CCE in the context of no detention provision in the RTE Act. However, there was an agreement that the board examinations are not required and guidelines for implementation of CCE need to be evolved for examining and testing the child during the elementary education cycle.

One could understand from the CABE deliberations that there have been lot of misconceptions and misgivings about this provision not only amongst parents and teachers but also amongst the members of highest decision making body like CABE that consists of education ministers and academicians.

This calls for understanding the spirit and rationale behind the provision from the historical perspective. As we know, the examinations in the education system were often used as a tool to eliminate children from the system on the pretext of poor performance. Such children were asked to repeat the same class and many a times, children were pushed out of system considering them as 'failures'. This is nothing but a new form of denial of education.

The 'no detention' provision under RTE Act does not imply abandoning the procedures needed to be followed to assess the child's learning from time to time. Nevertheless, Section 24 (d) and (e) of the RTE Act as part of teachers' duties, place the responsibility of assessing the learning ability of each child and accordingly supplement additional instruction if required. Further, it places onus on the teachers, to hold regular meetings with parents and guardians to appraise them about the regularity in attendance, ability to learn and progress made in learning in order to keep a constant vigil on the progress of learning of every child. Moreover, the RTE Act provides for 'comprehensive and continuous evaluation of child's understanding of knowledge and his or her ability to apply the same' under section 29(h).

Potential for learning

As we know, in reality, every child has the same potential for learning. Branding of children as weak, slow, dull or failed is not because of any inherent drawback in the child, but most often, the inadequacy of the teaching - learning environment and the ability of the system to handhold or to help the child to realise his/her potential in a meaningful and holistic manner.

Therefore, the 'failure' of the child is the failure of the system as a whole, rather than that of the child. Instead of proposing systemic change in the overall classroom transaction and learning process and victimising children for no fault of theirs is a real mockery.

This requires a revamp in the teacher education both in terms of content and structure to enhance the quality of the learning process rather than punishing the child through detention. There is no research study to suggest that the quality of the learning of the child improves if the child is failed or detained. Instead, it leads to more push outs/ dropouts from the system, especially girl children from marginalised section. The recommendation of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Human Resource Development to reconsider "no-detention" provision under RTE Act is myopic and ill-conceived. Any such move will go against the very spirit of RTE Act and negate Section 3 of the Act that assures free and compulsory elementary education as a fundamental right to all children till the completion of elementary education.

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