

Understanding the no detention system in India

Priyanka Aggarwal

Research Scholar, Department of Education, University of Delhi, Delhi, India

Abstract

India has been struggling to fulfill the goals of Universalization of Elementary Education in the country ever since it became independent. Heavy dropout rate of children from school is a major hurdle for the policy planners to overcome. Promotional Examinations System was found to be one of the causative factors as revealed by several research reports. Measures like mid-day meal, supply of free uniforms, textbooks, stationery, scholarship and No Detention Policy have been taken to deal with the problem. This paper attempts to identify the various dimensions of the No Detention Policy and explores whether or not the existing policy and its resultant activities and services continue to be effective and efficient in helping children and their education. While analyzing No Detention Policy, certain issues were raised regarding the motives of the policy and its adaptability in the existing system of education. On the basis of the content analysis of policy and its various ordinances some major dimensions (viz. Quantity, Quality, Attendance, Achievement, Assessment, planning and implementation) were schematized. These themes were discussed with teachers and students using individual and focused group interviews respectively, to echo their viewpoints on no detention policy in Indian schools, which depict practical implications for the policy makers who have to make strategies and decisions in order to cater this policy in a cogent and systematic manner.

Keywords: no detention system, policy dimensions, content analysis and ungraded school system

Introduction

In India, British Government started working to endorse most basic and elementary education to the people of India. This proposed education, however, was for their self interest. Afterward, government of India encased Universalisation of Elementary Education (UEE) in the colour of democracy through the constitutional provision of equal opportunities to all. However, it has so happened that despite several efforts the said goals could not be achieved. There is enough data to prove that a large number of children in the age group of 6-14 years have either dropped out or were pushed out at different levels of their schooling. The state and central government conducted surveys to understand the magnitude of the problem of wastage and stagnation and to find out the factors responsible for the high dropout rate at different places (Sapra, 1966; Sharma, 1969; Khan, 1962; PROBE Report, 1999). Amongst a variety of steps taken by the government an important and a recent one is No Detention to strengthen the motivation level of the students and also to prevent the frustration that occurs from early failure.

The drive for No Detention System in India had actually begun in mid-80's when an Non Graded School System (NGSS) was suggested in place of graded system school education by many national and state bodies (CABE 39th Session; MHRD, 1983) [4]. The role of one time promotional examinations was criticized for its leading role in the system where students are promoted and detained based on it. However, examinations were not discredited completely. It was reshaped and renamed as continuous and comprehensive evaluation (CCE). The purpose is to maintain a detail record on students' learning and take remedial actions. However, the new change brought many confusions and its mis-conceptualisation. No-detention was viewed as no-examination based promotion and hence no evaluation. Under

such as system, existence of CCE was taken up as rituals that have no purpose and aim. Thus, the present paper highlights the importance of no-detention and CCE as an integrated concept in it. As per the literal meaning of no-detention, a child is not detained in a class and is allowed to go to the next higher grade till class 8 year after year irrespective of his/her performance in annual examinations. However, examinations are not completely closed down for the fear of diluting the quality standards. An assessment and evaluation on a continuous basis is hence suggested and can be seen in the form of Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation (CCE). No Detention was implemented in a phasal manner in India; first till class III and then upto class VIII. Recently, in 2009, Right to Free and Compulsory Education Act has permitted complete promotion irrespective of attendance and examination.

Rationale

Presently, the system is in great discussions among the scholars of education. Criticism as well as favor is flowing to this system among educational community. People are showing their worry for the faults that the system is carrying; conversely, others have an optimistic attitude towards it. Each argument, positive or negative, may be valid in its own sense. But there is a need to study these arguments in a researchable manner. Therefore, the present study has tried to do an in-depth analysis of the ordinances and discussions with various stakeholders as a post implementation feedback was thought to be most essential. The study has also tried to raise some more fundamental issues regarding purposes of assessment, importance of promotion v/s detention, programs to enhance the academic standards of children which run parallel to no detention. There are several unanswered questions which directly or indirectly relate to the policy on the one hand, a

rationale and the context behind No Detention on the other. Such serious concerns needed investigations and a rigorous research exercise.

Objectives

The study was conducted with the objectives

1. To analyze the National and Delhi State Level Ordinances related to No Detention assessment at the Elementary Level and its implications
2. To understand the teachers' and students' perspective about the no detention and assessment after its implementation.
3. To understand the context of 'No Detention,' CCE and establish a rationale.

Methodology

In order to have the in-depth view of the policy, various ordinances/documents available from MHRD; Department of Education, University of Delhi; Municipal Corporation of Delhi; National and State Council of Educational Research and Training; Directorate of Education, Govt. of NCT, Delhi; were collected and then content analysis method was used to present the insight view of the policy.

The insight views on the policy were discussed with teachers and students of Government schools of Delhi using individual and focused group interviews respectively, to echo their viewpoints on no detention policy.

Analysis

In order to achieve the specified objectives, the analysis has been presented in the following three parts viz. study of the relevant ordinances and policy documents, voices of teachers & students and rationalizing the no detention and assessment.

Study of Ordinances and Policy Documents

Assessment is an integral part of any education system. It presents progress, growth and development of the individual or of the group. One of the well accepted objectives of assessment is that it provides feedback that helps the persons involved in educational process. It was a part of traditional one teacher school and is central in the contemporary western graded education system too (Little, 2006) [13]. However, its form has changed drastically like the education system itself. In a single teacher school, education was more individualistic, there were neither different classes for same aged group children nor a set entrance date/ age nor a fixed or structured national curriculum nor a present style of formal evaluation system. Learning was assessed informally and is individually designed by the teacher for the individual child (Little, 2006) [13]. The purpose, however, the examinations in modern system of education is quite different. It not just assesses the knowledge but plays an important function. It evaluates the students, certify them and quantify their achievement (Pathak, 2002) [16]. The purpose of certification for promotion and retention with the period of time became prominent. It became the only purpose of evaluation. Thus, there is a shift in conceptualization of examination from assessment to evaluation. In the competitive world and the demands of globalization, examination became a tool to filter the people on various grounds. Therefore, present day examinations are not individualistic. These examinations are common for all the students studying in one common grade. This shift to

evaluation has been criticized by many educationists on the very fact that common examinations, conducted to judge all the students studying together in one grade, curb the creativity of the students. It legitimizes idealistic patters and authority of bureaucratic institutions that certify the students (Pathak, 2002; Krishanmurti, 2008) [16, 11]. It reinforces inequality by stratifying the people for example allocating hierarchy of grades (A, B, C, D, E) or marks. Another criticism attached with the present day examination system is that it certifies the students to be promoted/ detained; this very act of detention causes fear of failure which has drastic implications on the psyche of the students. This fear of failure accelerates anxiety resulting in dropout, exam- induced suicides and nervous breakdown among individuals (Pathak, 2002; NCERT position paper on examination reform) [16].

No detention is a step forward to strengthen motivation and prevent them from frustration that occurs due to early failure. Some of the recommendations in this regard are:-

“The Board recognises the importance of no detention policy for strengthening motivation of students and preventing frustration that occurs due to early failure” (Pt 11, CABE 39th session, 1983) [4]. “Comprehensive measures for reducing dropout rates have been suggested to states such as No detention” (MHRD, Annual Report, 1983) [4]. “In order to achieve the goals of Universalisation of Elementary Education and to increase the retention in schools of Delhi, it has been decided to introduce ‘No Detention Policy’ upto class VIII” (Directorate of Education, 2008) [9]. “No child admitted in a school shall be held back in any class or expelled from school till the completion of elementary education.” (Pt 16, RTE Act 2009)

From the above facts, it becomes paradoxical to think that at the one hand students are promoted to prevent them from frustration and on the other these students are tagged with grades (A/ B/ C/ D/ E) and corresponding remarks in their performance/ report cards. Student, who scores E grade, is certified that his/ her performance is poor among their classmates. These students are never seen with a good impression. They do not intermingle with rest of their classmates and often struggle for their acceptance among classmates and teachers and henceforth they form poor sense of worth (Eldred and Hillson, 1963) [7]. One such example was noted in a mathematics classroom of class four. Class was working with the concept of “smart charts” (Chapter 14, Maths-Magic, NCERT). Teacher took an example which was supposed to be more concrete. He made a table on the blackboard specifying grades (A+, A, B, C, D) in a column and then with the help of students he filled another column denominating number of students in each category. He got (2, 5, 14, 2, 0) number of students respectively, when he asked the students to stand for each grade independently. The noticeable information, hereby, is that the strength of the present students was 33, however only 23 students showed their presence in the activity and nil in grade D, the lowest grade in the hierarchy. Teacher noticed this difference. His further efforts resulted in filling the lowest two grades with more number of students. Thereafter, teacher proceeded with the process of solving the sum. It was another noticeable fact that these students wished to hide their appearance under lowest grade categories and were unhappy of being uncovered among their classmates. This is just one of the examples coated here, which elucidates

that despite of no detention, we could not erase the stated ill effects of detention i.e. frustration. This happens to be so as frustration is not limited to failure. It is a direct implication of the type of examination system that the Indian education system is working with. It is pertinent to define here that the concept of pass and fail is not limited to promotion and detention. It has wider connotation in the present education system. Getting good grades ensures greater success in future materialistic/ economic society. This no-detention in elementary education still quantifies the learning on one common yardstick that confirms hierarchy. It stratifies the students and gives them hierarchical (A, B, C, D, E) grade on the basis of performance in the examinations. It still certifies the students to be excellent and points out the students who performed poorly. Secondly, these students however are promoted to next grade but they face daily failure because of acquired cumulative effects of poor learning at lower grades. These students internalizes that they are good for nothing and can never do good in academics. As a result, they not only develop poor academic self-concept but also encounter the failure. So, no-detention in the present system delays failure and doesn't prevent the failure in elementary grades. This delayed failure gets reflected in the results of higher grade where the incidence of failure is not just increasing but also their chances of getting future academic and economic success gets minimal.

Yet another paradox observed in this regard is when no failure then why examinations? Here it is imperative to understand the role of examination under no-detention system. It is expected to provide continuous feedback about individualized performance so that a teacher can initiate the remedial teaching accordingly. However, a practical problem faced by the teacher in this regard is syllabus completion and time constraints. Teacher finds it difficult to take up remedial classes along with managing the pace of syllabus within the fixed period of time given for prescribed syllabus. In such a scenario, continuous and comprehensive examination that was expected to be a more continuous and non-judgmental increased the on paper work. Number of examinations increased its method and process changed but it could not benefit in supporting the individual learning. Therefore, no-detention in the present system faces criticism for promoting the students without sufficient learning.

Thirdly, major goal that the above stated recommendations wished to achieve is reducing dropout through no- detention. More than a dozen researches, done to map the variables responsible for high dropout at national and state level, reveal failure is a key factor among various others. Therefore, no detention certainly helps in reducing dropout. However, PROBE clearly presents the main reason beside the dropout is that children do not learn anything even after studying for many years in schools and then they fail which results in their soon dropout (PROBE, 1999). As the stated policy has been viewed as a flexible movement in the education, policy planners have tried to ensure the presence of student by certain provisions with an assumption minimum prescribed attendance in the school will help in assuring minimum achievement/ learning. Some of the provisions in this regard are:

“No child shall be detained on the basis of poor performance in pre – primary classes and classes I, II, and III against the wishes of his/ her parents or guardian. Promotion from these

classes to the next higher class shall be automatic subject to the parent or the guardian agreeing to it and fulfillment of eligible conditions in respect of attendance.” (Point no. 28., Delhi School Education Act, 1973)

“No child would be detained in class IV, V, VI and VII on the basis of their performance in the various examinations taken for evaluation and promotion to the next class, provided the child attends the school more than 75% school days and also undertakes all Unit Tests and terminal examinations.” (Directorate of Education Circular, 26 June, 2008) ^[9].

However, RTE changed the above provision with a stroke of its provision (Pt 4 and 16), which ensures direct admission to age appropriate grade and automatic promotion till elementary education.

The arguments placed above drive us to reflect on a much deeper issue: quality v/s quantity. Do we really intend to provide quality education or more worried about towards quantity of educated people or both? The above said provisions seem to be hitting the targets of quantity. It has ensured more and more retention and successful completion of elementary education. It has also helped in reducing number of dropout occurring due to failure but the major concern articulated by the PROBE team in its PROBE Report is still far behind i.e. poor learning. Above stated provisions have also been cautious of it and hence, accepting the policy to be a supple move, attendance was made mandatory. Nevertheless, RTE ACT 2009 made it a snug provision. Attendance is no longer an urge of the system and hence, the irony is that the system left behind its major companion (quality). Quantity of education along with quality makes the nation and its individual grow in a healthy manner. In order to ensure quality with quantity, along with the no detention, we need to locate no detention within the concept of Non Graded System (NGS). The similar system got popularity in 1960s in many western countries and was recommended by Central Advisory Body of Education for the first time in its 39th session, 1983 in India. It recognized the importance of 'No detention' policy for strengthening motivation of students and preventing frustration that occurs from early failure. In order, however, to ensure that systematic teaching and learning take place, the implementation of a liberal policy of promotion will require simultaneous adoption of a non graded system as well as a system of continuous assessment of attainments (pt 11, CABE Report 39th session) ^[4]. The proposed system is structurally (academic and administrative) different from the present form of Indian education system. This system was favoured and practiced over graded system by many academicians in western and eastern states at school and national level. This system deals with the problem of dropout, fear of failure, frustration due to early failure, achievement, absenteeism, and self concept in a more comprehensive and effective manner as compared to graded system (Carbone, 1961; Lindsey, 1967; Barnickle & Lindberg, 1966; Dipasquale, 1964; Vogel & Bowers; 1972) ^[3, 12, 2, 5, 22].

This proposed concept, however, got filtered down from National to State bodies and no detention was implemented without its riders (NGS and continuous assessment of attainments), which require various structural (academic and administrative) reforms as experimented by various European countries (Alice, 1960; Lindsey, 1967; Goodlad and Anderson, 1959) ^[1, 12, 8]. Despite of the above stated facts, there is an immense need to probe its feasibility in Indian

context as the concept is still in its embryonic form and flourishing its innovative roots.

Conclusion

Study of the ordinances reveals that policy has immense strength to bring many healthy qualitative and quantitative changes but the problem has arisen due to the adoption of filtered approach, and hurry in implementation. The current form of No Detention Policy as has been adopted in the state of Delhi has implemented a part of the entire concept and left many of its riders, such as ungraded system and comprehensive assessment of attainments, back. Because of these lacunas, the current situation of the policy is in danger. It could have asserted the hearts of the teachers and would have brought fruitful results if it had been adopted in its holistic form and would have been implemented with proper planning. In its present form, it is in fact back firing according to the teachers. Moreover, students' responses showed that the policy had not helped them and none of its assertions like "to strengthen motivation and to reduce stress" gets fulfilled through the present form of No Detention Policy because according to them the students still go through the trauma of examinations and still are concerned about achieving high scores.

References

1. Alice M. Administration of the Non- Graded School. Chicago: The Elementary School Journal. 1960; 61(3):148-152.
2. Barnickle DW, Lindberg RT. The Unwilling Accelerates- A Problem of Non –Graded School. Illinois: The Elementary School Journal. 1966; 67(2):84-87.
3. Carbone RF. A comparison of Graded and Non Graded Elementary Schools. America: The Elementary School Journal. 1961; 62(2):82-88.
4. Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE) 39th Session. Resolutions Adopted by Central Advisory Board of Education, 1983. Downloaded from <http://www.Education.nic.in/cd50years/g/12/1G/121G0701.htm> on February 22, 2009.
5. Dipasquale VC. The Relation between... Dropout and the Graded School. Boston: The Phi Delta Kappan. 1964; 46(3):129-133.
6. Dixit SN. School Manual (Third Addition). Research and Extension Branch Delhi: Bharat Bhushan Publication, 2007.
7. Eldred, DM, Hillson M. The Non Graded School and /mental Health. Vermont: The Elementary School Journal. 1963; 63(4):218-222.
8. Goodland JI, Anderson RH. The Nongraded School, New York: Harcourt, Brace &Co, 1959.
9. Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi, Directorate of Education: School Branch, Old Secretariat: Delhi (2008) "ORDER to introduce No Detention Policy" vide No DE 23(383)/Sch. Br./08/1943-1952 dated 26-06-08.
10. Khan KL. A survey of Wastage and Stagnation in Compulsory Primary Schools in Chattarpur District. New Delhi: NCERT, 1962.
11. Krishnamurti J. Education and the Significance of life. Chennai: The Indcom Press, 2008.
12. Lindsey JF. Non Graded Programs- Which One?. California: The Elementary School Journal. 1967; 68(2):61-62.
13. Little AW. Education for All and Multigrade Teaching: Challenges and Opportunities. Netherlands: Springer Publication, 2006.
14. Ministry of Human Resource Development, Annual Report, 1983.
15. NCERT. National Curriculum Framework 2005, Position Paper: National Focus Group on Examination Reforms, 2006.
16. Pathak A. Social Implication of Schooling: Knowledge, Pedagogy and consciousness. Delhi: Rainbow Publishers, 2002.
17. PROBE Team. Public report on basic education in India, Oxford University Press, 1999.
18. Sapra CL. Educational Stagnation and Wastage in India. New Delhi: NCERT, 1966.
19. Sharma RC. Wastage and Stagnation in Primary and Middle schools in India. New Delhi: NCERT, 1969.
20. The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Bill 2008. Downloaded from <http://education.nic.in/Elementary/right free education.pdf>. Downloaded on February 23, 2009.
21. Twenty Point Policy recommended by the then Indira Gandhi Government, 1982. Downloaded from http://www.mospi.nic.in/tpp86_test1.htm on February 22, 2009.
22. Vogel FX, Norman DB. Pupil Behavior in a Multi – Age Nongraded School. The Journal of Experimental Education. 1972; 41(2):78-86.