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**Elementary Education in India:  
Minimum Learning Outcomes**

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**ABSTRACT**

All educational programs not only ensure more effective implementation, but also help in building learning capacities at the grassroots for providing quality education to the children all over the country. However, sadly enough, the revelations by ASER (2008) which focused on children's activities related to basic reading, comprehension and arithmetic of the primary school children studying in various rural schools remain a cause of concern to all the educationists at large, in addition to the parent community.

This paper focuses on various factors that are responsible for minimum levels of learning among primary school children studying in rural schools in India. Hence, in order to improve level of learning of children, three things must be given due consideration:

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12 : 11 November 2012

N. L. N. Jayanthi M.A., M.Ed., M.Phil., Ph.D. (English), Ph.D.

Elementary Education in India: Minimum Learning Outcomes

- (i) Employing fully motivated people with right attitude and aptitude towards teaching
- (ii) Developing them into effective teachers and multi-facilitators and
- (iii) Ensuring that the system is able to provide the best possible learning environment to every child.

This paper also suggests that decentralization of planning, decision making and meticulous implementation of government policies in the primary education must be given utmost priority to maximise the learning levels of children studying in primary schools in India.

### **Role of Government in Promoting UEE**

The Government of India and the State Governments in India aim at providing Universal Elementary Education to all children of India and has grown both in scope and geographical coverage to reach out millions of children living in both rural and urban areas through a range of interventions. All educational programs are designed to ensure that

- Enrolment in schools increases
- Learning in schools and communities increases
- The education net reaches children who are unable to attend school
- Models are replicated and scaled up to serve large numbers of children to achieve a large scale impact.

All educational programs are aimed at not only ensuring more effective implementation, but also helping in building learning capacities at the grassroots for providing quality education to the children all over the country. However, the recent surveys conducted by various non-profit organizations reveal a shocking state of the current levels of learning among the primary school children studying in various rural schools in India.

## **The Annual Status of Education Report (ASER)**

The Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) is referred to by the Central and State Governments for formulating various plans and policies. It has become a powerful voice in the area of educational reform. ASER (2008) had focused on children's activities related to basic reading, comprehension and arithmetic. Sadly enough, the rudimentary learning levels of the primary school children in rural schools remain a cause of concern. The ASER<sup>1</sup> report reveals that --

- In 2007, 38.2% children in class I cannot even identify either alphabets or numbers.
- Mothers of 50% of children cannot read texts even in their mother tongue.
- Nearly 40% children at class V level cannot read a class II text, while around 60 % at that level are unable to carry out simple divisions.
- India-wide situation shows that in the middle of the class III academic year, only 50 % children can read a class I text.
- In the middle of the class IV academic year, only 40% children can read a class II text.
- What should be more worrying though is the fact that in class II, only 9% children can read the text appropriate to them, and 60% cannot even recognize numbers between 10 and 99.
- This would seem consistent with NCERT's <sup>2</sup> own learning achievement surveys that indicate a mean achievement level of 58.5 % in language and 46.5% in Arithmetic at the class V level.

Given this background, the big question is: “What is the basic learning achievement level with respect to Reading, Arithmetic and Comprehension of the primary school children in India?” The following data gives a clear picture of the learning profile of the primary children of rural areas as reported by ASER (2008).

### **INDIA-RUDIMENTARY LEARNING LEVEL IN RURAL AREAS**

#### **Reading level: Percentage of Children who can read**

Language in India [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com)

12 : 11 November 2012

N. L. N. Jayanthi M.A., M.Ed., M.Phil., Ph.D. (English), Ph.D.  
Elementary Education in India: Minimum Learning Outcomes

| Std. | Nothing | Letter | Word | Level 1<br>(Std. 1 text) | Level 2<br>(Std. 2 text) | Total |
|------|---------|--------|------|--------------------------|--------------------------|-------|
| I    | 31.8    | 44.2   | 17.0 | 3.9                      | 3.0                      | 100   |
| II   | 11.2    | 31.6   | 34.4 | 13.8                     | 9.0                      | 100   |
| III  | 5.3     | 16.8   | 29.0 | 27.4                     | 21.6                     | 100   |
| IV   | 2.9     | 8.9    | 18.1 | 27.6                     | 42.5                     | 100   |
| V    | 1.9     | 5.3    | 11.9 | 22.2                     | 58.7                     | 100   |
| VI   | 1.2     | 3.0    | 6.9  | 17.2                     | 71.7                     | 100   |
| VII  | 1.0     | 2.1    | 4.2  | 12.9                     | 79.7                     | 100   |
| VIII | 0.7     | 1.4    | 2.7  | 8.6                      | 86.6                     | 100   |

### INDIA-RUDIMENTARY LEARNING LEVEL IN RURAL AREAS

#### Arithmetic Level: Percentage of Children who can

| Std. | Do<br>Nothing | Recognize<br>numbers<br>1-9 | Recognize<br>numbers<br>10-99 | Subtract | Divide | Total |
|------|---------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------------|----------|--------|-------|
| I    | 31.7          | 42.9                        | 20.1                          | 3.9      | 1.5    | 100   |
| II   | 11.7          | 31.8                        | 38.8                          | 14.2     | 3.7    | 100   |
| III  | 5.6           | 18.4                        | 33.7                          | 31.1     | 11.2   | 100   |
| IV   | 3.3           | 10.4                        | 24.1                          | 34.7     | 27.6   | 100   |
| V    | 2.1           | 6.5                         | 17.1                          | 31.9     | 42.4   | 100   |
| VI   | 1.5           | 3.8                         | 12.8                          | 27.8     | 54.2   | 100   |
| VII  | 1.2           | 2.8                         | 9.9                           | 23.4     | 62.8   | 100   |
| VIII | 0.9           | 1.8                         | 7.4                           | 18.3     | 71.6   | 100   |

### INDIA- -RUDIMENTARY LEARNING LEVEL IN RURAL AREAS (ENGLISH)

#### Percentage of Children who

| Std. | Cannot<br>read<br>capital<br>letters | Can<br>Read<br>capital<br>letters | Can<br>Read<br>Small<br>Letters | Can<br>read<br>simple<br>words | Can read<br>Easy<br>Sentences | Total |
|------|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------|
| I    | 60.9                                 | 22.9                              | 9.4                             | 4.6                            | 2.2                           | 100   |
| II   | 38.5                                 | 30.3                              | 17.4                            | 9.6                            | 4.2                           | 100   |
| III  | 23.2                                 | 26.3                              | 23.4                            | 19.3                           | 7.8                           | 100   |
| IV   | 14.1                                 | 19.7                              | 21.9                            | 28.1                           | 16.2                          | 100   |
| V    | 8.2                                  | 3.9                               | 18.6                            | 31.4                           | 27.9                          | 100   |
| VI   | 4.8                                  | 9.0                               | 13.8                            | 30.1                           | 42.4                          | 100   |
| VII  | 3.6                                  | 6.3                               | 10.2                            | 26.3                           | 53.7                          | 100   |
| VIII | 2.4                                  | 4.0                               | 7.37                            | 20.3                           | 65.9                          | 100   |

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12 : 11 November 2012

N. L. N. Jayanthi M.A., M.Ed., M.Phil., Ph.D. (English), Ph.D.  
Elementary Education in India: Minimum Learning Outcomes

## INDIA- -RUDIMENTARY LEARNING LEVEL IN RURAL AREAS

### English Comprehension; Percentage of Children who can

| Std. | Of those who can read words, %<br>who can tell meaning of the words | Of those who can read sentences, % who<br>can tell meaning of sentences |
|------|---|---|
| I    | 50.2  | 70.2  |
| II   | 53.7  | 73.0  |
| III  | 54.6  | 76.8  |
| IV   | 59.9  | 74.1  |
| V    | 62.0  | 78.2  |
| VI   | 65.3  | 81.7  |
| VII  | 66.5  | 82.7  |
| VIII | 67.1  | 86.1  |

### **Factors Responsible for Minimum Level of Learning Among Primary School Children**

There are many factors responsible for the poor learning outcome among the primary school children, out of which the following are the most vital.

**1. Ignorance of Parents** - Often parents do not know what their children can or cannot do. Sometimes children are confused themselves. Parents become restless when the children fail to possess rudimentary knowledge in Reading, Arithmetic and Comprehension.

**2. Introducing English in the Primary School Level** - In the domain of policy and politics, there have been wide-ranging debates about the implications of introducing English in primary school. The growing demand for English at all levels is undeniable and to deliver basic English to millions of children is a Herculean task. This is fuelled to a large extent by the perception that knowledge of English pays off in terms of improving access to better jobs and opportunities.

**3. Dearth of Trained Teachers** - In the development of the National Curriculum Framework 2006, a great deal of attention was paid to the teaching of English which stresses on "communicative competence"<sup>3</sup> and argues that teachers should aim to encourage the use of English language in meaningful contexts and develop children's ability to use the language in a variety of contexts spontaneously and appropriately.

Language in India [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com)

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Elementary Education in India: Minimum Learning Outcomes

However, the teachers need more training, motivation and involvement for handling the current situation in teaching the rudiments of language

**4. Too many Discrepancies** - All around us, in cities and in villages, we can see children engaged in doing many kinds of activities that need cognitive ability and calculations as well. We see children in the market - both buying and selling. We see children helping parents and family members with many tasks. In our country in the elementary school age group, some children can read and some cannot; some can do numerical calculations and computations on paper and some cannot.

**5. Lack of Detention** - The policy of the government to promote UEE seems to affect the teaching-learning environment and the organizational climate of the primary schools. So, although more children are going to school today than ever before, it must be accepted that they are learning very little, not even the rudiments.

## Conclusion

Thus, in order to improve level of learning of children, three things must be given due consideration. These are: (i) employing fully motivated people with right attitude and aptitude towards teaching, (ii) developing them into effective teachers and multi-facilitators and (iii) ensuring that the system is able to provide the best possible learning environment to every child. In addition, to the above, decentralization of planning, decision-making and meticulous implementation of government policies in the primary education must be given utmost priority to maximise the learning levels of children studying in primary schools in India.

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## References

1. ASER (2008). Annual Survey on Education Report. New Delhi.
2. NCERT (2008) 8<sup>th</sup> All India Educational Survey, New Delhi.

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