SARVA SHIKSHA ABHIYAN IN PUNJAB: AN ASSESSMENT

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SUMMARY OF THE THESIS

The summary of the thesis has been divided into four sections. Section I gives an introduction on education, need of SSA and objectives of SSA. It also gives in detail the objectives and hypotheses of the present study and the research methodology adopted for the purpose of this study. Section II gives the summary of the chapters theme wise. Section III covers the main findings of the study hypotheses wise. Section IV includes recommendations for policy makers.
Section I

INTRODUCTION

Education is one of the most important agents of social change, prosperity and national progress. The societies which are more educated are more advanced and better developed with high development indices. Elementary education (Classes I to VIII) holds centre stage in any system of education throughout the world including India. The framers of the Indian Constitution gave due importance to Universalization of Elementary Education (UEE) through a constitutional provision in Article 45, Part IV of the Constitution. The Constitution provided for larger responsibility to the state governments regarding education by including the subject of education in the State List of the Seventh Schedule of the Constitution.

This constitutional mandate of accomplishing UEE by 1960, however, could not be accomplished. As a result, the target date was revised first to 1970, then to 1976 and later on to 1990. In the meantime, by the 42nd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1976, the subject of ‘education’ was transferred to the Concurrent List of the Seventh Schedule of the Constitution to facilitate greater participation of the Central Government in support of the primary education. Accordingly, the Central Government has been funding various centrally sponsored schemes. However, the task of providing basic education for all, with concrete plans of action gained greater momentum only after the adoption of the National Policy of Education, 1986, revised in 1992.

The Central Government, in partnership with the state governments initiated a number of programmes to fulfill the constitutional and national obligations of UEE like Operation Blackboard, Mahila Samakhya Programme, Mid-Day Meal Scheme, Teachers Training Programme and District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) in 1994 in select districts of the country to achieve UEE. The Government of India again set the target for achieving UEE at 1995 but even this target could not be achieved. Later the ‘World Education Forum’ held at Dakar, Senegal in April 2000 and ‘Millennium Development Goals’ adopted in 2000 presented an opportunity to mobilize high levels of political support for primary education and literacy programmes. Education for girls and
women was high on the agenda as they held the key to population management and nation’s development.

These national and international developments brought the need for recognizing basic education as a fundamental right of every citizen at the centre stage. Since the target of UEE by 1990, later revised to 1995 could not be achieved, the target date was further extended to the year 2010, five years in advance of the goals set at the ‘Dakar Conference’ and the ‘United Nations Millennium Development Goals’ of 2015. As a first step towards achieving this renewed target of UEE by 2010, the Government of India passed the Constitution (Eighty-Sixth Amendment) Act, 2002 making elementary education a fundamental right and launched a flagship programme of UEE – Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA). On 1st April, 2010, the Right of all Children to Compulsory Education Act, 2009 came into effect to fulfill the obligation of the State under the 86th Constitutional Amendment Act, 2002.

SSA became important because many states were not covered under District Primary Education Programme, Bihar Education Project, Lok Jumbish Project, thereby, depriving them of the benefits provided under these programmes. Even those states which were covered by these programmes, all the areas did not benefit. For instance, slums in the urban areas.

OBJECTIVES OF SSA

SSA was a flagship programme of the Government of India to achieve UEE by 2010. Its main objectives were:

a) All children in school, Education Guarantee Schools (EGS), Alternate School, back-to-school camp by 2005.

b) All children complete five years of primary schooling by 2007.

c) All children complete eight years of elementary schooling by 2010.

d) Focus on elementary education of satisfactory quality with emphasis on education for life.
e) Bridge all gender and social category gaps at primary stage by 2007 and at elementary education level by 2010.

f) Universal retention by 2010.

**OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The present study attempted to undertake mid-term appraisal of the achievements of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan Authority (SSAA), Punjab in the three districts – Ropar, Fatehgarh Sahib and Muktsar – of Punjab towards achieving the targets of SSA. The study was undertaken with the following objectives.

1. To critically appraise the aims and objectives of SSA.
2. To examine the organizational structures set up at the National, State, district and sub-district levels to implement SSA.
3. To examine the role of community in planning under SSA.
4. To examine the physical monitoring framework set up to implement SSA.
5. To examine the transparency in the functioning of the system.
6. To examine the financial arrangement for the implementation of various activities under SSA.
7. To examine the various issues in the working of financial arrangements under SSA like delay in release of money, political interference.
8. To examine the role of Village Education Development Committees (VEDCs) in budgeting under SSA and its role in financial management under SSA.
9. To examine the financial monitoring framework under SSA.
10. To examine the training policy of SSAA, Punjab with respect to various functionaries involved in SSA like teachers, members of the Village Education Development Committee.

**HYPOTHESES**

The following hypotheses were tested in the course of the study:
1. The targets of SSA are set unrealistically by the Central Government.

2. SSAA, Punjab fails in its goal of bringing all children in the 6-14 years age-group back to schools by 2005.

3. SSAA, Punjab fails in its goal of providing quality elementary education under SSA.

4. SSAA, Punjab fails in its goal of bridging gender and social equity gaps under SSA by 2010.

5. a) SSAA, Punjab follows a decentralized approach of planning under SSA.

   b) The community plays an active role in planning.

6. The monitoring of the programme is weak.

7. The working of SSAA, Punjab lacks transparency in its functioning.

8. The finances for Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan are not fully utilised due to reasons like irregular disbursal, political interference, poor co-ordination and vested interests.

9. The monitoring of funds expended under SSA is weak.

10. The functionaries associated with the programme are not oriented in the new educational techniques and strategies. This hypothesis was studied with respect to the following aspects:

    a) The key resource persons and the resource persons are not imparted adequate training.

    b) The teachers are not oriented in the new educational techniques and strategies.

11. The VEDC members are not imparted requisite training that would ensure their participation in the programme.

**RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

For the purpose of the present study, three districts – Fatehgarh Sahib, Ropar and Muktsar – in Punjab were chosen on the basis of the categorization done by the finance wing of SSAA, Punjab as high, middle and low on performance. All the administrative
blocks were covered taking one or two schools from each of the blocks (Table 1.12) i.e 28 schools from 15 blocks. The study was based on both primary and secondary data. Primary data was collected through the use of interview schedules, formal and informal interviews, observations during visits to schools in the three sample districts. Interview schedules were administered to the following sample size of the population.

a) 120 Teachers (40 each from Ropar, Fatehgarh Sahib and Muktsar).

b) 37 VEDC Members (15 from Ropar, 12 from Fatehgarh Sahib and 10 from Muktsar).

c) Parents of drop-outs (20 each from Ropar, Fatehgarh Sahib and Muktsar); never enrolled children (20 each from Ropar, Fatehgarh Sahib and Muktsar); and those who had withdrawn their children from schools (5 from Ropar, 7 from Fatehgarh Sahib and 10 from Muktsar). All were randomly chosen.

Formal as well as informal interviews were conducted with the following:

a) State Project Director, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan Authority (SSAA), Punjab.

b) Assistant State Project Director, Planning, SSAA, Punjab.

c) Assistant State Project Director, Training, SSAA, Punjab.

d) Assistant State Project Director, EGS and AIE Centres, SSAA, Punjab.

e) District Project Co-ordinators of Ropar, Fatehgarh Sahib and Muktsar.

f) Students who left school voluntarily (30 each from Ropar, Fatehgarh Sahib and Muktsar) from household clusters in the villages.

Information was also gathered by being in regular contact with the various government functionaries at the State, district, block and village level. The secondary data was taken from various sources.

Descriptive and qualitative analysis of the data collected was done. The data collated was presented and analysed by using tables, figures and percentages.
Section II

The steps taken by Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan Authority (SSAA), Punjab to achieve the objectives of SSA, organisational structure set up to implement SSA in Punjab, financial resource sharing between the Centre and Punjab and the training policy adopted under SSA have been summarized in this section.

IMPLEMENTATION OF SSA IN PUNJAB

SSA was launched all over India including Punjab in 2001-02. The baseline assessment survey regarding the total child population in all the districts of the State including Ropar, Fatehgarh Sahib and Muktsar was done in the first two years since the launch of the programme. The actual date of launch of the programme was 24th July, 2003. The next two years went into building infrastructure like school buildings, classrooms, separate toilets for girls, water facilities, appointment of primary and upper primary teachers and initiation of special enrollment drives to enroll more and more children. In the meantime the schools were functioning in the makeshift arrangements. According to the officials associated with the implementation of SSA in Punjab, the implementation of the programme started picking up from mid-2005 onwards. Arrangements for non-formal Education were also made by opening Education Guarantee Scheme (EGS) and Alternative and Innovative Education (AIE) Centres for those children who could not come to schools during regular timings. Free bicycles and textbooks were given to girls at upper primary level to motivate them to complete elementary schooling. Free textbooks were also provided to Scheduled Castes students to encourage them to come to schools and complete elementary education. Special arrangements were also made to impart education to Children with Special Needs (CWSN). Medical camps were organised every year to assess the nature and degree of disability and accordingly, assistive devices were distributed to them. Orthopaedically handicapped students were provided barrier free access in schools to assure their easy movement. Special resource teachers were appointed to educate those Children with Special Needs who could not come to schools.
SSAA, Punjab had following initiatives to impart elementary education of satisfactory quality with emphasis on life skills.

1. Vocational education was imparted to all students at upper primary level of education whereby the girls were trained in the art of cutting, sewing and embroidery and boys were given training in skills like carpentry and electrician’s work.

2. Building as Learning Aid (BALA) scheme was also started whereby the school building was used to impart education in an innovative way e.g. drawing of the measurement scale on the walls to develop a sense of measuring length and height, introduction of low height grid boards for students, to draw angles on ground to improve the sense of angles while opening and closing of door, walls were used to draw maps, solar system, eclipses, snakes and ladders etc. This was done to make education more joyful.

3. The syllabus of the Punjab School Education Board was reoriented according to the National Curriculum Framework, 2005.

4. SSAA, Punjab provided free workbooks to all students.

5. Education at upper primary level was imparted through computers to make learning more interesting and qualitative.

All these initiatives towards achieving the objectives of SSA were implemented in all the districts of the State. As a result of these initiatives, education at elementary level became accessible and there was an increase in the enrollment of students in all the districts of Punjab.

ORGANISATIONAL FRAMEWORK

A National Mission for SSA was set up at the national level comprising of a Governing Council chaired by the Prime Minister in his ex-officio capacity, an Executive Committee chaired by the Union Minister for Human Resource and Development and a Project Approval Board. The Governing Council and the Executive Committee supervised and assisted the states in implementing SSA. The function of the Project Approval Board was to approve the Annual Work Plan and Budget of the states. The
national resource institutions like NCERT, NUEPA, IGNOU and NCTE were also associated with the programme to assist the states in their capacity building in implementing SSA.

Every state including Punjab had set up a State Mission for SSA on similar pattern as the National Mission for SSA comprising of a Governing Council chaired by the Chief Minister of the State in his ex-officio capacity and an Executive Committee chaired by the Chief Secretary of the State. The Executive Committee was assigned the responsibility of implementing SSA in Punjab which functioned through three committees, viz., the Appointments Committee, the Finance Committee and the Programme Implementation Committee. The Programme Implementation Committee implemented SSA through Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan Authority (SSAA), Punjab under the charge of the State Project Director (SPD). It was assigned the specific responsibility of supervising, co-ordinating and implementing SSA in Punjab. Further down the administrative hierarchy, education committees were set up at the district, block, cluster and village levels. The VEDCs were assigned the major role in planning, implementing and monitoring the programme. The programme was implemented based on the plans made by the VEDCs which were compiled into district plans and finally into the State plan.

The organisational structure set up to implement SSA at national, state, district and sub-district levels was in the nature of a matrix organisation set up outside the regular education departments functioning at the Union and State level to achieve the time bound objectives of SSA in a mission mode.

The monitoring of the implementation of the programme was also ensured internally at every level of the hierarchy and externally by external agencies. The VEDCs prepared their monthly, quarterly, bi-annual and yearly reports on the status of the implementation of the programme. These reports were sent to the Cluster Resource Centres where the cluster monitoring report was prepared along with the comments from the cluster inspecting team. This report was then sent to the Block Resource Centres where the monitoring report of the whole block was prepared along with the comments from the block inspecting team. All the blocks in the district then sent their monitoring
reports to the district head office where the district monitoring report with comments from the district monitoring team then sent to the office of SSAA, Punjab. The State Project Director monitored and scrutinized the performance of each district in implementing SSA. Alongside, monitoring of the programme was also done in the monthly meetings of the district, block and cluster officials. The monitoring teams from SSAA, Punjab also monitored the implementation of SSA and functioning of schools in the districts of the State.

The Joint Review Mission, national resource institutions like NCERT, NUEPA, IGNOU and the Department of Education, Panjab University, Chandigarh undertook review of implementation of SSA in Punjab as part of review by external agencies outside the organisational set up.

**FINANCES UNDER SSA**

SSA was launched by the Central Government in partnership with the states including Punjab. The finances were divided between the Centre and the State over the ten year period starting from 2000-01 to 2009-10. The financial resource sharing between them under SSA was in the ratio of 85:15 during 2001-02 (9th Five Year Plan); 75:25 during 2002-03 to 2006-07 (10th Five Year Plan) and an equal share of 50:50 from the 11th Five Year Plan onwards. The resource sharing pattern was changed for the XIth Five Year Plan due to stiff opposition from the states expressing their unwillingness towards contributing more money citing their precarious financial position. Thus, according to the new funding pattern for SSA for the XIth Five Year Plan, the Centre’s share increased to 65% and the states’ share was fixed at 35% for the first two fiscals of the XIth Five Year Plan beginning 2007. In 2009-10, the Centre’s share scaled down to 60% with the states’ footing 40% of the bill. In the fourth year of the Plan, there would be further reduction in the Central Government’s contribution to 55% and rest would be provided by the states (The declaration of having increased the Punjab’s share to 40% was made in the budget speech by the State Finance Minister Shri Manpreet Singh Badal for the financial year 2009-10). The international funding agencies like the World Bank, European Commission and the Department for International Development (DFID) were also contributing money. One of the main features of SSA allocations was that if the released
amounts were not spent in a particular year, they did not lapse; rather this amount was carried over to the next years’ Annual Work Plan and Budget (AWP&B).

As a special measure to mop up financial resources, the Government of India was imposing an education cess @ 2% on all major central taxes since 1st April, 2004 and had set up a non-lapsable fund called ‘Prarambhik Shiksha Kosh’ in which the proceeds of education cess were put. It was learnt that no such special measures were taken by SSAA, Punjab to supplement its financial resources for financing SSA.

The funds for SSA were transferred from the Central Government to the Ministry of Human Resource Development which then allocated the centre’s share to the State Implementation Societies of all the states including Punjab on the basis of the approved Annual Work Plans and Budgets (AWP&B) prepared by all the states including Punjab. The funds were then passed to the SSAA, Punjab. The approved money was released in two installments by the Central Government – the first installment was released in the month of April (for the first two quarters) soon after the approval of the Annual Work Plan and Budget by the Project Approval Board (PAB). The second installment was released in the month of September (for the 3rd and the 4th Quarter) on the fulfillment of certain conditions like demand from the states (usually six months after the first release); contribution of state’s matching share to the State Implementation Society, expenditure of atleast 50% money from the first installment, and maintenance of the 1999-2000 level of expenditure on elementary education during the period SSA was implemented.

The released money was transferred to the districts in periodic installments within fifteen days of its receipt based on the approved annual plan, statement of expenditure and performance of districts. Further, down the channel, the district education offices at the district level released the funds to the block education offices, cluster resource centres from where the money was transferred to the Village Education Development Committees (VEDCs) which were the final agencies to expend money.

The implementation of SSA involved expenditure of huge sums of money which made it necessary to have an effective auditing system. The auditing of SSA funds was done both internally and externally. Internal auditing was done through the accounts branch set up within the organisational hierarchy at every level from the village to cluster
to block to district to State level. The external auditing of the SSA funds in Punjab was done by the Chartered Accountant, Comptroller and Auditor General of India and the Internal Auditors of India appointed by the Government of India. The budget document was also an important instrument to ensure auditing of expenditure incurred by SSAA, Punjab as it gave a clear view of the statement of income and expenditure.

The financial condition of SSAA, Punjab was also discussed by the political executive in the meetings of the Governing Council and Executive Committee of the State Mission for SSA. The financial position of SSAA, Punjab and issues related to it were also discussed in the debates and discussions held during the sessions of the State Legislative Assembly.

TRAINING UNDER SSA

SSA was launched by the Government of India in 2001-02 with the objective of providing meaningful elementary education through simple, joyful and effective pedagogical methods. The programme was implemented with the participation of the Village Education Development Committees (VEDCs). For the purpose of ensuring good quality education and participation of VEDCs, training of teachers, members of the VEDCs and administrative officials was considered a critical component of the implementation of SSA. SSAA, Punjab provided 20 days in-service training to primary and upper primary teachers (now reduced to 12 days) every year; two days orientation training to the members of the VEDCs every year and organised regular workshops for the administrative officials.

The teachers training programme called “Preparation for Learning Enhancement in Punjab at Elementary Level (PLEP)” was conducted after meticulous planning and assessment of the needs and requirements of the teachers. Training for the teachers was conducted in a ‘cascade mode’ whereby key resource persons comprising of faculty from the State Council for Educational Research and Training (SCERT), District Institutes of Education and Training (DIET) and officials from the State Project Office were trained in various workshops by the national resource institutions like NCERT, NUEPA, IGNOU and NCTE. The key resource persons were apprised with various new techniques of classroom processes and techniques to develop training modules in order to strengthen
the qualitative aspect of SSA. They were acquainted with the emerging trends in pedagogy by regular visits to different national level resource institutions. They were also provided training in activities like material and module development and monitoring. The faculty members of the DIET, Ropar and Fatehgarh Sahib were trained in 2004 at NCERT; but after that they were not given any further training nor did they play any role in teachers’ training subsequently.

The second link in the training process was the training of resource persons by key resource persons. The key resource persons trained the resource persons for 2-3 days in the DIETs located in the districts. The resource persons were the block elementary education officers, block resource centre co-ordinators and senior lecturers from the school cadre. The number of resource persons trained depended on the number of educational blocks in the district. Their training was oriented towards the content knowledge, new pedagogical skills, development of the teaching-learning material, classroom transaction processes, and awareness of the problems of elementary schools in the State, etc. The training of the resource persons was very important as they directly trained the teachers.

The next and the most important level of training was at the block and cluster level where the primary and upper primary teachers were imparted twenty days in-service training by the trained resource persons. The training sessions were organized in batches of 40-50 teachers who were trained through lectures by resource persons. The participation of teachers was encouraged during the training sessions whereby they shared their experiences and apprised their fellow teachers of the successful teaching practices they had adopted in their classes.

SSAA, Punjab also organised two days orientation training for the VEDC members to apprise them of the aims and objectives of SSA and their role in planning and implementing SSA. Apart from this, regular workshops were also organised for the administrative officials to train them in various aspects of elementary education and SSA.
Section III

MAIN FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The main findings of the study have been presented below hypothesis-wise.

HYPOTHESIS – 1

The targets of SSA were set unrealistically by the Central Government.

SSA was a centrally sponsored scheme launched in 2001-02 all over India with the aim of achieving UEE by the year 2010. Its primary objective was to achieve complete enrollment in the 6-14 years age-group by 2005. This objective was originally set to be achieved by all the states of India including Punjab (a non-DPEP State) by the year 2003. The target year was extended within three years of the launch of the programme as many non-DPEP states including Punjab had not even undertaken the baseline assessment survey. The change in the target year regarding the very first basic objective of enrollment in the first three years of the programme itself reflects that the mission was planned and launched without even considering the ground realities. There was no evidence available of any systematic exercise having been undertaken before the launch of the programme. In fact, the baseline assessment survey on the total child population in Punjab, children enrolled in schools, teacher-pupil ratio etc. in all the districts of the State was done after the launch of the programme. Further, after the baseline assessment survey, two to three years went into building school infrastructure. Though implementation of the programme had started earlier it was on adhoc basis. Thus, in real sense, the implementation of the programme took off from mid-2005 only. As a result of the late start, the State lagged in implementing and achieving the objective of complete enrollment by 2005.

This discussion supports the hypothesis that “the targets of SSA were set unrealistically by the Central Government”.
HYPOTHESIS 2

SSAA, Punjab has failed in its goal of bringing all children in the 6-14 years age-group back to school by 2005.

The primary objective of SSA was the achievement of complete enrollment of all children in the 6-14 years age-group by 2005. SSAA, Punjab took a number of steps to achieve this objective like opening schools, launching enrollment drives, giving incentive like free textbooks, free bicycles for upper primary girls and vocational education for making education meaningful for life. Special steps were initiated to enroll and educate Children with Special Needs. Arrangements for alternative schooling were made in the form of Education Guarantee Scheme (EGS) and Alternative and Innovative Education (AIE) centres for those children who due to some reasons like earning compulsions could not come to regular schools. This had definitely ensured accessibility of education and increased the enrollment of children (both boys and girls) in the government schools of the State.

Despite these initiatives, the authorities were grappling with the large number of out-of-school children (both drop-outs and never enrolled). As per the household survey conducted by SSAA, Punjab in January, 2008, there were 100457 out-of-school children in Punjab, 2684 in Ropar, 1060 in Fatehgarh Sahib and 6202 in Muktsar in the 6-14 years age-group. In 2010-11, 65,422 children in the 6-14 years age-group still remained out-of-school, exposing the failure of the authorities in containing the drop-out rate. Out of 65,422 out-of-school children in the State, 25,053 were in the age-group of 6-8 years, 18,076 in the 8-11 years and 22,293 in the 11-14 years. There were 976 out-of-school children in the said age-group in Ropar, 1,443 in Fatehgarh Sahib and 3,447 in Muktsar. This was a clear reflection of SSAA, Punjab’s inadequacy in achieving the very first objective of SSA i.e. achieving complete enrollment by 2005. SSAA, Punjab was way behind in achieving the very first target of bringing back all children in the age-group of 6-14 years by 2005.

These findings revealed that out-of-school children were a major cause of concern for the authorities in achieving universal enrollment under SSA. A number of reasons were attributed by the officials of SSA and teachers for the child remaining out-of-
school; these were poverty in the family, child’s earning compulsion, lack of interest in studies and parental apathy. On the other hand, parents of out-of-school children interviewed mostly blamed lack of quality education as the major reason for their child either dropping-out of school or for never enrolling apart from poverty and earning compulsions.

This discussion based on the secondary data and interviews with the parents and teachers supports the hypothesis that “SSAA, Punjab has failed in its goal of bringing all children in the 6-14 years age-group back to school by 2005”.

**HYPOTHESIS 3**

SSAA, Punjab has failed in its goal of providing elementary education of satisfactory quality with emphasis on education for life under SSA.

SSA aimed at providing elementary education of satisfactory quality with emphasis on imparting life skills. SSAA, Punjab took a number of initiatives like better school infrastructure with the presence of boundary walls, drinking water facilities, separate toilet facilities, innovative techniques of teaching through computers, provision of vocational education at upper primary level, innovative vocabulary building workbooks for students to enhance students vocabulary, education through the use of teaching-learning material like charts, audio-visual aids, chalks, chalkboards, slide projectors, education kits, science kits, mathematics kits, geometry boxes, globe etc., reorientation of the Punjab School Education Board syllabus according to the National Curriculum Framework, 2005 to bring it at par with the national standards and make it more interesting and qualitative.

Despite these initiatives, the results of the first ever survey of the basic education skills conducted by the office of SSAA, Punjab under the ‘Parho Punjab Project’ among the government primary school children in the State reflected poorly on the quality of elementary education. According to the results of the survey, more than 50% of the class V students did not know how to read a story in Punjabi, over 25% could not write even the Punjabi alphabets, almost 40% did not know how to subtract and almost 70% did not
know how to divide. In Ropar, around 12% of Class V students did not know how to recognize numbers; in Fatehgarh Sahib, around 17% of the students did not know how to read in Punjabi; and, in Muktsar, over 60% of the students could not read a full story in Punjabi. A number of reasons were attributed for the poor quality of elementary education like paralysing curriculum; burden of non-comprehension due to the pedagogy of learning by rote; books and teaching aids not reaching in time; and non-availability of teachers for vocational education.

Further, though provision for vocational education was made but the teachers for imparting vocational education were not available. Moreover, the vocational education was imparted in traditional crafts and it did not expose the students to modern and new avenues.

Apart from this, a number of issues also affected primary and upper primary teachers of the State like high teacher-pupil ratio; vacancies of teachers; single teacher schools; involvement of teachers in non-teaching activities; lack of involvement and interest in teaching due to factors like unwanted postings, demotivating environment, unavailability of teachers for vocational education etc. having a negative impact on the quality of elementary education

This discussion on various aspects of the quality of elementary education imparted supports the hypothesis that “SSAA, Punjab has failed in its goal of providing elementary education of satisfactory quality with emphasis on education for life”.

**HYPOTHESIS 4**

SSAA, Punjab has failed in its goal of bridging gender and social equity gaps under SSA by 2010.

SSA laid special emphasis on the education of girls, Scheduled Caste children and Children with Special Needs. Special measures were initiated to enroll more girls in schools under SSA like free textbooks, uniforms, free education under SSA, provision of bicycles at upper primary level, vocational education in cutting, sewing and embroidery
at upper primary level etc. Despite these initiatives, the drop-out rate among girls was reported to be as high as 21.3% in primary classes and 34.76% in upper primary classes in 2007-08. It was also reported that large number of girls did not enroll in school for number of reasons like poverty in the family, socio-cultural factors, compulsion to take up household work and child-care commitments of the younger siblings. Similarly, high drop-out rate among the Scheduled Caste students (boys as well as girls) was also reported due to factors like poverty in the family, earning compulsions, lack of interest in studies, failure and last but not the least social discrimination practiced against them in schools. Despite the adoption of the ‘Zero Rejection Policy’ to educate Children with Special Needs, success was achieved in educating only those orthopaedically handicapped children who could manage to come to school. However, not many students with other types of handicaps like visually impaired or mentally challenged could be enrolled and taught either due to paucity of the resource teachers or due to lack of special facilities for them. Thus, a large number of students (both boys and girls from the Scheduled Castes category as well as Children with Special Needs) in the age-group of 6-14 years remained out-of-school.

This discussion supports the hypothesis that the “SSAA, Punjab has failed in its goal of bridging gender and social equity gaps under SSA by 2010”.

HYPOTHESIS 5

a) SSAA, Punjab followed a decentralized approach of planning under SSA.

b) The community played an active role in planning.

The essence of the successful implementation of SSA was the devised system of micro planning where plans were to be formulated by the Village Education and Development Committees. The discussions undertaken with the Assistant State Project Director, Planning, SSAA, Punjab and the District Project Co-ordinators of Ropar, Fatehgarh Sahib and Muktsar revealed that the Village Education Development Committees did not play any role in the planning process. The data and figures regarding number of schools, enrollment rates, drop-out rate and other indicators of SSA were
collected by cluster heads either on phone or through personal visits, these were compiled and sent to the block head office. All the blocks then sent the compiled figures to the district head offices and district plans were prepared which were then compiled to form the state plan for SSA. Finally, the head office at the State presented its changed plan to the national level for grants; apparently, at the State head office to present the State in a better light at the national level to avail the grants.

The primary data collected by holding discussions with the sample of Village Education Development Committee members in the three districts of Ropar, Fatehgarh Sahib and Muktsar revealed that they were unaware of the provision according them a central role in planning under SSA. Furthermore, no initiative was taken by the authorities to train the unaware and largely illiterate members in the planning process nor any other mode of involving them adopted. The plans under SSA were formulated to the total exclusion of the Village Education Development Committees in Punjab. The planning process under SSA in Punjab had negated the idea of setting up a separate organisational framework to implement SSA with the full involvement of the community. The process of plan formulation adopted by SSAA, Punjab clearly reflected the traditional approach of centralised functioning of government organisations with no role of community. The plans were formulated by officials of SSAA, Punjab to the total exclusion of the VEDCs.

The primary and secondary data did not support the hypotheses that “SSAA, Punjab followed a decentralized approach of planning,” and that “the community played an active role in planning.”

HYPOTHESIS 6

The monitoring of the programme was weak.

The monitoring of the implementation of SSA in Punjab was done both internally and externally. Internal monitoring of the programme was undertaken along with the functioning of the organisational machinery; monitoring by the VEDCs was the first level of monitoring. Primary data collected through interview schedules and discussions with a
sample of teachers and VEDC members showed the weakness of the internal monitoring system. 25% of the teachers in both Ropar and Fatehgarh Sahib and 32.5% in Muktsar said that the VEDC members did not visit their schools.

The irregular meetings of VEDCs was also an issue; they met as the need arose. The head teacher of the school, who was the secretary of the VEDC, visited the VEDC members’ houses and got the minutes of the meetings signed. Other issues pertaining to improvement in enrollment, curtailing drop-out rate, girls’ education were rarely discussed. Furthermore, while the inspection teams from the cluster and block level visited the schools hardly any team from the district or State head office had visited the schools. The monitoring by the cluster and block teams involved an approach to monitoring by rule of thumb with input of hospitality than yielding anything positive. According to the teachers interviewed the inspecting teams from the State head office had visited Ropar and Fatehgarh Sahib, which were near Chandigarh (SSAA, Punjab’s office was located in Chandigarh) but no such visit was undertaken to Muktsar.

On the other hand, external monitoring was undertaken by different agencies outside the organisational framework like the Joint Review Mission and the Department of Education, Panjab University, Chandigarh. External monitoring had its inherent limitation of the long time gap that elapsed between the successive reviews and submission of reports. Thus, the lapses noted by them were much after the occurrence. The reports submitted by the external monitoring agencies were discussed in the annual meetings of the Project Approval Board which were held when the Annual Work Plan and Budget of the State was discussed in March-April. Making matters worse, SSAA, Punjab did not even submit the action taken reports. This was a far cry from the regular and tight monitoring needed for a programme like SSA.

This discussion supports the hypothesis that “the monitoring of the programme was weak”.

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HYPOTHESIS 7

The working of SSAA, Punjab lacked transparency in its functioning.

In the course of the research data was to be drawn from the Annual Work Plan and Budget (AWP&B) documents, Annual Reports and District Information on School Education (DISE) survey of SSAA, Punjab. The experience of the researcher in getting this information, technically belonging to the public domain, was indeed an arduous one. The researcher was not provided any information by the State Project Director, SSAA, Punjab’s office, not even the approved Annual Work Plan and Budget (AWP&B) and the annual reports of the office. Thus, the researcher had to use the figures given in the report of the Comptroller and the Auditor General of India and newspapers. After a number of frustrated attempts at getting these documents through meeting the officials concerned and having a word put in by their colleagues who were known personally to the researcher, as a last resort the Right to Information Act, 2005 was invoked to get the data. However, even the queries under the Right to Information Act, 2005 did not elicit the complete information and no reason for this omission was provided as mandatorily required under the Act. The concerned authorities were undeterred by the repercussions of not providing the sought information under the Right to Information Act, 2005. Further, on various occasions, some of the officials explained away their poor records maintenance on account of various reasons like the wide coverage of the programme across the whole State, enormity of the data to be collected, collated and processed, an all-in-all tedious and complex process. Others were categorical about not providing the information under any circumstances. The attitude of the officials regarding maintenance of data was in gross violation of Section 4 of the Right to Information Act, 2005. Thus, the functioning of SSAA, Punjab was found to lack transparency.

This discussion supports the hypothesis that “the working of SSAA, Punjab lacked transparency in its functioning”.

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HYPOTHESIS 8

The finances for Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan were not fully utilised due to reasons like irregular disbursal, political interference, poor co-ordination and vested interests.

A study of the channel of fund flow, timing of the release of funds, its utilisation w.r.t. civil works and Management and Management Information System (MIS) costs, informal discussions with the officials of SSAA, Punjab, teachers and members of VEDCs revealed the mismatch between the allocation and expenditure of money. A number of reasons like irregular disbursal, political interference, poor co-ordination and vested interests were reported. The main reason for irregular disbursal of money to the districts was the delay in the release of grant by the Central and the State Government. The often cited reason for the delay in the central grant was that the State Government could not maintain 1999-2000 level of expenditure on education as stipulated in the Memorandum of Understanding signed between the Centre and the State. Further, the State did not release its share of funds, thereby, blocking the release of the Central share of grants. On the other hand, precarious financial position was cited as the reason for the delay in the release of the State’s share of grants.

Political interference was also reported in the disbursal of money within the State and districts. The politically strong districts, blocks and villages got more money and on time. Thus, the needy areas remained starved of funds. Instances of corruption also came to notice from newspaper reports and informal discussions with teachers and officials. A case in point revealed during informal discussion was that sometimes the money was asked for the construction of a whole room while actually money was needed just to construct a wall. Even the State Project Director, SSAA, Punjab and the report of the Comptroller and Auditor General of India had accepted to the prevalence of large scale misappropriation of SSA funds in the past six years of the launch of SSA in the State.

This discussion supports the hypothesis that “the finances for Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan were not fully utilised due to reasons like irregular disbursal, political interference, poor co-ordination and vested interests”.

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HYPOTHESIS 9

Monitoring of funds expended under SSA was weak.

Monitoring and auditing of SSA finances was done both internally and externally. The internal auditing of expenditure was done by the audit and accounts branch of SSAA, Punjab. The Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAGI) had referred to the weakness in the internal audit in SSA. This was also admitted to by the State Project Director (SPD), SSAA, Punjab. Moreover, the Finance Committee – the highest body set up to review SSA funds – had never met to date as a full body.

External Auditing of SSA, Punjab funds undertaken by the Chartered Accountant, the Comptroller and Auditor General of India and the Institute of Public Auditors of India, New Delhi appointed by the Ministry of Human Resource Development had its own inherent weaknesses. The Chartered Accountant was appointed in the office of SSAA, Punjab in 2005-06 on contract basis; no information was provided on who conducted the statutory audit of SSA, Punjab before this. The Institute of Public Auditors of India, New Delhi in its report ‘Monitoring the Financial Aspects of SSA in Punjab’ reported that a retired cashier from the State Education Department was entrusted with funds management and cash handling and there was no other superior officer to supervise his work although his work involved handling of huge public funds. Further, a long time elapsed between the two consecutive audits done by the CAGI and the Institute of Public Auditors of India, New Delhi. The financial audit of SSA funds by the CAGI in Punjab was last conducted in 2006; it could not be a comprehensive exercise owing to the expanse of the programme.

The auditing of SSA funds at the political level was also weak. The Governing Council had met only once since its inception in 2000 (17th April, 2003). On the other hand, the Executive Committee of SSA, Punjab had met annually but these meetings simply served the purpose of approving the budget which had already been discussed in the office of the SPD, SSAA, Punjab. Apparently, no detailed discussions on financial irregularities of SSA funds or misappropriation of SSA finances had taken place at the political level. Even, the legislative control over the funds of SSAA, Punjab was weak. The State Vidhan Sabha debates revealed that questions on education pertained to
specific issues like imparting education through Education Satellite (EDUSAT), upgradation of schools, creation of new posts of teachers, opening new colleges, adarsh schools and training teachers but there was nothing constructive and substantial in them pertaining to the financial position of SSAA, Punjab. Further, upto February 2008, the discussions during voting on the demands for grants also revealed no discussion on financial irregularities of SSA funds; the demands for grants were passed without discussion. The budget document, which itself was a monitoring document, did not reveal anything about the financial status of SSAA, Punjab. The traditional line item budgeting technique was followed. This reflected the indifferent attitude of the opposition in discussing important programmes of public interest like SSA. There was delay in discussing the reports of the CAGI. Hence, the political monitoring was customary and occasional.

The discussion on monitoring and auditing of SSA funds supports the hypothesis “that the monitoring of funds expended under SSA was weak.”

HYPOTHESIS 10

The functionaries associated with the programme were not oriented in the new educational techniques and strategies.

a) The key resource persons and resource persons were not imparted adequate training.

b) The teachers were not oriented in the new educational techniques and strategies.

Observations of the researcher and interviews with resource persons and teachers revealed that SSAA, Punjab did not follow any structured mode of training. The faculty members of the DIET, Ropar and Fatehgarh Sahib were trained as key resource persons in 2004 at NCERT; however, they were neither given any further training nor did they play any role in teachers’ training subsequently. The training wing of SSAA, Punjab along with SCERT planned and organised training sessions for the teachers. The resource persons, allotted this duty by the school authorities, perceived it as a punishment; those
having political backing managed to get theirs cancelled. The resource persons were found lacking in their abilities to train primary and upper primary teachers; they were not specialists, they delivered uninspired, repetitive routine lectures that did not address needs of the teachers; dealt with issues in a theoretical manner which did not address the local level and practical issues.

This discussion on the training of the key resource persons and resource persons supports the sub hypothesis that “the key resource persons and resource persons were not imparted adequate training.”

It was also found that the teachers were not oriented in the new educational techniques and strategies. The teachers perceived training to be just a formality, a condition which they must fulfill. As a result there was large scale dissatisfaction with the training sessions culminating in state wide protests against them in December 2008. The reasons cited were:

a) Training was imparted by inexperienced trainers (63.3% in Ropar, 83.35% in Fatehgarh Sahib and 83.3% in Muktsar);

b) Training sessions were unplanned with lot of repetition in the training content (63.15% in Ropar, 88.23% in Fatehgarh Sahib and 83.33% in Muktsar);

c) Training did not help in enhancing teaching skills and did not impart new pedagogical skills;

d) Training did not update knowledge as it did not impart any new instructional skills;

Training sessions were said to be more fruitful for the new recruits and those who had not undergone repeated training.

This discussion on teachers’ training supported the sub hypothesis that “the teachers were not oriented in the new educational techniques and strategies.”

The discussion on the training of key resource persons, resource persons and teachers supports the hypothesis that “the functionaries associated with the programme were not oriented in the new educational techniques and strategies”.

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HYPOTHESIS 11

The VEDC members were not imparted requisite training that would ensure their participation in the programme.

SSAA, Punjab was imparting two days orientation training to the VEDC members in all the villages of the State. However, the ground reality was different from the stated position. 40% of the respondents (VEDC members) in Ropar, 33.3% in Fatehgarh Sahib and 60% in Muktsar were not even aware of the provision of their training under SSA and many of those who were aware of it had attended the training sessions. The content of their training sessions aimed at orienting them in the aims and objectives of SSA, their role under SSA and undertaking civil works. A majority of VEDC members interviewed said that they were told about the maintenance of accounts and use of different types of grants. However, they were neither told nor imparted any training about their role in making plans and budget for SSA.

The primary data and discussions with the Village Education Development Committee members support the hypothesis that “the VEDC members were not imparted requisite training that would ensure their participation in the programme”.

Section IV

SUGGESTIONS

The study suggests that there is a vast gap between theory and practice that needs to be bridged. However, the various suggestions given cannot be studied and implemented in a compartmentalized way. For clarity, they have, however, been categorized on the basis of their main focus.

OUT-OF-SCHOOL CHILDREN
1. The policy makers must accept that parental apathy is not always the reason for the child remaining out-of-school. The administrators, at all levels, including teachers must implement the programme of SSA in its true spirit.
2. The school calendar must be synchronized with local patterns of agricultural activity to curtail drop-out rate and ensuring retention of students in schools. Children migrating during the agricultural season should be issued achievement cards indicating their learning levels. Association with other states should be held so that these children can be tracked and educated.

3. There is an urgent need for better schooling infrastructure with school buildings, toilets and water facilities especially in remote areas and villages.

4. The non-formal education centres, instead of functioning as parallel centres should be changed over to second shift schools from 2 pm to 6 pm in the already existing school premises as is done in the Union Territory of Chandigarh. This will not only provide an access to the already built infrastructure but will also give a school environment to the students. They must also be provided adequate funds and functionaries. Mass awareness campaigns in slums and unauthorized areas should be held with the help of community leaders where these centres are run.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

5. The need of the hour is to adopt a friendlier curriculum where students can relate education to their life situations. The process of curriculum updation, development of books, learning techniques and technology would have to be made more broad based and need based to take on the challenges of the fast changing technology as also to capture the interest of the beneficiaries. For this, SSAA, Punjab must initiate measures for a greater interface and networking with reputed academic/ research institutions to keep itself abreast of the latest developments in elementary education.

6. More teachers should be appointed to reduce teacher-pupil ratio so that every child gets personalized attention. Shortage of teachers for vocational education should also be covered so that there remains no gap in imparting education to students.

7. The involvement of teachers in non-teaching activities should also be reduced as far as possible so that they can concentrate on teaching. If this is not possible then these duties should be done after school hours.
8. There is an urgent need to appoint locally available persons to teach in places where qualified teachers are unwilling to go. However, this should be a short term arrangement.

9. School surroundings should be improved by providing modern facilities like reading rooms, T.V rooms, indoor and outdoor sports equipment etc.

BRIDGING GENDER AND SOCIAL EQUITY GAPS

10. PTAs should encourage involvement of mothers in education programmes of schools to create awareness especially about girls’ education, reserving positions for mothers in the PTAs should be considered.

11. SSAA, Punjab must make immediate arrangements for opening more upper primary schools for girls at reasonable distance from their homes.

12. Sensitization of special focus groups should be effected by holding awareness camps, celebration of important days with participation of the community; involving media as a partner in awareness and sensitization campaigns; organising meetings and participative workshops with the stakeholders.

13. Disabled children and students from socially disadvantaged groups should be brought in the mainstream by further increasing individualized education development centres in all the districts of the State.

WORKING OF THE ORGANISATIONAL SET UP AND IT’S TRANSPARENCY

14. The Governing Council and Executive Committee should meet regularly both at the national and state level.

15. There is a need to bring about co-ordination and integration between the SSAA, Punjab and the regular education department of the State, thereby, preparing the employees of the education department since the subject of elementary education will be ultimately dealt by the regular education department of the State.

16. The State Government must formulate a plan to absorb the oriented and trained workforce appointed on contract in SSAA, Punjab.
17. There should be effective decentralization of powers to the community encouraging their larger involvement in planning. Other means of involvement like consultations and discussions should be undertaken to tap the wisdom of the community members who may otherwise have low or no education.

18. Transparency in the system should be ensured by putting approved Annual Work Plan and Budget, annual reports of SSAA, Punjab, monitoring reports and other documents in the public domain.

19. There is need to bring about attitudinal changes of the employees by imparting requisite training and taking disciplinary action against defaulters on the part of the organization rather than waiting for someone to go into appeal under the Right to Information Act, 2005.

PHYSICAL AND FINANCIAL MONITORING

20. Physical monitoring of the programme at all levels of the hierarchy should be strengthened. This will ensure better functioning of the organization, better implementation of the programme and, consequently, effectiveness in achievement of objectives.

21. Internal monitoring by the finance wing at all levels of the organisation should be strengthened to keep an eagle eye on the propriety of expenditure on each activity by strengthening internal audit system at all the levels of the hierarchy.

22. Monitoring reports by different monitoring institutions should be submitted on time so that timely improvements can be made. The SSAA, Punjab must submit the action taken report.

23. Steps should be taken to ensure regularity of monitoring at all levels especially by the higher levels. Field visits by the monitoring agencies, follow-up action on their reports and monitoring meetings must be streamlined.

24. External auditing of finances should be strengthened. The politicians must bring their act together to ensure accountability of the money spent. Alongside, the authorities need to move beyond the traditional line-item budgeting technique and adopt a better and transparent ‘Zero Based Budgeting’ technique for a social programme like SSA.
PROVISION OF FINANCES

25. The experience of different countries of the world shows that development is directly linked to high expenditure on education. For instance, China spends around 5.29% of their GDP on education. There is a need to bring education on the priority of the government spending by allocating 4% of GDP as suggested by various commissions and committees.

26. The State Government must set its house in order by releasing its share of grant under SSA so that the Centre’s share is also released in time. This will ensure that the programme does not suffer due to resource crunch.

27. In order to tap more financial sources, panchayats and community members may be motivated to contribute liberally for school activities.

28. Political pressure of politicians in the disbursement of grants to favoured constituencies should be curtailed, in fact, all constituencies must be considered as ‘favoured’ and receive timely disbursements.

STRENGTHENING OF THE ORGANISATIONAL SET UP FOR TRAINING

29. The training wing of SSAA, Punjab must update the training needs based on the feedback received from the teachers and expertise from the national resource institutions. On this basis, a long lasting comprehensive training policy needs to be evolved for imparting training in a better way.

30. There is a need for capacity building of the personnel at block resource centres and cluster resource centres in collaboration with DIETs as they can serve as crucial academic resource centres at the sub-distriict level. The personnel at block resource centres and cluster resource centres were more preoccupied with data collection and administrative activities than academic matters.

31. Training modules should be prepared for the training of administrative officials in the office procedures and practices, and approach and commitment towards various aspects of SSA. This will go a long way in improving planning and implementation for SSA and strengthening the interface with the stakeholders.
32. There is a need to have effective and constant monitoring mechanism at the headquarters by strengthening the training wing in the office of the State Project Director, SSAA, Punjab.

**TRAINING OF TRAINERS**

33. The selection criteria of trainers should be rigorous and transparent based on their capability, qualifications, experience, commitment and communicative skills.

34. It is essential that the training of trainers at each level be undertaken at regular intervals so that they show sufficient initiative and capacity to shoulder the responsibilities and tackle local issues.

**TRAINING OF TEACHERS**

35. The needs of the teaching community should be assessed properly by initiating a dialogue between the teaching community and policy makers to discuss the nature and feasibility of the existing programme.

36. There should be proper survey of the training needs of male and female teachers (rural and urban), teachers running schools single handedly, first line receivers of training and the experienced teachers. On this basis, a comprehensive training policy should be formulated which will add to their efficiency and enhance quality of education.

37. The teachers training sessions must emphasise on effective classroom pedagogy like imparting activity based education (learning while doing); adopting participative method of teaching by encouraging focused group discussions and practical work, developing motivational skills, handling difficult cases/ situations and motivating parents/ community. Based on local conditions, issues such as children’s mother tongue and cultural background, discrimination of girls, and education of Scheduled Castes children should also be addressed during training sessions.

38. SSAA, Punjab could examine whether more focused and goal oriented training be given to teachers every alternate year rather than annual training sessions.
IN Volvement of the Community

39. There is a need to make sustained efforts in increasing the awareness levels of the community by ensuring effective interaction between the community members and SSA functionaries. This will increase their awareness about the importance of education and can be motivated to send their children to schools. Educated persons should come forward, join hands with VEDC members and take the lead in promoting elementary education.

40. The VEDC members should be trained through structured training modules on micro planning, school mapping and maintenance of accounts on continuous basis to strengthen their capacity to plan and monitor the implementation of the programme. This will enhance their effective participation in the programme and address the problem of underutilisation of funds.

41. Parent-Teacher Associations should be actively involved in the functioning of schools by holding regular meetings. This will go a long way in improving the communication channels between parents and school authorities.

42. Wider participation of NGOs and other civil society organizations must be encouraged. They must be associated in training the VEDC members in planning and monitoring the programme. Furthermore, the SSA authorities in Punjab must assign them a role in generating awareness and sensitizing the community about the role and importance of education, the aims and objectives of SSA and provisions made in government schools under SSA.

However, there are various issues relating to SSA in the context of new paradigms of Public Administration that can be studied as part of the future researches in the area. For instance, the importance of the private sector in education in the present day globalized world and exploring the role of private sector as a partner in achieving universalisation of elementary education. The study may pertain to the impact of availability of more choices parents will have in the education sector. Another issue that can be taken up for future study is the evaluation of returns on huge financial investments made by the government in the social sector. These areas of study were beyond the scope of the present work due to its limited scope. The researcher will feel amply rewarded if
the present study stimulates serious thinking in crucial areas of implementation of SSA. The gaps that exist for systemic enquiry due to the delineated scope of the study may provide rich areas for future research.