

INDIA

Strengthening and Extending Child rights in the Primary Education Sector of Kerala

Jayalekshmi. S, P.S. Mathew and M.V. Mukundan

1. Introduction

India is one of the cradles of human civilization. The independent India can be described as the land of unity in diversity which encompasses geography, culture, language, gender, food and religion. The constitution of India and other legislations provide ample provisions for the protection of children. The right of equality, protection of life and personal liberty and the right against exploitation are enshrined in several Articles of the Constitution. Children have a right to development in all aspects of their lives that include physical, emotional, psychosocial, cognitive, educational, social and cultural aspects. Children have the right to peaceful school assembly, to be active participants in all matters affecting their lives, to express their opinions freely and to have their views heard and taken seriously. Various studies on child rights have concluded that children are capable of expressing their feelings, concerns and aspirations within contexts that respect their feeling and are adapted to their ways of communicating issues of their concern.

Government of India ratified the UN convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in 1992. The UNCRC outlines the fundamental rights of children. The Convention prescribes standards to be adhered to by all State parties in securing the best interest of the child. The rights of survival, development, protection and participation are recognized as basic human rights of children. The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (Right to Education Act, RTE Act) came into force in India in 2009, for ensuring quality education to children of the age ranging from 8 – 14 years.

Kerala was the first state in India to be recognized as a fully literate state in 1991. Kerala has enviable records of achievement in social indicators also. Human develop-

ment has been the focus of successive Government policies and programmes. Child rights have received a fillip with several unique initiatives of UNCRC network since 2004, Bala Panchayats (Child Parliament), Child budgeting and Social Security Mission. All these initiatives function at school, village and district levels. *The CRC network in Kerala* has constituted a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) called *APPROACH* in 2013-14, for enhancing the child rights in Kerala.

However, concerns remain regarding the availability of an environment for the full enjoyment of child rights. According to the national records, there are increasing crime rates against children, food and nutritional security issues of children of vulnerable groups, sanitation and health issues in the context of increased urbanization, mental health problems of adolescents, drug abuse among children, child abuse, deficit of support systems for the disabled and children in difficult circumstances and last but not the least, financial support for the children, especially the under privileged, for meeting the basic requirements.

The Kerala State Commission for Protection of Child Rights (KSCPCR) was established in April 2013, which is responsible for the protection of child rights in Kerala under the Kerala State Commission for Protection of Child Rights Rules, 2012. This project envisages the intervention for strengthening and extending child rights in the primary sector throughout Kerala. This project attempts to identify priority issues through an intensive study of the child rights interventions made at the district and school levels by various agencies and to suggest the ways and means for implementing child rights in all schools in Kerala through addressing the issues in the curriculum.

2. Frame of Reference

The CRC network in Kerala (*APPROACH*) is already involved in various research projects, highlighting the CRC related interventions at school and district levels. However, this team intends to take up the CRC to a higher level, so that the tenets of CRC are extended throughout the state of Kerala with a holistic perspective. This effort is a booster to the steps already taken by the Department of Education in imparting child rights through various institutions.

The State Government has already constituted the Child Rights Commission in Kerala which itself shows the commitment of the Government of Kerala in safeguarding the rights of children. Also the State is now engaged in the process of curriculum revision from pre-primary to higher secondary levels as well as the pre-service teacher training course.

Curriculum, in its true and complete meaning, includes aims of education and schooling, the subject matter, content and their sequencing across grades, the learning experiences provided to the students using various approaches, methods and media, the nature and form of assessment, the general educational environment provided to the students based on their context of development and the infrastructure involved in organization and the provisions made there in. Curriculum undergoes changes and

reforms from time to time, based on the changes in the vision and the aspirations of the learners. Developing a curriculum to meet its curricular vision and perspectives by highlighting the needs of learners and emphasizing the all-round development of the child is a huge challenge for the planners, policy makers and practitioners. Kerala is currently engaged in this challenging task of curriculum revision. It is in this context the study gains its relevance. We take this opportunity as a starting point of initiating an intervention which encompasses all the desired aspirations in building up a progressive society. This project, through an impact study which focuses on the effectiveness of the child rights interventions already carried out in the state, will suggest future plan of action in this regard.

3. Purpose

To strengthen Child Rights Convention throughout the State by providing proposal to the Policy makers and Administrators for integrating CRC inputs in the ongoing revision of Primary school curriculum in Kerala.

4. Methodology (Activities)

The team members have joint assignments under this change project. The following are the areas of work and the target groups selected for the study.

Team members	Areas of work	Target Group
Dr. M.V. Mukundan Principal, District Institute of Educational training (DIET)	Policy formulation related to curriculum development, its implementation and monitoring	1. Policy makers and administrators which include State Curriculum Steering Committee, comprises of; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Govt. Secretary for General Education • Director of Public Instruction • Director, SCERT • All Dept. Heads • Academicians • Teacher organisations 2. Stakeholders <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education officers • Faculty members of DIETs • Faculty members of SCERT • District Project officers, Sarva Shiksha Abhayan, Kerala • CRC Network, India • Headmasters, Teachers, Students and Parents
Mr. P.S.Mathew Deputy Director of Education		
Dr. Jayalekshmi. S Research Officer, State Council of Educational Research and Training (SCERT)		

As part of the study, the activities were carried out in a phased manner which consists of three phases.

Phase I

1. Interacted with the Director, SCERT and shared the experiences of ITP at Sweden and about the project and also submitted a report on the programme. We also shared experiences with faculty members of SCERT.
2. Interacted with the Secretary, General Education Department, Government of Kerala and the Director of Public Instruction and presented a brief report of ITP in Sweden about the project.
3. Interacted with Child rights commission in Kerala and suggested them to advise the State Policy makers to include Child rights as a major component in the curriculum.

Phase II

1. Conducted in-depth discussion with the CRC change agents for collecting information about CRC interventions made by them in various schools.
2. Observed the child rights activities implemented in securing the best interest of children in some of the schools in the districts of Pathanamthitta and Kottayam.
3. Analysed various documents related to Child rights such as UNCRC Handbook, Change projects from the International Training Programmes of various batches, Kerala's Real Story in Ensuring Child Rights, and materials relating to child rights interventions prepared, released and have given training to the entire teacher community by SCERT such as Anti Drug Abuse Awareness Manual, Life Skill Education Handbook focusing on the social and emotional skills and also for the care of the health of children, Manual on Road Safety, Student Police Cadet Manual, Manual on Counselling, interactive DVDs for language learning and also the relevant pages of child rights in the D Ed curriculum.
4. From the workshop organised by SCERT, the team members collected responses on the implementation of child rights in the schools from 75 teachers from various parts of Kerala, who had undergone massive teacher empowerment programmes on management aspects, which also had a major module on professional ethics and child rights.
5. The Kerala Child rights Commission convened a special seminar while a new scheme called NIREEKSHANA, an online complaint registering system for the school children in Kerala, was inaugurated by Hon'ble Minister for Social Justice. The seminar consisted of different sessions on different issues related to

child rights. We, the team members were invited and actively participated in the sessions.

6. Organised National Seminar on Child rights at DIET, Pathanamthitta in which our Mentor Prof. Per Wickenberg presented a paper on Child rights.
7. Extended the awareness of child rights to the teachers of schools in Lakshadweep Islands through teacher empowerment programme wherein Kerala curriculum is followed. One of the team members acted as resource person for the programme.
8. Participated actively in the preparation of handbooks on Education and Health related to Children, Teachers, Parents, Children with Special Education Needs and Inclusive Education done at district level in Pathanamthitta. All books contain chapters on Child rights.
9. Consolidated Child rights-related interventions introduced in the State based on the aforesaid activities.

The following significant interventions provided us clarity about the overall scenario within the State as regard to the 3 Ps in CRC:

- Making the schools child friendly – the oath, the display board
- Awareness rally, activity camps
- Alternate school festival
- Formation of PPTA
- School Parliament
- My tree project, organic cultivation
- Learning material preparation, plastic free campaign
- Sahavasa Camp
- Swimming training, puppetry, Ayurvedic camp, exposure trip
- Vegetable cultivation, house visits
- Soap making, book binding, field trip, story writing
- Supply of health card, training on life skills, formation of code of conduct in the class
- Strengthening of Class Council activities
- Preparation of individual development plan
- Formation of reading circle, strengthening of club activities
- Kaumarya Deepika – a programme for girl children
- Keeping students box and timely follow up
- Road safety programme
- Launching of website link on child rights
- Healthy body for healthy and creative individual
- Parental meetings
- Various club activities
- Provision of nutritious food

- Equal opportunity to all children
 - Child friendly city project at Nilambur – special practices like Yoga, Motivation classes, Communicative English
 - Toll free number to all students and parents in the municipality
 - Suggestion boxes in all schools
 - Child protection councils
 - Participation of school children in decision making
 - Cascade model trainings
 - Trainings from state level on life skills, anti drug abuse programmes, road safety, counselling etc.
10. Prepared a descriptive report highlighting the major areas related to CRC and the suggestions to be incorporated in the primary education curriculum.

In order to ensure that the 3 Ps enshrined in the UNCRC (Provision, Protection and participation) are not something to be merely stated in the textbooks but should provide chances for the children for constructing and experiencing the skills, attitude and values along with knowledge. The curriculum being hidden should have slots for the transaction of the following areas. This enables the children to experience the 3 Ps in letter and spirit:

- Democratic outlook
- Concept of equality
- Sense of Secularism
- Respect to culture and heritage
- Tolerance
- Civic sense
- Peace education
- Environment protection
- Health and hygiene
- Outlook on sustainable development
- Attitude against drug, alcohol and tobacco
- Awareness about ill-effects of consumerism
- Road safety
- Adolescent education
- Gender equality
- Judicial literacy
- Awareness about cyber crime
- Media awareness
- Creative thinking
- Critical thinking

- Leadership skills
- Life skill education

The suggestions given to the curriculum makers are:

- Textbooks should be child-friendly
- The textbook cover should be colourful and should contain illustrative pictures of various activities of children
- The curriculum should reflect the essence of Right to Education and right based approach
- The textbook should contain fundamental duties enshrined in the Constitution on India
- The textbook should contain child rights
- The presentation of the content should be child-friendly
- Ample slots for child involvement and interaction should be provided in the textbooks
- No gender discrimination should be there in the textbook as well as in the its transaction
- Sufficient slots should be there in the textbooks to address the major areas identified with respect to Child rights
- The evolution of child rights
- Support material related to Art education, Physical and Health education, Work experience for all children
- Provision for food and nutrition for all children
- Support to CWSEN
- Freedom should be given to the teachers to adopt suitable learning strategies to ensure the participation of all children
- Role of teachers should be redefined as mentors
- Teacher text should be evolved leading the students to get hands-on-experiences
- Various club activities ensuring the participation of all children
- Areas of values should be incorporated in the textbooks

The Government of Kerala has declared the revision of curriculum from pre-primary to higher secondary classes in a phased manner and the work is entrusted with SCERT. In the year 2014-15, the revised textbooks were implemented for classes 1, 3, 5, 7 & 11, in 2015-16 the revised textbooks for classes 2, 4, 6, 8 & 12 will be implemented and in the year 2016-17 revised textbooks for classes IX & X will be implemented.

The team members were aware of the fact that preparing suggestions will not yield any results unless and otherwise they themselves involve as stakeholders in curriculum development process. So we took part in the curriculum development process from the initial stage itself. The challenge faced by the team members was that how to convince

the curriculum developers to evolve strategies for integrating and incorporating 3 Ps in the content areas.

The following section elaborates the features of Kerala school curriculum and the process of curriculum development. Curriculum outlines the knowledge, skills, performances, attitudes, and values children are expected to learn from schooling. It includes statements of desired pupil outcomes, descriptions of materials, and the planned sequence that will be used to help children attain the outcomes. It includes the syllabi, textbooks and other teaching-learning materials, the methods/strategies employed, assessment and other aspects, like norms and values which relate to the way the schools are organised. Activity is the heart of the child's attempt to make sense of the world around him/her. Therefore, every resource must be deployed to enable children to express themselves, handle objects, explore their natural and social milieu, and to grow up healthy. Children's classroom experiences are to be organised in a manner that permits them to construct knowledge. Thus, the School Curriculum Framework of Kerala, 2013 has a philosophical backdrop of Constructivism. It incorporates the features such as:

1. Connecting knowledge to life outside the school
2. Enriching curriculum to provide for overall development of children rather than remain textbook centric
3. Nurturing an over-riding identity informed by caring concerns within the democratic polity of the country
4. Making examinations more flexible and integrated into classroom life
5. Ensuring learning shift away from the rote methods

The Right to Education Act, 2009, and the Rights based Education are the backbone of the revised curriculum. Kerala develops curriculum with the participation of all the stakeholders of the state. Kerala Curriculum includes various curricular materials such as syllabi, textbooks, supplementary materials, and assessment guidelines, adapted materials for special children, teacher texts, worksheets and teacher training modules. Curriculum is developed in such a manner which ensures learning of all children. Learning outcomes were fixed at all stages of school education for various subjects and also for each unit the subjects in each class. Curriculum has provided sufficient slots for ensuring learning outcomes in every child, which helps to improve quality of education.

The process followed by the State for the development of curriculum vision paper, syllabus, textbooks and teacher texts is:

- School Curriculum Steering Committee is formed under the chairmanship of Hon'ble Minister for Education, Government of Kerala in which Director, SCERT is the convenor. This Committee is the policy making body.
- An expert committee was formed by the Government to examine the need for curriculum revision and to develop a platform for the revision.
- A core committee consists of Department heads, experts and teacher organisation representatives was formed by the Government under the Chairmanship of the

Secretary, General Education and its convenor is Director, SCERT. This committee monitors and evaluates the curriculum revision process and makes suggestions. One of the team members is a joint convenor of the committee (Annexure).

- Formation of textbook development committee which includes national experts, subject experts from various universities in Kerala and the practicing teachers. This committee prepares the syllabus and syllabus grid which consists of concepts, processes/activities, learning outcomes and assessment, develops textbooks and teacher texts through workshops.
- Formation of subject expert committee and curriculum sub-committee. These committees scrutinise the text materials and it is modified according to their suggestions.
- The final products such as vision paper, syllabus, textbooks and teacher texts are submitted to the curriculum committee for approval.

Since the curriculum development is an evolving process, which involves various steps, the team members made use of their official and professional stakes as and when required. Being one of the team members is a joint convenor of the core committee appointed by Government for monitoring and evaluating the curriculum revision, the process at the state level became more conducive.

The following activities were carried out under phase III.

Phase III

1. The Government has appointed two committees, one for examining the need for curriculum revision and to develop a platform for the new curriculum and the other for examining the problems confronted by the higher secondary sector. The team interacted with both the committees and convinced them on the need for incorporating child rights in curriculum in the context of implementing RTE Act in Kerala.
2. Interacted with the participants who were involved in the curriculum vision paper development workshops based on the expert committee report.
3. A write-up on child rights was developed for giving suggestions on including various aspects of the child rights and given to the textbook development committee of all subjects for incorporating the areas of child rights in the syllabus grid of all subjects of all classes and ensured its inclusion.
4. A convergence workshop was conducted by SCERT for finalising the syllabus grid of all subjects of all classes. The team members have ensured the inclusion of all aspects of child rights in the curriculum.
5. Attended a meeting organised by the Child Rights Commission along with other officials in Department of Education, wherein the Secretary, General education Department, Government of Kerala has also participated. At that meeting, it was decided to write to the Government, that the cover page of the textbooks

should include messages and logos of Child Rights and also the inner page of the textbooks should contain the child rights.

In addition to the broader areas of CRC suggested, the team members felt the need of submitting some specific level-wise suggestions. Due to the deliberations related to curriculum development, the following level-wise suggestions for integrating 3 Ps in the textbooks and teacher texts were evolved and based on the suggestions, activities and content were incorporated in the revised textbooks.

Classes I – V (Lower Primary)

- Health and Hygiene
- Food and nutrition
- Family relations
- Slots for participation in activities
- Learning strategies / activities for ensuring the participation of all children
- Area for promoting the need for access for all children
- The cover page should carry the messages of child rights (pictures, logos, photographs etc.)
- Areas such as Children’s Parliament, Mid-day Meal Programme etc.
- Slots for differentiated learning strategies and differentiated assessment strategies
- Provision for discussion on Road Safety, issues against child abuse
- Awareness activities against physical and mental harassment of children
- Discussions on creative participation in school parliament and club activities
- Activity guides for art, physical and health education

Classes VI – VIII (Upper Primary)

In addition to the above topics:

- The historical evolution of child rights acts in India
- Prohibition of child labour act
- Civil rights and civil responsibility
- UN declaration – ratification and implementation
- Right to Education Act
- Various Commissions and Agencies
- Discussions on violation of child rights at school, home and society
- Discussions on the evil effects on drug, alcohol and tobacco use

5. Results

This project has thrown some light in the school sector in varied dimensions. The results of the CRC interventions made at district and school levels have given us enlightenment regarding the various components of child rights to be addressed in different textbooks. Though based on the state policy on curriculum revision, the team members have succeeded in convincing and incorporating right based components in the implemented curriculum throughout the state. As a result, new textbooks for classes 1, 3, 5 & 7 consisted of variety of slots for dealing with the 3 Ps. The entire teacher folk in the State got basic training as regards to CRC. Child rights have become the prime concern of the entire society. Child rights Commission has given prominence in inviting team members for the academic interventions.

As a token of the approval from the part of the policy makers, in the expert committee report on curriculum revision, it is clearly stated that contextual and relevant activities related to child rights issues and its various concepts need to be addressed in the curriculum. Participation of children could be ensured in the preparation of curriculum.

In the Kerala School Curriculum, 2013 (vision document) it is stated that, to develop engaged citizens who are physically healthy, emotionally intelligent, personally effective, socially responsible, aesthetically sensitive who have character, commitment and courage with global consciousness and local connectedness, some core areas including themes of child rights like anti drug abuse, gender equality, road safety, life skill education, peace education, health aspects, human rights, child rights, co-operation, democratic values, access to information and use of latest technology/tools like computers etc for enhancing the knowledge, equality and secular feeling embedded in the Indian Constitution which are identified based on values, attitudes and commitment should be integrated by using a purposeful process of infusing these affective coaching in the cognitive exercises for the harmonious integration of head, heart and hands and should be included in the content areas of all subjects from pre-primary to higher secondary level.

All the textbooks contain front inner cover page printed in with fundamental duties enshrined in the Indian Constitution and back inner page printed in with Children's rights and major responsibilities. The contact information of various agencies who take care of child right protection activities were given in the cover page itself. The content of the textbooks include suggested areas at various levels.

As quality education has been considered as the right of the child, curriculum ensures the attainment of learning outcomes in every child. For the effective implementation of the curriculum, teachers should be empowered for the integration of 3 Ps in the learning process. The team members extended their services in the preparation of teacher text and in the preparation of modules for the massive teacher training programme for the entire teacher community. In the teacher text developed for all classes, practical tips for the integration of 3 Ps in the teaching-learning process, to overcome the challenge faced by the teachers, is given.

The teacher training module consisted of one specific session for dealing with Right based Education which provided slots for the preparation of action plans by the teachers for the effective implementation of right based education in schools.

6. Discussion and Reflection

The CRC change agents in Kerala are actively involved in various projects related to the propagation of UNCRC. Many novel interventions were thus, conceived and practised in a piece meal mode in different parts of Kerala. Given the situation, our task was to pool up all the CRC related activities in a holistic manner at the policy level systematically and to implement them throughout the State. Our stakes at the state level helped us positively to take up this project though challenging, was encouraging. May be incidental, the decision of the State Government to revise the existing curriculum was an impetus to the team members for taking up this project. The higher policy makers and authorities supported us in all ways. Also the political decision to implement Right to Education and the constitution of Child rights Commission highlighted the importance of child rights on one part and evoked a public awareness in the entire society. These actions were supplementary inputs in our academic endeavours.

Learner centred pedagogy is followed in Kerala. The textbooks are written in an integrated approach, by giving equal importance to content and pedagogy. Therefore, various dimensions of child rights could be addressed in the content part e.g. Awareness of the child rights and the other dimensions in the pedagogy part e.g. Ensuring participation of all children in the group work for learning and giving chance to all children in the class for feedback and reflections.

One of our reflections is that the observation remarks of the CRC interventions in the districts of Kottayam and Pathanamthitta and the result of the CRC interventions which were made by the DIET, Pathanamthitta, in collaboration with the Panchayath (local self-government) and the state level interventions of SCERT in the curriculum development process will help in strengthening the CRC in all schools throughout the state.

The textbooks of classes 1, 3, 5, 7, and 11 which reflect the essence of rights based approach were approved by the School Curriculum Steering Committee and it was implemented in the year 2014-15.

7. Way Forward

1. Interventions in the textbook development process for classes 2,4,6,8 and 12 which are implemented in year 2015-16.
2. Interventions for the parental awareness programme after the implementation of textbooks through media.
3. Field level close monitoring has to be done so as to find out the difficulties faced during the implementation and to suggest ways to overcome it.

4. Since CRC related activities for its continuance requires a constant attitudinal change among all the stakeholders, constant overview and follow up activities are required.
5. A co-ordination among all the stakeholders is a must. The recently formed NGO by the CRC change agents in Kerala shall take up more supportive activities for the propagation of CRC in Kerala.

8. List of References

1. Change Project Reports of Kerala CRC Network
2. Implementation Handbook for the Convention on the Rights of the Child, UNICEF
3. Newspapers daily dated 13/09/2013
4. Curriculum Study report of NCERT, New Delhi, 2013
5. The revised textbooks of classes 1,3,5,7 and 11 (2014- 2015)
6. Kerala's Real Story in Ensuring Child Rights, The Kerala Network of CRC Change Agents, 2013
7. Manual on Road Safety, Manual on Anti-drug abuse awareness, Handbook on Life Skills and Handbook on Physical and Health education, Handbook on counselling, and interactive DVDs for language learning.

9. List of Annexures

1. Child friendly cover pages of revised textbooks
2. Inner cover pages consisting of fundamental duties and child rights
3. Some relevant pages of revised textbooks dealing with child rights issues
4. Govt. Proceedings showing the members of core committee constituted by the Government for monitoring and evaluating the curriculum revision in which one of the team members is a joint convenor.
5. Photographs of the activities
6. Relevant pages of teacher text containing right based education
7. News paper cutting of the National Seminar organised at DIET, Pathanamthitta