Abstract

It is generally agreed that learning programmes, more so of the adults in order to be effective must be based on their 'felt needs' as for them, learning is interesting when it is based on perceived interests and informed contextual application. Adult learners are those adults who are engaged in learning activities that may promote "any sustained change in thinking, values, or behaviour. Adult education is a highly developed sub-discipline of education where people 'whose major social roles are characteristic of adult status - undertake systematic and sustained learning activities for the purpose of bringing changes in knowledge, attitudes, values, or skills'. The Saakshar Bharat Programme, being one of the Adult Education programmes of India was launched in Meghalaya State in the district of West Garo Hills in August, 2010 at Tura, the district Headquarter. To accelerate the processes of implementation, the SRC, NEHU, Shillong has been providing academic and technical resource support to the State Literacy Mission Authority, (SLMA), District, Block and Village level Committees. It has been observed that in West Garo Hills District of Meghalaya, the overall performance of activities of Saakshar Bharat Programme has not been satisfactory as compared to some other
states in the region and in the country. Keeping this in view, this research attempts to identify the hindrance in the effective implementation of Saakshar Bharat Programme in only the 4 adopted Blocks under West Garo Hills District of Meghalaya from the period of its inception till the 2013. This study used a qualitative descriptive method. It employed a purposive sampling technique. Besides, the officials from the District Literacy Society, a total of 52 women were consulted and self-constructed and validated reliable questionnaire was administered on them. The study aimed to identifying barriers in effective implementation of Sakshaar Bharat Programme in Meghalaya. It has already been asserted that barriers can be located within the learner, within the centre of learning, within the education system and within the broader social, economic and political context. These barriers manifest themselves in different ways and only become obvious when learning breakdown occurs, when learners ‘drop out’ of the system or when the excluded become visible. Sometimes it is possible to identify permanent barriers in the learner or the system which can be addressed through enabling mechanisms and processes. Some of these barriers include lack of time, money, confidence, or interest, lack of information about opportunities, scheduling problems, and problems with child care and transportation. Based on the given findings, suggestions/recommendations are made taking into account the effective implementation of the said programme.

1. Introduction
Adult learners participate in many types of formal and informal education activities in order to become functionally effective in the changing world around them, or for the purpose of achieving personal sense of fulfilment, for bringing about improvement in their lives, or even for the sake of leisure or recreation. Adult learners are autonomous and self-directed learners, they are goal-oriented as well. Adults are practical, focusing on aspects of a lesson most useful to them in their life’s applications. However, adults have many responsibilities that they must balance against the demands of learning and hence, barriers against participating in learning.

1.1 Developmental Barriers to Adult Learning
Barriers may require different interventions or strategies to prevent them from causing learning breakdown or excluding learners from the system. Some of the barriers are -

i.) Socio-Economic Barriers: The relationship between educational provision and the socio-economic conditions in any society must be recognised. Effective learning is fundamentally influenced by the availability of educational resources to meet the needs of any society. In many countries and in most cases, inadequacies in provision are linked to other inequalities in the society such as urban/rural disparities, as well as inequalities arising from discrimination on grounds such as gender, race and disadvantages. Barriers result not only from the inadequacy of provision, but also from policies and practices which are designed to perpetuate these inequalities. Few are lack of access to basic services, poverty and underdevelopment, and factors which place learners at risk.

ii.) Attitudes: Negative and harmful attitudes towards illiterates and poverty in our society remain a critical barrier to learning and development. Discriminatory attitudes resulting from prejudice against people on the basis of qualification, socio-economic, race, class, gender, culture, disability, religion, ability, sexual preference and other characteristics manifest themselves as
barriers to learning when such attitudes are directed towards learners in the education system. Barriers resulting from fear and lack of awareness may arise from educators themselves.

iii.) **Inflexible Curriculum:** One of the most serious barriers to learning and development can be found within the curriculum itself and relates primarily to the inflexible nature of the curriculum which prevents it from meeting diverse needs among learners. When learners are unable to access the curriculum, learning breakdown occurs.

iv.) **Language and Communication:** A further area of barriers arising from the curriculum, are those which result from the medium of teaching and learning. Communication is essential for learning and development in both formal and informal contexts.

v.) **Inaccessible and Unsafe Built Environment:** In many contexts the vast majority of centres of learning are physically inaccessible to a large number of learners, educators and communities. Inaccessibility is particularly evident where centres are physically inaccessible to learners, educators and members of the community. Such inaccessibility often also renders centres unsafe for learners who are not capable to reach the place of learning.

vi.) **Inappropriate and Inadequate Provision of Support Services:** Particular enabling mechanisms and processes are needed to support diversity and enable the education system, including educators and learners, to minimise, remove and prevent barriers which may exist or arise. Where no provision exists for such services, barriers cannot be overcome and needs cannot be met. In some contexts, however, inappropriate or inadequate support services may contribute to learning breakdown or exclusion.

vii.) **Lack of Enabling and Protective Legislation and Policy:** Many of the barriers to learning and development discussed above do not merely arise from problems occurring in the education system or in the wider society. It is often policy and legislation governing the education system and regulating the society which directly or indirectly facilitates the existence of such barriers. Where such legislation or policy fails to protect learners from discrimination or perpetuates particular inequalitiesthe, it directly contributes to the existence or maintenance of such barriers.

viii.) **Lack of Recognition from civil society and Involvement:** The active involvement of the broader community in the teaching and learning process is central to effective learning and development. Such involvement includes recognition for civil society as the primary support such, that they are a central resource to the education system. More specifically, they are critical components for effective governance of centres of learning and for facilitating community ownership of these facilities. Where civil society are not given this recognition or where their participation is not facilitated and encouraged effective learning is threatened and hindered.

ix.) **Lack of Human Resource Development Strategies:** The development of educators, service providers and other human resources is often fragmented and unsustainable. The absence of ongoing in-service training of educators, in particular, often leads to insecurity, uncertainty, low self-esteem and lack of innovative practices in the classroom. This may result in resistance and harmful attitudes towards those learners who experience learning breakdown or towards particular enabling mechanisms.

### 1.2 Adult Education And Saakshar Bharat Programme

A fundamental purpose of adult education is to facilitate growth of persons toward understanding of their self, leading to maturity, consisting of awareness of one’s own skills, abilities, attitudes, assets and responsibilities. Hence, adult education is the practice of teaching and educating adults in the workplace or otherwise in classrooms, through ‘extension’ or ‘continuing education’
organized at primary schools, secondary or college or university levels generally by the adult education professionals. Its usage is more broadened to include learner-centred education for people of all ages, more significantly, adults who already have a fairly large amount of accumulated knowledge and experiences with them. Adult Education and the parameters of literacy may vary from one geographical region to another and from one era to another. It is observed that initially, the definition of literacy was confined to the acquisition of the basic skills of the 3 R’s (reading, writing and arithmetic). Over a period of time, basic literacy was upgraded to functional literacy, expanding further into knowing to do things by using insight. This transformation of literacy is, in fact, associated with its importance for the society as a whole, and to enable a person to effectively participate in the life.

Of all the countries of the world, it is India, which has the biggest literacy problem. About one third of the world’s non-literate people reside in our country. The rationale for the establishment of the National Literacy Mission (NLM) lay in the realisation that the process of nation building would never be complete without giving literacy a major thrust. To recast this mission, Saakshar Bharat Programme, a centrally sponsored scheme of Department of School Education and Literacy (DSEL), Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) was launched by Government of India (GOI). The aims of this Mission are to eradicate illiteracy from the country, and to provide further learning opportunities to the neo literates to improve the quality of their lives. It lays special emphasis on adult literacy especially among the illiterate women and other disadvantaged segments of the society. The Saakshar Bharat Programme also aims at reducing gender gap in literacy covering all adults in the age group of 15 years and beyond, with primary focus on women. It aimed to further promote and strengthen Adult Education, by extending educational options to those adults who having lost the opportunity of access to formal education and crossed the standard age for receiving such education. However, some problems were identified by the researchers in its implementation in West Garo Hills district of Meghalaya.

2. Problem and Justification of The Study

The Saakshar Bharat Programme was launched in Meghalaya State in the district of West Garo Hills on August 12th, 2010 at Tura, the district Headquarter of West Garo Hills. Since then, the State Resource Centre (SRC), NEHU, Shillong has been providing academic and technical resource support to the State Literacy Mission Authority, (SLMA), District, Block and Village level Committees. The Centre has also adopted 4 Blocks of West Garo Hills District, Meghalaya with an aim to make the Adult Education Programme a success. In these four Blocks, the SRC has engaged Block Resource Persons to Co-ordinate the activities at the district, Block and Village levels, and monitor and evaluate the functioning of Adult Education Centres at the village levels. However, it was observed that in West Garo Hills District of Meghalaya, the overall performance of activities of Saakshar Bharat Programme has not been satisfactory as compared to some other states in the region and in the country. The Nationwide Basic Literacy Assessment test for the neo-literates was conducted by District Literacy Society, West Garo Hills District on 20th August, 2011 in which about 9200 neo-literates appeared. However, evaluation of the Answer Script was not done. As a result of this, number of certified neo-literates could not be recorded by the National Institute of Open Schools (NIOS) and National Literacy Mission Authority (NLMA), Govt. of India. Similarly, the District could not conduct the subsequent nationwide Learner’s Assessment Test held on March, 6th, 2012, 20th August, 2012 and March 17th, 2013 to further motivate the learners towards literacy.
3. Delimitation

Keeping in view the above, this research studied the implementation of Saakshar Bharat Programme in only the 4 adopted Blocks under West Garo Hills District of Meghalaya from 2010 till 2013.

4. Objective Of The Present Study

The objective of the study is to identify the hindrances in the effective implementation of Saakshar Bharat Programme and to suggest remedial measures for improvement of Saakshar Bharat Programme in Meghalaya.

5. Methodology Adopted For The Study

This study used a qualitative descriptive method with a purposive sampling technique. The study was conducted in 04 adult education centres in the 4 adopted Blocks under West Garo Hills District of Meghalaya. The AECs sampled were from villages, Rengsangre of Gram Panchayat or the AEC Code - Asanang (Village Code- 109) at Rongram Block, Nokatgre at Selsella block of Gram Panchayat or the AEC Code - Dalupara (Village Code- 0355) , Aminda Rangsa of Gram Panchayat or the AEC Code - Dinegre (Village Code- 0067) at Gambegre block and Wakagre of Gram Panchayat or the AEC Code - Wakkagre (Village Code- 0184) at Betasing block. Its population consisted of all the officials of the District Literacy Society, West Garo Hills, Meghalaya, besides, the total of 52 women who were consulted on a self-constructed/validated and reliable questionnaire.

6. Hindrances in Effective Implementation

It was noted that there was not one single cause for why adults have difficulty with literacy through the Sakshar Bharat Programme in the West Garo Hills District of Meghalaya. The reasons are as varied as the individuals themselves, and also on personal life situations, governmental policies, and glaring societal challenges. Some are reported as below:

i.) Financial Instability: Authorisation of funds by SLMA and delayed deposits in banks for time-bound projects disinterested field level functionaries. Many of the preraks stopped working and left Saakshar Bharat because of delay in honorariums. Though financial inflow was somewhat regular from 2010 to 2011, in the year 2012-2013, there was no activities whatsoever recorded by the district for the Adult Education Centres (AECs). The Block Coordinators could not go for field visits because of lack of TA/DA. Activities of mobilisation/monitoring could not be followed due to non-availability of funds or untimely release of funds to the district.

ii.) Lack of Volunteer teachers in the villages in the absence of honorariums: Since the AEC is meant for the cluster of villages, many learners would not compromise the distances. The AEC centre comprising of 2-5 villages could not accommodate all the learners from all the villages, so a volunteer teacher to teach in their respective villages rose in. However, payment of any remuneration for these village volunteers became a problem. And volunteer’s job became a burden without any incentives. The volunteer teachers in literacy programmes are the grassroots workers and they had long been neglected in the name of voluntarism. Incentives and recognitions do work but does not replace salary.

iii.) No dedicated accommodation for Adult Education Centres: There are any structured buildings in most of the respective AEC centres. Many of the AEC centres are not electrified.
and hence procurement of some important electrical equipment like computers and television had pose problems. It has been ordered by the Directorate of School Education and Literacy that all Lower Primary school buildings should be allowed to run the literacy classes in the village level. This is of very little help since the adult learners goes to school in the evenings after the day’s work is completed. Many Lower Primary Schools in the villages has no electricity connection. Few schools having electricity has poor voltage available at night time which makes reading and writing difficult for adult learners.

iv.) Non-payment of Honorarium to coordinators, functionaries and Pre-rakes: As the funds of Saakshar Bharat are not authorized in time, the payments of the employees could not be release in due time which really hampers the smooth functioning of the programme. It is also discouraging when preraks of Saakshar Bharat wait for more than 10 months to get only the release of 3-months’ salary. There is also a trend that funds are authorized usually in February just to be closed by 31st March of every single year since its implementation. Other 10 months are only the waiting months when activities like mobilisation and monitoring could not take place in time.

v.) Non-availability of funds for mobilization: Non-availability of funds for mobilization at State, District and Block levels and inadequate funds at Gram Panchayat/AEC level is where the district could not take a step further as many monthly review meetings with the Block Coordinators had to be undertaken without travelling allowance (TA) or Daily Allowance (DA) for these functionaries. Not to talk of TA, these Block Coordinators are without honorarium for 6 months during the days of 2012-2013. The preraks in the GP level had been engaged in survey work without any TA/DA and not getting enough encouragement even before the work could be started.

vi.) Vocational Education Programme has no funds: Vocational Education Programme has less funds been out of just Rs.2250/- per month for management in the AEC centre is to be utilized for the training purposes as well. Many AEC Chairmen/Secretaries felt that this amount would meant only for contingencies, meetings, TA/DA, buying books for libraries and purchasing newspapers on daily basis. With all these expenses, there is hardly anything left for the vocational training to be organised.

vii.) Negativity of the Adult Learners: Illiteracy has been shown to be correlates with a variety of social problems. However, the adult education centres in the villages of West Garo Hills seem to be in a “bad-shape” to correlate it with the positivity of the development of self-esteem of the learner. Only 23% (unmarried) of 52 women respondents enjoy attending adult education centres. 77% of respondents associated it with negative functioning of the preraks who are irregular and demotivated due to less or no pay. They revealed that working as labourers for daily wage learners rather than spending their time in the AECs is preferable. 50% said Sakshaar Bharat programme is a mismatched Government policy to their life-oriented field –works.

viii.) Learners’ Assessment Test held during the years 2012 and 2013: Some people have intellectual limitations or disabilities that made literacy challenging for them. These may affect reasoning, learning and problem solving. So, many back out before the assessment periods. Learning elements amongst adult learners like motivation, reinforcement, retention, transference failed to be manifested as they responded to this query.
7. Positive Effects Of The Implementation

Saakshar Bharat Mission goes beyond “3”R’s because it seeks to create awareness of social disparities and a person’s deprivation on the means for its amelioration and general well-being. Its principal target is to impart functional literacy to adults in the age group of 15 years and beyond. Thus attempts have been made to understand the “Attitude of adult education learner toward the Sakshar Bharat programme” of 52 rural women through individual and focus group interviews, found that literacy had positive impact on their self-esteem. They were happy to inform that they could read, learn and write the basics of life. Many household with minimum of literacy had learned to have the access to electricity and simple entrepreneurial skills. Their income-generating abilities grew faster and stronger. They expressed more confidence in moving “out” for their own benefit and the family’s development. The study revealed that 85 per cent of literacy learners reported an improvement in their self-concept.

8. To Suggest Remedial Measures For Improvement Of Saakshar Bharat Programme In Meghalaya

I. Today in the villages of West Garo Hills District of Meghalaya, the most important and widespread interventions for women’s empowerment are micro credit or self-help group programmes. To realise the objectives of such programmes, substantive literacy and capacity-building inputs should be ensured and appropriate programmes developed and all promoters of such programmes across different departments of the Government and each should be responsible for implementing them. Investing in innovative programmes and approaches and drawing lessons for adaptation and expansion is one of the critical needs for regional sharing. Here, creativity is the first step toward improvement.

II. The teaching and learning of adult literacy programmes cannot be overemphasized if educators do not have right qualification in adult teaching and learning. Follow up workshops/ In-service training / regular academic activities for preraks’ and other adult educators’ andragogy training should move in towards implementation of the said programme.

III. Motivational factor on the part of adult learners is very important. Monitory incentive and a certificate of completion can be of smoother methodical design of the programme. Adequate care needs to be taken so as to make payment for the attendance as an incentive. Enough care has to be taken as to give fewer burdens to the District and Block coordinators with online portals. Skill Development Programme can be implemented on larger scale. Prerak’s honorarium and the volunteer teachers timely payment is to be ensured so that programme should not lead to unavailability of the workforce.

IV. Literacy programmes may incorporate life skills education to the largest means. A strong demand exists for post-literacy training in income earning skills, but no model exists for meeting this demand successfully on a large scale.

V. A combination of quality primary education, non-formal basic education for adolescents and youth, and a network of non-formal and adult education programmes are essential to combat illiteracy.

VI. Fixed duration campaigns to carry out literacy courses on a mass scale are not effective. Campaigns of fixed duration with a focus on mechanical acquaintance with alphabet and targets for declaring districts as “free from illiteracy” do not reflect an understanding of literacy and how it can make a difference in lives of people.
VII. One view that holds a very significant place in the failure of the programme is the “top to bottom” approach taken up to execute SBP. Successful grounded grassroots-level studies should uniquely be based on the genuine and specific problems of each village, each block, and specific district. Attempts to explore into “uncommon and district/village specific drawbacks” by every policy makers, decision takers and high rank functionaries exterior to the field may be a mandate for a triumph of any programme.

VIII. Management of literacy, continuing education and non-formal education needs to be based on government-civil society partnership and decentralized enough to make it responsive to local conditions and accountable to the community.

IX. Financing of the SBP should be given top priority and it should be serious. Bottom approach from AEC maintenance to provision of learning & teaching materials to administration and evaluation of assessment procedures to regular organization of the adult education/AECs should be monitored with full attentiveness and application.

X. Learning occurs within each individual as a continual process throughout life—motivation, reinforcement, retention, transference are four critical elements of learning that must be addressed to ensure that participants learn.

9. References