

Primary Education in India: Imperatives for Right to Education

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ABSTRACT

Education is necessary factor for the development of any country. Growth of human capital depends upon qualitative development of education. India is the hub of human capital. But the quality of its human capital is low. Therefore we are not able to take advantage of this population. When population of any country is able to utilize resource with full potential, then new ways to development opens. Development in education sector leads to development in other sectors like health, environment and social safety. When education sector is developed, then only we can achieve Nehru's dream of 'ending of Illiteracy, inequality, poverty and disease.' Gandhiji has called that 'Basic education' is the indicator of development in any country. An elementary education is institution where children receive the first stage of compulsory education known as primary education. Elementary school exists worldwide as the basic foundation institution in the formal educational structure. Elementary Education System in India is the second largest in the world effect on 1 April 2010, ensures the rights of all Indian children aged between six and 14 years to free and compulsory elementary education. Against this background, present paper highlights the emerging trends in primary education in India and imperatives for Right to Education Act.

Introduction

The education of children is influenced by interplay of a range of factors at school, society and family, especially for the tribal children. For school participation, it is important that all the three factors should be positive or at least one or two factors should be strongly favourable. The children from families with more socio-economic resources are more often enrolled in school. For wealthier families, the direct costs associated with education, such as fees, books and uniforms are less likely to be an obstacle. Opportunity costs of children not being able to help at home, at the family farm or by earning additional income through child labour, are also less important to them (Evangelista de Carvalho Filho, 2008; Basu, 1999). Besides household wealth, the educational level and labour market position of the parents is expected

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to play a role. There is ample evidence that children from better educated parents more often go to school and tend to drop out less (UNESCO, 2010). Parents who have reached a certain educational level might want their children to achieve at least that level (Breen & Goldthorpe, 1997). For educational enrolment of girls, education of the mother might be especially important (Emerson & Portela Souza, 2007; Shu, 2004; Kambhampati & Pal, 2001; Fuller, Singer and Keiley, 1995). Mothers who have succeeded in completing a certain level of education have experienced its value and know that it is within the reach of girls to complete that level. Therefore, we expect them to use the power and insights derived from their higher education to make sure that their daughters are educated too (Smits & Gündüz-Hogör, 2006).

The income of the parents plays a strong determinant of children education. Regarding father's labor market position, we expect fathers who are in salaried employment to be more aware of the importance of education and hence to invest more in their children's education (Breen & Goldthorpe, 1997). The children themselves may also be more aware of the benefits of education. On the other hand, parents are less likely to invest in their children's education when direct occupational transmission or transference of capital is a viable option to obtain a good position in society for their children (Treiman & Ganzeboom, 1990; Blau & Duncan, 1967). Hence farmers and business owners may feel less need to invest in their children's education than people in dependent employment. Also, for small farmers the opportunity costs of sending their children to school may be high, since they are more likely to expect their children to help out tending the land and rearing livestock, especially during peak working times (Bhalotra & Heady 2003; Basu, Das & Dutta, 2003).

Education in today's world is undoubtedly the most powerful tool to ignite the young minds and guide the young generation. At a time when our society is fast evolving, it is sound education that builds the young generation with knowledge and values and empowers them to dream big. Development and education go hand in hand, no society can make progress and transform itself without investing in educating its citizens. The base for which is laid with elementary education. It is for this reason all 189 member nations of United Nations committed to achieving the Millennium development goals (MDGs). The second MDG pledges to achieve universal primary education. It is for this Indian parliament enacted the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Bill, 2009, to provide education to all children between 6 to 14 years of age. The bill also reserves one fourth of seats in private schools to weaker section of society. However, any change in policy does not immediately translate into practice in schools.

Concentrated efforts must be made by states and departments of school education to capitalize on the policy changes and to ensure that good quality education is made available to one and all the children. India recognizes education as a fundamental right of a child and makes appropriate provisions in its constitution to impart the same. The Right of Children to 'Free' and 'Compulsory' Education (RTE) Act, 2009 ensures that every child in the age group of 6 - 14 years has a right to full time elementary education of satisfactory and standard quality in a formal school that fulfils essential norms and standard as per the requirements. The RTE Act came into effect on 1 April 2010.

Right To Education

There have been significant developments in Indian education during the 11th Five Year Plan. There has been a surge in school enrolments while gender and social category gaps in enrolments have been narrowed considerably. Expansion of school infrastructure and facilities has significantly widened the access to schooling while incentives such as textbooks, mid day meals and uniforms to large number of children have further increased the school enrolments, retention and improved the nutritional status of children. Article 21-A, was incorporated in the Constitution of India through the Constitution Act, 2002 to make elementary education a fundamental right, followed by the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009, which became operative on 1st April 2010. The RTE Act is a milestone in the journey towards achieving the goal of universal, equitable and quality education. This development has far reaching implications for elementary education in the years to come. It implies that every child has a right to elementary education of satisfactory and equitable quality in a formal school which meets certain essential norms and standards. The RTE Act incorporates the principles of child centered education spelt out in the National Policy on Education and elaborated in the National Curriculum Framework 2005; these have now become part of educational legislation. Government has since revised the Framework of Implementation for Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan to correspond with the provisions of the RTE Act, as also the fund sharing pattern between the Central and State Governments to provide for a more favorable sharing ratio for the States. The Government has also accorded approval to a financial estimate of Rs 2.31 lakh crore for the implementation of the RTE Act over a period of five years for the period 2010-15. The 13th Finance Commission earmarked a sum of Rs 23,068 crore for the same period specifically towards elementary education. Notification of teacher qualifications under section 23 of the RTE Act and the prescription of a Teacher Eligibility Test by the National Council for Teacher Education were other significant developments pursuant to the RTE Act becoming operative in the country. Several initiatives were

also taken in the States to support the RTE Act, including that: (a) 20 States notified the RTE Rules, (b) 31 States issued notifications prohibiting corporal punishment and mental harassment; (c) 25 States issued notifications prohibiting screening for admission and capitation fees; (d) 31 States issued notifications prohibiting expulsion and detention; (e) 30 States issued notification banning Board examinations till completion of elementary education; (e) 27 States notified academic authority under RTE Act. Several States have also initiated steps to conduct the Teacher Eligibility Test. These policy initiatives have contributed to in the country's efforts to universalize elementary education.

Some of the key strengths of the RTE are:

- The Act clearly makes the state responsible for ensuring that every child, in the age group of 6-14, receives schooling for eight years, instead of merely shifting the onus for this to the parents, a majority of who are illiterate and mired in poverty.
- The Act reiterates the role of the state, along with private and aided schools, to satisfy certain basic norms in terms of infrastructure, learning facilities and the academic calendar. This is important since the quality of inputs has bearing on education outcomes.
- The Act mandates a minimum Pupil-Teacher Ratio and explicitly requires the same to be maintained in each school, rather than as an average over a block or a district.
- The Act prescribes the minimum qualifications of teachers and their academic responsibilities along with the minimum quality of the content and process. This can positively impact the actual quality of education provided within our schools.

There has been steady progress toward universal elementary education over last two decades with enactment of the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act 2009 which makes it the right of every Indian between 6-14 years of age to gain admission for education to complete 8 years elementary schooling. About 199 million children have universal access with gender parity at elementary level education. Furthermore of the 14.6 million children who joined elementary schools between 2007-08 and 2012-13, 56 percent were girls 32 percent from disadvantaged groups of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes and 59 percent Muslims. School infrastructure has climbed up to 1.4 million schools with 7.72 million teachers so that 98 percent habitations have a primary school (class I-V) within one kilometer and 92 percent have an upper primary school (class VI-VIII) within three kilometer walking distance. Out of school children and dropout rates have

reduced substantially, however teacher shortage and quality of teaching – learning processes and learning outcomes are the new challenges. One of the world's largest Mid Day Meal program provides 108 million children school meals daily to help retention

Education is universally affected as most important determinant of economic wellbeing of households. Progress in educational attainment of girls and women has positive impacts on children as well as on economic status of family. Universalization of education has been one of the important development agenda, however, gender and social gaps in education still remain significant. India still has the largest number of illiterate population. There has been significant improvement in gross enrolment ratios at primary and middle school stages during the corresponding period; however, gender disparity in education still remains significantly. One of the biggest challenges of education is the problem of dropouts. Though, dropout rates over the period have come down, the rates are still quite high for the elementary and secondary levels. Poor educational facilities coupled with economic distress often force children to dropout of schools, mostly to look for employment. Among the states, dropout rates for girls at the primary level are found to be very high in the states of Bihar, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh. North-eastern states so higher dropout rates for boys as well as girls. Dropout rates are found to be much higher for the disadvantaged classes as compared to general population.

Right to Education Act

The Parliament of India has recently passed Right to Education Act through which education has become fundamental right of all children of age group 6-14 years and is the most substantive declaration of the government's responsibility towards ensuring universal quality education. The Act clearly makes the state responsible for ensuring that every child, in the age group of 6-14, receives schooling for eight years, instead of merely shifting the onus for this to the parents, a majority of who are illiterate and mired in poverty. The Act reiterates the role of the state, along with private and aided schools, to satisfy certain basic norms in terms of infrastructure, learning facilities and the academic calendar. This is important since the quality of inputs has bearing on education outcomes. The Act mandates a minimum Pupil-Teacher Ratio and explicitly requires the same to be maintained in each school, rather than as an average over a block or a district. The Act prescribes the minimum qualifications of teachers and their academic responsibilities along with the minimum quality of the content and process. This can positively impact the actual quality of education provided within our schools.

Features of the Right to Education Act:

- Right of children to free and compulsory education:
- Right of free and compulsory education to every child from the age of 6 to 14 years
- No child will be liable to pay any kind of fee or charge, which may prevent him or her from pursuing elementary education Standards for recognition of schools:
- Prescribed norms and standards highlighting parameters such as ideal pupil-teacher ratio and minimum number of working days
- Certificate of recognition from competent local authority for operating school
- Schools not conforming to the norms and standards specified in the schedule and formed before the Act to fulfill such norms.

There has been significant improvement in schools meeting selected RTE norms during the period of 2010-2012. However, pupile teacher ratio was reported to be 42.8 in 2012. About 40 per cent schools do not have playground while about 45 per cent schools do not have boundary wall/fencing. A large segment of schools do not provide proper toilet facility while a large number of schools do not have proper toilet facility for girls. About 16 per cent schools do not have kitchen set for cooking Mid-Day meal. Similarly, a large number of schools do not have proper library facility. During the year 2014, there has been remarkable progress in school facilities which shows an improving trend due to implementation of RTE Act.

There has been increasing trend in the enrolment of children in the age group of 6-14 years in private schools. During 2006, 18.7 per cent children of this age group were enrolled in private schools in rural areas while during 2014, this has increased to 30.8 per cent. During 2014, more than half of the students in Uttar Pradesh and Haryana were found enrolled in private schools while the states of West Bengal, Odisha and Bihar recorded the low enrolment of students in private schools. Pupil Teacher ratio was recorded higher in the states of Kerala, Manipur, Nagaland, Jammu and Kashmir, Mizoram, Tripura and Karnataka while it was reported low in Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand and Madhya Pradesh during 2011. Teacher classroom ratio was recorded high in Mizoram, Gujarat, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Uttarakhand, Rajasthan, Punjab and Uttar Pradesh while it was recorded low in Manipur, Bihar, Chhattisgarh and Tripura in 2011.

Growth of Institutions

There has been remarkable growth in recognized educational institutions in India during the recent period. There were 8.4 lakh primary schools and 4.29

lakh upper primary schools during 2015-16. The total number of secondary and senior secondary schools was reported to be 2.5 lakhs. There were about 4 lakh institutions of higher education during 2015-16. The total enrolment of students in primary education was reported 129.1 million during 2015-16. However, the enrolment in primary schools has decreased significantly over the period of 2011-12 to 2015-16. However, enrolment of students in upper primary schools has significantly increased over the period. The total enrolment of students in upper primary schools during 2015-16 was recorded 67.6 million. Similarly, total enrolment of students in secondary education was recorded 39.1 million during the year. During 2014-15, in the primary school age group (6-10 year olds), 49 percent of urban and 21 percent of rural children attended private schools. That nearly half of all primary age children in urban India are studying in private schools is striking. In the upper primary school age group (11-14 year olds), a rather smaller proportion is attending private unaided schools (40.7 percent in urban and 17.5 percent in rural India. In urban areas, at the secondary school stage, the proportion attending private schools shrinks further still, to 36 percent - compared with 49 percent at the primary and 41 percent at the upper primary stage. States with high prevalence of private schooling are Andhra, Haryana, Punjab, Rajasthan, Telengana and Uttar Pradesh.

The overwhelming majority of schools were government schools while proportion of private aided and private unaided recognized schools was also recorded significant in most of the states. Even, the proportion of private unaided unrecognized schools was reported significant in the state of Assam, Kerala, Jharkhand and Bihar. The proportion of Madarsas against total number of schools was found significant in the state of Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Telengana, Madhya Pradesh and Bihar. Over the four year period 2010-11 to 2014-15, the total stock of government schools in India increased by a mere 16,376 govt. schools. By contrast the number of private schools rose by 71,360 schools. Despite the modest increase in the number of govt. schools, the total enrolment in govt. schools over this period actually fell by 11.1 million (1 crore 11 lakh) students, whereas total enrolment in private schools rose by 16 million (1 crore 60 lakh) students, over the same 4 year period. In some states, the growth of private schooling was very pronounced in Uttar Pradesh, the number of private schools rose by 31,196 over this short four-year period, and private school enrolment rose by nearly 7 million (70 lakh) students and govt. school enrolment fell by 2.6 million (26 lakh) students, over this four-year period.

Gross Enrolment of Students

There has been fluctuating trend in gross enrolment of students in primary level during the period of 1990-91 to 2015-16. Gross enrolment has declined

over the period. During 2015-16, 99.2 per cent gross enrolment was recorded. Gross enrolment was recorded slightly high among females as compared to males. Similarly, gross enrolment in upper primary level has also shown fluctuating trend. However, it has shown an increasing trend since 2011-12. Gross enrolment in elementary schools has shown a declining trend over the corresponding period. Between 2000-01 and 2013-14, the enrolment of girls as percentage of total enrolment registered substantial improvement at all levels of school education. The enrolment of girls as percentage of total enrolment in primary education (Classes I-V) increased from 43.8 per cent in 2000-01 to 48.4 per cent in 2012-13 and then marginally declined to 48.2 per cent in 2013-14. The overall increase in the enrolment of girls as percentage of total enrolment in primary education was 4.4 percentage points during the period 2000-01 to 2013-14. The improvement has been more pronounced at the upper primary stage. The enrolment of girls as percentage of total enrolment in upper primary education (Classes VI-VIII) increased from 40.9 per cent in 2000-01 to 48.8 per cent in 2012-13 and then marginally declined to 48.6 per cent in 2013-14. The overall increase in the enrolment of girls as percentage of total enrolment in upper primary education was 7.7 percentage points during the period 2000-01 to 2013-14. The enrolment of girls as percentage of total enrolment in elementary education (Classes VI-VIII) increased from 43 per cent in 2000-01 to 48.5 per cent in 2012-13 and then declined to 48.3 per cent in 2013-14. The overall increase in the enrolment of girls as percentage of total enrolment in elementary education was 5.3 percentage points during the period 2000-01 to 2013-14.

Conclusion

During the last decades, the role of education as a cornerstone for growth, development and social progress gained unanimous consensus. Universal education is one of the main objectives of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and education is one of the three achievements being used by United Nations to compute the Human Development Index. These recognitions can be seen as an arrival point for classic economic theories and as a starting point for new development theories and practices concerning the importance of education. Development of education is often accompanied by a changing perception and a major request of human rights. Education can also play a large role in reducing inequality and society stratification. There is a significance correlation between education and health. Accumulation of human capital plays a crucial role in economic growth theory. In order to develop these characteristics, school, family and experiences are crucial and quality of education act as a strong determinant on which it is important to focus when facing investment decisions.

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