



PRIMARY EDUCATION IN INDIA: PROGRESS AND CHALLENGES

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ABSTRACT

Education has a significant role in the development of the personality of the child. During the phase of school education, primary education is one of the strong pillars which determine the development of all the faculties of the child. Even though the government is trying its best to uphold basic education for all, some issues remain unsolved. The primary education is considered as the spring board for latter education. The paper provides an overview of the progress as well as challenges in primary education in India.

Key Words: Primary education, progress, challenges

INTRODUCTION

Over the past few years, due to the various programs and drives conducted by the Government of India to increase enrolment in remote areas, India has made tremendous progress in schooling and enrollment rates of primary education across the length and breadth of the country.¹ However, the dropout rates and low levels of quality learning still remain considerable challenges for the state and the central government. The enrollment reaching 96% since 2009, and girls making up 56% of new students, it is quite astonishing that many of the problems related to school access have already been addressed. Immense improvements have been made to the infrastructure of public schools, thereby resulting in 1.4 million schools operating in India, with 7.7 million teachers ready to give guidance to the budding engineers, doctors, and future sports personalities of our country.²

Making children get enrolled in schools is not the end of the story, but perhaps the beginning. Despite these efforts put in by the various governments of our country, keeping children in school through graduation is still an immensely important issue the government has to address. Moreover, the quality of learning is a major issue and according to reports children are not achieving class-appropriate learning levels. To address the most important issue of all, the quality of education offered, the main thing which has to be addressed and rectified is to increase teacher accountability. Better assessments at each grade level and more efficient monitoring and support systems. By and large, the public school system of our country needs better people managing the whole system. One more of the serious problems haunting the education system of our country are gender issues, where recent cases of violence against girls are on the

rise. This issue can be addressed and altered by changing gender mindsets to be imperative and educating the crowd about gender studies.³

PROGRESS OF PRIMARY EDUCATION

In recent decades India has made significant progress on access to schooling and enrollment rates in primary education but dropout rates and low levels of learning remain challenges for the state and central government. As the U.S. has a longer history of public education than India there are opportunities for India to learn from the successes and failures in the American education system and to collaborate in tackling shared challenges, such as the best use of technology in primary education. Primary school enrollment in India has been a success story, largely due to various programs and drives to increase enrolment even in remote areas. With enrollment reaching at least 96 percent since 2009, and girls making up 56 percent of new students between 2007 and 2013, it is clear that many problems of access to schooling have been addressed. Improvements to infrastructure have been a priority to achieve this and India now has 1.4 million schools and 7.7 million teachers so that 98 percent of habitations have a primary school (class I-V) within one kilometer and 92 percent have an upper primary school (class VI-VIII) within a three-kilometer walking distance.⁴

Some of the issues which need to be understood and worked on, to improve the overall situation of the primary education in India are:

Optimization of Technology

Technology has a lot of potential in our country to improve the overall education, but how it can be cost-effectively implemented still remains a question. So far philanthropists and incubators are the ones who have helped to identify and scale best practices. A more officially driven effort is required to evaluate digital content and even more important to develop cost-effective methods of making these available to teachers and students in areas where resources are scarce.

Educating the teachers

The lack of quality learning in India's schools calls for changes to be made to the teacher education. Collaborating public schools with private schools could help build capacity and upgrade teacher education both in terms of curriculum and pedagogy, which is much needed in today's time.

Building good assessment systems

Good assessments are useful at the classroom level for teachers to gauge their students' understanding and also to inform policy. The need for regular and useful assessments in India is something that Indian departments of education are focusing on at the central and state level.

Gender Studies Education

The state of women in India has recently drawn a lot of attention and promoting gender equality through education has an important role to play. Boys and girls should be taught to think about gender equality from an early age and the curriculum should include gender studies with appropriate teacher training.⁵

Despite these improvements, keeping children in school through graduation is still an issue and dropout rates continue to be high. Nationally 29 per cent of children drop out before completing five years of primary school, and 43 per cent before finishing upper primary school. High school completion is only 42 per cent. This lands India among the top five nations for out-of-school children of primary school age, with 1.4 million 6 to 11 year olds not attending school. In many ways schools are not equipped to handle the full population – there is a teacher shortage of 689,000 teachers in primary schools, only 53 percent of schools have functional girls’ toilets and 74 percent have access to drinking water.⁶

Additionally, the quality of learning is a major issue and reports show that children are not achieving class-appropriate learning levels. According to Pratham’s Annual Status of Education 2013 report, close to 78 percent of children in Standard III and about 50 percent of children in Standard V cannot yet read Standard II texts. Arithmetic is also a cause for concern as only 26 percent students in Standard V can do a division problem. Without immediate and urgent help, these children cannot effectively progress in the education system, and so improving the quality of learning in schools is the next big challenge for both the state and central governments. Improving learning will require attention to many things, including increasing teacher accountability. According to school visits teacher attendance is just 85 percent in primary and middle schools and raising the amount of time teachers spend on-task and increasing their responsibility for student learning also needs improvement. Part of this process requires better assessments at each grade level and more efficient monitoring and support systems. Overall, the public school system also needs a better general management system.⁷

CHALLENGES FACED – PRIMARY EDUCATION IN INDIA

India also faces many challenges that could be tackled through the education system. For one gender issues have come to the fore because of the spate of recent cases of violence against girls. Changing gender mindsets seems to be imperative and gender studies education is one way of doing so. Also India, along with most countries, is concerned with the future of the labour market and employability; Prime Minister Mr. Narendra Modi wants to emphasize skill development in order to make school education more practically relevant.

Infrastructure deficit

In school environment, the dilapidated structures, single-room schools, lack of drinking water facilities, separate toilets and other educational infrastructure are grave problems.

Corruption and leakages

The corruption and leakages include transfer of funds from the central to state to local governments to school leads to involvement of many intermediaries, the fund transfer is drastically reduced by the time it reaches the true beneficiaries and high rates of corruption and leakages plague the system, undermine its legitimacy and harm the many thousands of honest headmasters and teachers.

Quality of Teachers

The problems like lack of well trained, skilled and knowledgeable teachers which provide the foundation for a high quality education system and teacher shortages and poorly qualified teachers are both a cause and effect of poorly paid and managed teaching cadres.

Non-Academic burden

The teachers are overburdened with senseless reports and administrative workload. This eats into the time which is necessary for teaching and a study by the National Institute of Education Planning and Administration (NIEPA) revealed that teachers spend only around 19 percent of their time teaching while the rest is spent mostly on non-teaching administrative work.

Poor salary

Teachers are paid miserly salaries which affect their interest and dedication to work. They will look for other avenues like tuitions or coaching centers and coax the students to attend it. This has dual effect, firstly the quality of teaching in schools drop and secondly, the poor students are forced to spend money despite constitutional provision of free education.

Teacher Absenteeism

Absence of teachers during school hours is rampant. The lack of accountability and poor governance structures add to the woes.

Lack of Accountability

School Management Committees are largely dysfunctional. Many exist solely on paper. Parents are often not aware of their rights and if they are it is difficult for them to make their voice heard.

High drop-out rates

The drop-out rates in schools, especially girls, is very high. Many factors like poverty, patriarchal mindset, lack of toilets in schools, distance to schools and cultural elements lead to children dropping out from education.

School closure

Many schools are closed to low student strength, lack of teachers and infrastructure. The competition posed by private schools is also a major challenge to government schools.⁸

Obstacles before Primary Education in India

There are many reasons for the ongoing situation in the Primary education in India and can be understood by addressing the obstacles:

- ❖ In India, a large population lives below the poverty line, contributing primarily to the problem.
- ❖ Many schools are yet to be made in the rural sector, and the schools available in the urban areas are sometimes a burden for the parents as the busy roads and traffic make the parents not risk their kids' lives.
- ❖ The conditions of schools in rural areas are another example of the poor functioning of the primary sector.

- ❖ The education system is another constraint to primary education in India. The education given to children or teenagers does not reflect the work environment. This is why parents prefer to send their children to be an apprentice under someone and learn a craft to make a living in the future.
- ❖ Caste discrimination is another reason for the large deficit in the Primary education in India.
- ❖ Allowance of child labour is another obstacle before primary education.
- ❖ Teachers lack motivation and training. ⁹

CONCLUSION

The most pressing problems is the unavailability of money or inadequate funding of Indian Education programs or systems. There are various aspects of education. The demand far exceeds the supply, and available monies are only for the most basic Educational needs of the students. The pre-primary schools lack equipments due to shortage of funds. The pace of progress being slow, there is a dearth of trained teachers and child literature in this field of education.

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