

ELEMENTARY EDUCATION AND INCLUSIVE DEVELOPMENT IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

The analysis clearly reveals the limited success of India in ensuring the minimum levels of education for its population. Despite considerable progress, sharp disparities continue to exist between male and female literacy levels. There is an urgent need that government has to address various aspects for improving literacy and elementary education. Like firstly, more resources have to be allocated to education particularly primary education with the international norm of 6% of GDP. Secondly, the quality of education in terms of curriculum, better infrastructure and teaching has to be improved. Thirdly, social mobilisation of the community against child labour. Fourthly, emphasis on generation of productive employment and minimum wages would reduce the households' dependence on children. Fifthly, Mid-Day Meal Scheme can help increase attendance, improve nutrition reduce dropout rates. Others like, Pre-school education in Integrated Child Development Services, involvement of Panchyats and NGOs, high returns to educational investment, removing institutional constraints, reduction in school fees of private institutions, reduction in distance to school, conditional cash transfers etc. promote primary education. Instead of piece-meal ad-hoc approaches, government should adopt comprehensive policy which will help in achieving the goal of "Education for all" in given short period.

Keywords: Education, Inclusion, Literacy.

INTRODUCTION

Inclusive development can be seen in terms of progress in economic and social inclusion. Despite more than six decades of planning in India, the fruits of development have not reached the desired segments of population who suffers from social and financial exclusion. The wide ranging reforms, have induced greater efficiency and competitiveness in all spheres of economic activities, however its performance in the form of Human Development Indicators has been unsatisfactory. Indicators like education, health, family welfare, employment, women empowerment, rural infrastructure etc. have lagged behind in the race for better standard of living.

Investments in health and education shape the ability of men and women to reach their full potential in society. The population well equipped with education and skills, can contribute effectively to the development of the national as well as global economy. In India the National Policy on Education (NPE) 1986, as modified in 1992 emphasized that education must play a positive and interventionist role in correcting social and regional imbalance, empowering women, and in securing a rightful place for the disadvantaged and the minorities. In India Free education for all children between the age of 6 and 14 years has been made a fundamental right under the RTE Act 2009 with effect from 1 April 2010.

According to World Development Report 2012, "Primary/elementary Education refers to programs normally designed to give students a sound basic education in reading, writing, and mathematics along with an elementary understanding of other subjects such as history, geography, natural science, social science, art and music. Religious instruction may also be featured". The Xth Five Year Plan emphasizing the importance of elementary and secondary education points out three main challenges for achieving universalization of elementary education in India. They are 1- Access to basic education for the unreached segments and social groups. 2- Qualitative improvement in content and processes so as to raise learning achievements. 3- Tackling high drop-out and low retention rates in primary and upper primary schools. The Mid Term Appraisal (MTA) of Tenth Plan and Common Minimum Programme of UPA government emphasize the importance of elementary and secondary education. According to MTA, there has been substantial reduction in out of school children from 42 million at the beginning of Tenth Plan to 8.1 million in September 2004. There has been substantial increase in the allocation of funds to primary education. The Twelfth Plan Approach Paper focuses on teacher training, evaluation and measures to enforce accountability and capacity building to accommodate students moving from primary to secondary education.

With the above background realizing the importance of education in achieving social, economic and political development the study was planned with the following objectives.

1. To know the level of literacy in India.
2. To study the government expenditure on education in India.
3. To know the Elementary Education Programmes.
4. To find out the Reasons for Non-Enrolment and Dropout from School.

The paper was prepared collecting information from secondary data. Various books, journals, research reports of individual researchers and govt. have been referred.

The study analyses briefly the various aspects of elementary education in India identifying various areas for further research studies in future course of time.

Literacy Rate in India

The UNESCO has drafted a definition of literacy as the "ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate, compute and use printed and written materials associated with varying contexts. Literacy involves a continuum of learning in enabling individuals to achieve their goals, to develop their knowledge and potential, and to participate fully in their community and wider society"².

The National Literacy Mission defines literacy as acquiring the skills of reading, writing and arithmetic and the ability to apply them to one's day-to-day life. The achievement of functional literacy implies (i) self-reliance in 3 R's, (ii) awareness of the causes of deprivation and the ability to move towards amelioration of their condition by participating in the process of development, (iii) acquiring skills to improve economic status and general wellbeing, and (iv) imbibing values such as national integration, conservation of environment, women's equality, observance of small family norms.

The working definition of literacy in the Indian census since 1991 is as follows.

- **Literacy rate:** The total percentage of the population of an area at a particular time aged seven years or above who can read and write with understanding. Here the denominator is the population aged seven years or more.
- **Crude literacy rate:** The total percentage of the people of an area at a particular time aged seven years or above who can read and write with understanding, taking the total population of the area (including below seven years of age) as the denominator.

Table 1. Literacy Rate in India

Census Year	Persons	Males	Females	Male-Female Gap in Literacy Rate
1951	18.33	27.16	8.66	18.30
1961	28.30	40.40	15.35	25.05
1971	34.45	45.96	21.97	23.98
1981	43.57	56.38	29.76	26.62
1991	52.21	64.13	39.29	24.84
2001	65.38	75.85	54.16	21.70
2011	74.04	82.14	65.46	16.68

Source: Census of India (2011)

Literacy is an important factor in judging the quality of population. For the purpose of the census, a person is deemed as literate if he or she can read and write with understanding in any language. A person who can merely read but cannot write is not defined as literate. Over the decades, literacy rates have shown a substantial improvement. The Literacy rate further improved over the last one decade with the implementation of free education. As per the census 2011, India has managed to achieve an effective literacy rate of 74.04 percent in 2011 from 18.33 percent in 1951. The most notable thing is female literacy rate has shown much higher growth, increasing by 11.30 percentage points as against 6.29 for males thus reducing the male-female differential in literacy rates from 21.70 in 2001 to 16.68 in 2011. According to the report there are almost 74 percent literates that constitute the total population of India aged between seven and above. (See Table-1)

Table 2. Percentage of Children Attending School, Age-Wise, 1999-2000

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ST	Rural	69.9	64.7	68.0	58.6	51.1	55.9	64.5	58.3	62.4
	Urban	83.6	87.1	85.1	77.9	74.9	76.6	80.8	81.4	81.0
SC	Rural	75.9	73.4	74.9	64.5	56.6	61.5	70.5	65.5	68.6
	Urban	84.2	82.7	83.6	79.8	73.2	77.0	82.1	78.1	80.4
OBC	Rural	80.0	78.5	79.4	68.0	61.8	65.6	74.4	70.8	73.0
	Urban	88.6	83.2	86.3	83.5	77.7	81.0	86.2	80.6	83.8
Others	Rural	84.9	83.3	84.2	79.6	74.8	77.5	82.4	79.1	81.0
	Urban	92.4	89.2	91.0	89.8	85.3	87.8	91.2	87.3	89.5

Source: NSS 55th round; quoted in Dev (2007)

According to government reports, Programme of universalization of elementary education has been given a high priority to fulfill the constitutional directive of providing universal education to all children attaining the age of 14. Similarly children attaining the age of 14 years by 1995 would have free and compulsory education up to class VIII. Education is free up to lower secondary (class X) in several states while children belonging to SC/ST get free education in all states and union territories. But this has not enabled a good number of children to avail the education facility. (See Table-2)

Government Expenditure on Education

Table 3. Government Expenditure on Education in India: (in percentage of GDP)

Year	Elementary Education	Secondary/Higher Secondary	Adult Education	University & Higher Education	Total
1990-91	1.78	1.24	0.05	0.77	3.84
1991-92	1.76	1.26	0.04	0.75	3.81
1992-93	1.68	1.27	0.07	0.73	3.75
1993-94	1.67	1.20	0.04	0.71	3.62
1994-95	1.65	1.18	0.04	0.69	3.56
1995-96	1.72	1.17	0.02	0.65	3.56
1996-97	1.73	1.14	0.02	0.64	3.53
1997-98	1.73	1.13	0.02	0.62	3.50
1998-99	1.89	1.26	0.01	0.69	3.85
1999-00	1.93	1.44	0.01	0.86	4.24
2000-01	1.88	1.25	0.01	0.81	3.95
2001-02	1.75	1.10	0.02	0.63	3.50
2002-03	1.76	1.15	0.02	0.69	3.62

Source: Abstract of Selected Educational Statistics 2002-03

The stagnation and deceleration in government expenditure on education indicate the low priority attached to human development by the government. In a broad sense, compulsory education may be interpreted as firstly, a compulsion on the state to provide schooling facilities to all children, and secondly, subject to that, an obligation of the parental

community to send all children to school. The girl child is going to be particularly benefitted from the establishment of compulsory education. The government's education expenditure as a percentage of GDP has never ever risen above 4.3% of GDP, though the 6% target finds mention in the manifestos of all parties and despite the target of 6% having been set as far back as 1968 by the Kothari Commission. (Table-3)

Elementary Education Programmes

India which had a bottom-heavy population is now graduating to an economy with middle-heavy population. To reap the benefits of this demographic dividend to the full, India has to provide education to its population and that too quality education. Several initiatives have been undertaken by the government in the field of elementary and secondary education in recent years. Some of the important schemes for elementary education are as follows.

Operation Blackboard:

The Operation Blackboard Scheme was started in 1987-88, which aimed at improving the class-room environment by providing infrastructure facilities and teaching-learning material.

District Primary Education Programme: (DPEP)

Launched in 1994 in 42 districts, this is centrally sponsored scheme aiming at providing access to primary education to all children, reducing primary dropout rates to less than 10 percent, increasing learning achievement of primary school students by at least 25 percent and reducing gender and social, groups to less than 5 percent.

National Programme of Nutritional Support to Primary Education: (NPNSPE)

This programme was launched on 15th August 1995 with the objective to boost the universalization of primary education by impacting upon enrolment, attendance, retention and nutritional needs of children studying in I-V. Under this programme more than 10 crore children are being targeted for coverage. At present Gujarat, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Madhya Pradesh, Chattisgarh, Orissa, Karnataka and Delhi are providing cooked meals. The remaining States and Union Territories are distributing food grains. (Wheat/Rice)

Pradhan Mantri Gramodaya Yojana: (PMGY)

This programme was launched during 2000-01 and envisages Additional Central Assistance for basic minimum services in certain priority areas. The scheme has six components covering elementary education, primary health, rural shelter, rural drinking water, nutrition and rural electrification. Funds for the elementary education sector under PMGY are utilised to further the goal of universalization of elementary education.

Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan: (SSA)

The main vehicle for providing elementary education to all children is the ongoing comprehensive programme called Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan launched in 2001-02. The goals of SSA are as following.-

- All children in school, education Guarantee centre, Alternate School, back-to – school camp by 2005.

- Bridge all gender and social and regional category gaps at the primary stage by 2007 and at elementary education level by 2010.
- Universal retention by 2010.
- Focus on elementary education of satisfactory quality with emphasis on education for life.

One of the main tasks of SSA is to make school more attractive, interesting, and a joyful place. SSA implemented in partnership with the States, addresses the needs of 209 million children in the age group of 6-14 years, it covers 9.72 lakh existing primary and upper primary schools and 36.95 lakh teachers.

National Programme for Education of Girls at Elementary Level: (NPEGEL)

It is an important component of SSA. It is a focused intervention of the government of India to reach the 'Hardest to Reach' girls. NPEGEL provides an additional support by way of girl-child friendly schools, stationary, escorts, workbooks, uniforms etc. for girls' education in educationally backward blocks (EBBs) and in other areas for elementary education of under privileged and disadvantaged sections. EBBs are blocks with female literacy below, and gender gap above, the national average. Apart from EBBs, NPEGEL is also implemented in blocks of districts which are not covered under EBBs but have at least 5 percent SC/ST populations and where SC/ST female literacy is below 10 percent, and also in select urban slums.

Education Guarantee Scheme and Alternative and Innovative Education: (EGS and AIE)

Another important component of SSA is the EGS and AIE. It is specially designed to provide access to elementary education to children in school-less habitations and out of-school children. It supports flexible strategies for out of-school children through bridge course, residential camps, drop-in-centres, summer camps, remedial coaching etc. It has helped to provide elementary education to 85.67 lakh children in 2004-05.

Mid-Day Meal Scheme:

This is the world's largest school feeding programme involving preparation of a hot meal every day. The centrally sponsored Mid-Day Meal Scheme was revised and universalised at primary level with effect from September 2004 to make a provision for providing cooked meals to children of classes I-VIII studying in Government, Government-aided, and Local body schools, Madaras and EGS and AIE centres. Besides providing food grains free of cost to the States/UTs, and food grains transportation subsidy, the central government provides assistance for converting food grains in to cooked meal at a rate of RS. 1/ per child per day. The programme now covers nearly 12 crore children studying in over 9 lakh primary schools and EGS AND AIE Centres.

Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya: (KGBV)

The KGBV Scheme was launched in August 2004 to set up 750 residential schools at elementary level for girls belonging to predominantly to the SC, ST, OBC community, girls from BPL families, and minorities in EBBs. All 750 KGBVs have now been sanctioned by

the government of India, with 117 KGBVs allocated to blocks with substantial minority population. The KGBV scheme was merged with the SSA with effect from 1 April 2007.

Prarambhik Shiksha Kosh: (PSK)

Department of Elementary Education and Literacy issued orders on November 14, 2005 constituting Prarambhik Shiksha Kosh to receive the proceeds of the education cess imposed through Finance Act 2004. PSK is a separate, dedicated, non-lapsable fund to be maintained by the Ministry of Human Resource Development.

Reasons for Non-Enrolment and Dropout from School

Official data shows that dropout rate among children continue to be high. In education, elementary sector faces numerous problems such as inadequate school infrastructure, presence of single-teacher schools, no schools at nearby place, high teacher absenteeism, poor drinking water and toilet facilities, ill-equipped and ill-functioning government schools, large scale teacher vacancies, inadequate equipment etc. in addition, education not considered as useful by many poor parents. The poor quality of schooling to disadvantaged sections whose reliance on publicly provided facilities is greater, and poverty in backward regions and rising demand for labour in developed regions are also the reasons for non-enrolment and dropouts. Indirect cost of education viz. uniforms, books, transport, etc. also dampens the demand for education. NSS 52nd Round provides three reasons for never enrolled and reasons for dropout from school. They are lack of interest, direct school related factors and direct economic factors. A recent ASER study found that only 53.4% children in Std V could read a Std II level text. 38% of the children who have completed four years of schooling cannot read a small paragraph with short sentences meant to be read by a student of class II. About 55% of such children cannot divide a three digit number by a one digit number. On an average, there has been decrease in children's ability to do simple mathematics.

Thus, dissatisfaction with the school functioning may induce the child and parents to forego education enforcing them to start earning. Thus, the schooling system is partly responsible for the persistence of child labour.

CONCLUSION

The above analysis clearly reveals the limited success of India in ensuring the minimum levels of education for its population. Despite considerable progress, sharp disparities continue to exist between male and female literacy levels. There is an urgent need that government has to address various aspects for improving literacy and elementary education. Like firstly, more resources have to be allocated to education particularly primary education with the international norm of 6% of GDP. There is a need to spend more on rural areas. Secondly, the quality of education in terms of curriculum, better infrastructure and teaching has to be improved. Thirdly, retaining children in the schools is more difficult than enrolling them. Retaining of children in the schools needs social mobilisation of the community against child labour and for education and intensive educational setup. Fourthly, emphasis on generation of productive employment and minimum wages, both they would reduce the households' dependence on children. Fifthly, Mid-Day Meal Scheme can help increase attendance, improve nutrition reduce dropout rates. Other measures like, Pre-school

education in Integrated Child Development Services, involvement of Panchyats and NGOs, high returns to educational investment, removing institutional constraints, reduction in school fees of private institutions, reduction in distance to school, conditional cash transfers etc. also help in promoting primary education. For the enhancement of capabilities of the disadvantaged sections of the population, instead of piece-meal ad-hoc approaches, government should adopt comprehensive policy which will help in achieving the goal of “Education for all” in given short period.

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