

Status of Elementary Education In India

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1. INTRODUCTION

It is widely accepted that education is an important instrument of social transformation and economic development of the country (Caldwell, Reddy and Caldwell, 1985, Tilak, 2003). Education increases awareness of the society and weakens the social hierarchy which is considered as the main cause of discrimination across social groups in the society. Further, education also reduces economic inequality as earnings and education has a positive relationship. In addition to this, the strong linkages between the educational attainments of population and the economic growth of the country are widely recognized in the literature (Tilak, 2003; Jha, Das, Mohanty and Jha, 2008).

The role of education is very important in the life of an individual. It is important for getting success in life as well as personal growth. It transforms an individual's thinking, productivity, personality and behavior. Being educated not only reflects in better earnings than non-educated it also reflects in lifestyle of a person. Education aims at making individuals good human beings and helps decide

between right and wrong in personal life. Education spreads awareness about social problems such as poverty, unemployment, inequality, corruption, terrorism etc. and help in producing learned individuals who could solve these evils from the society and make lives on planet earth better for fellow human beings. In today's globalised life, education has become fourth necessity for human beings after food, cloth and shelter.

Further, education not only contributes to personal growth of an individual but it also helps in the development of the country (Choudhary, 2015). In an economy, if more people are educated, there would be more skilled labor and productivity of skilled labor is higher than unskilled labor, hence education level of labor in an economy is directly related to productivity in the economy.

Recognizing the importance of education, international institutions such as United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) have stressed upon universalisation of elementary education. Not only elementary education, United Nations has also mandated it for

member countries to improve the quality of education for all (United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, 2015). Given the changing scenarios at global level, the government of India has also undertaken a series of policy measures (Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, District Primary Education Programme, Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya Scheme, Right to Education Act 2009) since the early 1990s wherein the major objective of all these measures remained to achieve the universalization of elementary education as well as to reduce dropout rate at the elementary education level. Against this background, the following are the objectives and research questions of the paper.

Research questions

1. Has elementary education improved in India?
2. How various states have performed at elementary level of education?
3. Has inequality increased/decreased across states after SSA and RTE?

Objectives of the paper

1. To analyze the performance of elementary education across Indian states.
2. To analyze the improvement in elementary education with the implementation of SSA and RTE.

This paper is divided into five sections including introduction. Section 2 discusses about the policy intervention towards education in India since 1947. Section 3 provides details on data sources. The results and their interpretation are provided in section 4. Section 5 provides major conclusion of the analysis.

2. Review of literature

Beteille (2002) discusses the need for elementary education in India and areas which need prioritization in this regard. Author highlights that universal elementary education is important for its benefits which range from economic to social to demographic to functioning of demographic institutions. The study suggests that although progress in recent years has been seen in context of access to elementary education but still a lot remains to be done on the front of access of elementary education in India. Not only universal access needs to be emphasized alone but alongside efficiency of the education should also be emphasized to realize the benefits expected from universal elementary level education in India.

According to Tilak (2003) increase in education increases the human capital which contributes to economic development of a nation. Human capital is one of the most important types of capital for the growth of an economy. Growth in human capital leads to growth of economy. Growth in human capital is much easier than growth in physical and financial capitals and its effect on growth is much more pronounced. Most of the economies of the world have realized the important role of human capital in economic development and putting in much more efforts in the development of this type of capital. In the words of Tilak, "...human capital is an important factor of growth, comparable to the conventional physical capital also created hopes among the (physical) capital-scare developing countries that as investment in human capital would lead to economic growth, they would be able to reach the levels of economic growth of the advanced countries, if they were invest in human capital."

Due to this efforts to enhance education across the countries have increased many folds during the last couple of decades.

According to Azim Premji Foundation, (2004) analyse the role of various factors facilitating and hindering the growth of primary education in India. The role of factors ranging from socio-cultural, economic and socio-demographic has been analysed. The study suggests that various governmental and non-governmental interventions in the area over the last half a century has led to improved provision of schooling, rising enrolments, higher gender equity and literacy levels which indicates progress towards universalisation of elementary education. After half a century of efforts still primary education in India suffers from various problems such as high drop-out rate, irregular attendance etc. Role of economic factors play an important role as the study suggests that poverty hinders enrolment and continuation of education in rural India.

Government of India (2007) India's Eleventh five year plan document mentions that the role of education in facilitating social and economic progress is well critical as education helps individual development especially youths and empowers people with skills and knowledge. Accordingly it makes them eligible for productive employment in the future. Further it is mentioned that education increases efficiency and it also improves the overall quality of life.

Govinda and Bandyopadhyay (2008) provide an analytical review on access to elementary education in India. The study suggests that over time improvement in supply of schools, schooling infrastructure and facilities has been observed in

India and near universal enrolment at elementary level has also been achieved in many parts in India. The government has also sought community participation in recent years through various programmes and strategies to reform the governance system. But problem of inequity in coverage and participation is still observed with respect to gender, different social groups and also between rural and urban areas In case of rural areas, teacher absenteeism and sub-optimal use of teachers is still high.

Kumar and Rastogi (2010) argue that four distinct features of elementary education system in India since independence have remained incomplete enrolment, inequalities, poor quality, and ineffective school performance. Authors have also mentioned six areas for public action which need attention to achieve universalisation of education at elementary level. These areas are- stronger advocacy of universalisation of elementary education, restoration of dignity to the profession of teaching, strengthening of after school programmes and extra-curricular activities, exploration of not-for-profit schooling models in backward and remote areas and a lot more systematic research especially independent reporting and evaluations on a number of issues. Authors suggest that more structural reforms, greater policy clarity and better public reasoning can go a long way in overcoming the hindrances in the path of free, compulsory and quality elementary education to all children.

Jain and Mittal (2011) tried to examine the effectiveness of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) on the one hand and also assessed the level of awareness and satisfaction of different

stakeholders (teachers, students, parents etc.) regarding selected components of SSA. It was observed that despite varying degree of implementation of centrally funded schemes across states, considerable success has been achieved in terms of reduction in out of school children in the age group of 6-14 years as well as in dropout rates on the one hand and drastic increase in enrolment ratio at the elementary level on the other hand. At the same time, it is suggested that efficacy of these schemes can be improved by increasing awareness about the programmes alongwith increasing allocation of funds for teaching-learning material as well as by providing funds to NGOs who are partners in the programme in order to smoothen the functioning of the schemes.

Raju and Singh (2011) argue that educational development cannot be measured with a single indicator as it is a multidimensional indicator and highlight the need for a composite index combining development in different dimensions. An inter-state comparison on the basis of a composite index at the elementary level is performed. It reveals that Kerala stands first with respect to elementary education as a whole while Tamil Nadu has the highest level of educational development at the primary level. Besides, the states lagging behind at elementary education level include Bihar, Jharkhand and Nagaland. At the primary level of education, most under-developed states include Bihar, Nagaland, Jharkhand, Arunachal Pradesh and Tripura. At the upper primary level, Kerala ranks first whereas Bihar, Odisha, Nagaland, Jharkhand and

Arunachal Pradesh are most under-developed states.

In India, education has always remained at the focus of economic policy making since independence. Government has tried to promote education in India through various policies and programmes. EFA review report (Government of India, 2014) observes that government in India has always kept education for all a high priority agenda in planning throughout various five year plans and other policy programmes and these efforts have resulted in considerable success though much more remains to be achieved.

UNESCO (2015) in Sustainable Development Goals (2015) document, 17 goals have been highlighted which need to be met till 2030 in order to transform the world. The education got due importance among those 17 goals. Not only United Nations but international organizations such as OECD have also emphasized upon the role of education in the economic development. All these developments have encouraged policy makers worldwide to keep promotion of education as high priority agenda in the economic planning arena.

3. Data Sources

To understand the impact of various policy measures such as SSA and RTE on the expansion of elementary education, the data has been collected from various publications of the Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India and the National University of Educational Planning and Administration, New Delhi. For instance, annual publication of National University of Educational Planning and Administration entitled Elementary Education in

India: where do we stand? Similarly, we have collected data from Annual Report of the Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India.

4. Results of Analysis

In this section we have analyzed four set of indicators. First, we have collected data on Gross Enrolment Ratio. It tells about the expansion of education in India. Secondly, we have analyzed the availability of teachers for enrolled students in Indian states. Thirdly, the infrastructure indicators such as student class room ratio and the availability of playgrounds in schools have been analyzed.

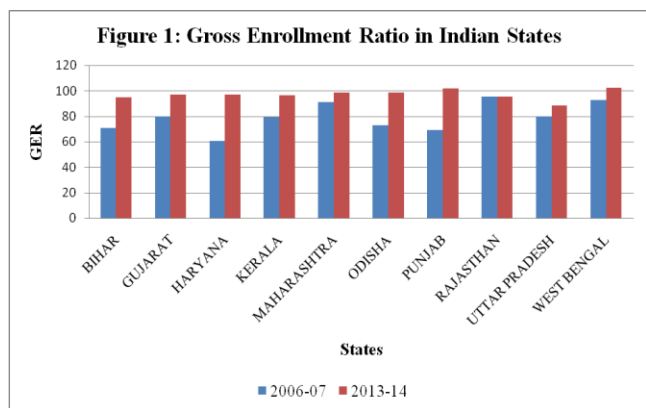


Figure 1 shows Gross Enrollment Ratio across various Indian states. It can be seen from the graph that in 2006-07 variations in Gross Enrollment Ratio across states were much higher as compared to in 2013-14. For instance, Gross Enrollment Ratio in 2006-07 ranged from 60 per cent in Haryana to around 96 per cent in Rajasthan whereas in 2013-14 the variation among states ranged only between 94 per cent in Uttar Pradesh and 102 per cent in West Bengal. In 2006-07 the range of variation was 36 per cent whereas in 2013-14 the range of variation was only 6 per cent. It indicates that inter-state variations in Gross Enrollment Ratio have reduced over the

period of seven years as a result of policy efforts such as Sarv Shiksha Abhiyan and Right to Education Act.

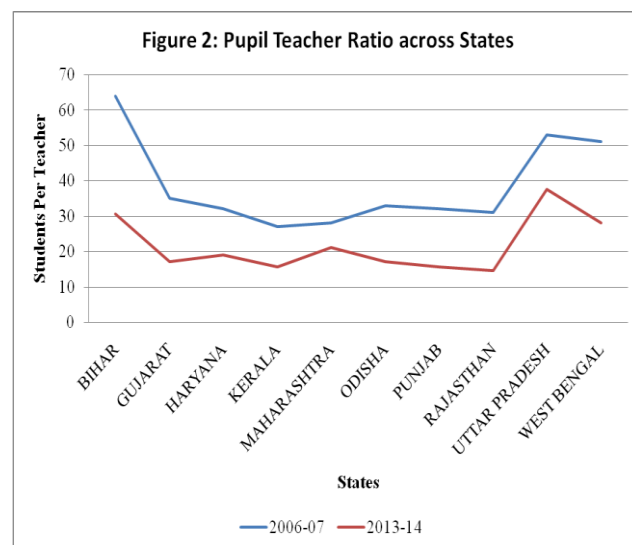


Figure 2 shows Pupil Teacher Ratio across states between 2006-07 and 2013-14 and trends have remained encouraging. On an average, all the selected states have experienced a decline in pupil teacher ratio. In 2006-07 nearly all the selected states had a Pupil Teacher Ratio of more than 30 per cent and in case of some states it was as high as more than 50 per cent (Figure, 2). On the contrary, in 2013-14, almost all the states showed a Pupil teacher Ratio of less than 30 per cent and furthermore, in a majority of the states, it was below 20 per cent (such as Kerala, Punjab, Haryana, Gujarat, Odisha, West Bengal, and Rajasthan). The trends have remained particularly encouraging in the states of Bihar and West Bengal as is clear from the difference between two lines corresponding to two different time periods. In case of Bihar, Pupil Teacher Ratio has reduced from around 64 per cent to little over 30.5 per cent during 2006-07 to 2013-14. In case of Uttar Pradesh, pupil teacher ratio has declined from 53 in 2006-07 to 37.5 in 2013-14.

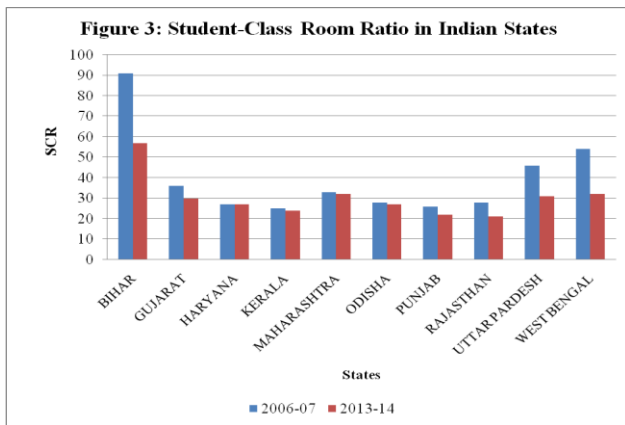


Figure 3 indicates student-class room ratio in the selected states. It indicates the availability of a classroom against the number of students. For example, PTR 20 would indicate that on an average one classroom is available against 20 students. Trends have remained encouraging between 2006-07 and 2013-14. As a result of Sarv Shiksha Abhiyan and other policy efforts towards promoting education, student-class room ratio has declined in all the selected states except Haryana where it has remained same. Major improvement on this criterion has been noticed in the state of Bihar, West Bengal and Uttar Pradesh. In 2013-14, except Bihar all other states had a student-class room ratio around 30. Figure 3 indicates that educational infrastructure has improved significantly in the period 2006-07 to 2013-14. Among others factors, the major improvement in infrastructure was mainly witnessed on account of the implementation of Sarv Shiksha Abhiyan and later Right to Education in 2009. Along with ensuring universalization of elementary education, the major thrust of these programmes was also to expand infrastructure facilities.

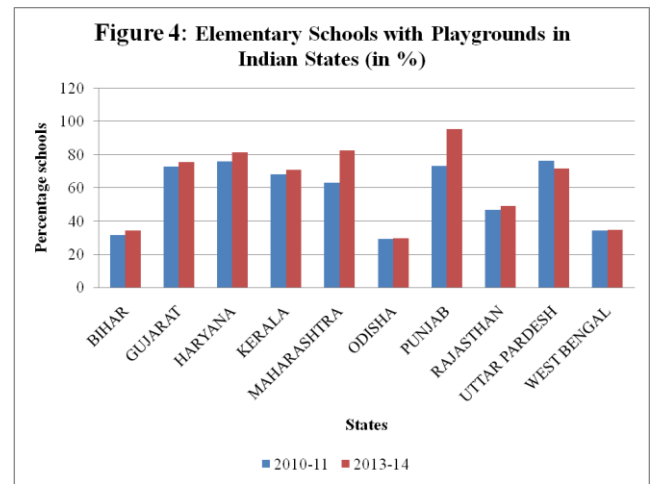


Figure 4 shows percentage of elementary schools with playgrounds in various states. Information presented is for two years i.e. 2010-11 and 2013-14. School infrastructure in terms of availability of playground has improved in all the selected states. Highest percentage of schools with playground has been in the case of Punjab (95 per cent) followed by Maharashtra (82 per cent) and Haryana (81.3 per cent). Punjab, Maharashtra and Haryana have also experienced highest improvement in infrastructure among all the states. Lowest percentages of schools with playground are found in the poorer states such as Bihar, Odisha and West Bengal wherein this percentage is only around 30 per cent (Figure, 4).

5. CONCLUSION

On account of increasing importance of education as an instrument of social transformation and economic development of the country, the countries across the globe have taken a series of initiatives to improve education. Education not only contributes to personal growth of an individual but it also helps in the development of the country. In an economy, if more people are educated, there would be more skilled labor and productivity of skilled labor is higher than unskilled labor, hence education level of labor in

an economy is directly related to productivity in the economy. Recognizing the importance of education, international institutions such as United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) have stressed upon universalisation of elementary education. Not only elementary education, United Nations has also mandated it for member countries to improve the quality of education for all (United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, 2015). In Sustainable Development Goals (2015) document, 17 goals have been highlighted which need to be met till 2030 in order to transform the world. The education got due importance among those 17 goals.

Given this, the government of India has initiated a series of programmes such as Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, District Primary Education Programme (DPEP), Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya Scheme (KGBVS), Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act in 2009 during the last two decades. The objective of all these programmes was to promote the elementary education in the country by increasing enrolment and reducing drop-out rate. Not only this, the special focus was also given to promote students coming from backward social groups on the one hand and also to promote girls students on the other hand.

In this context, this paper has made an attempt to analyze the improvement at the elementary education in the country. For this, we have selected ten states from the country and analyzed their performance in terms of various indicators. Followings are the major findings drawn from the analysis.

- (i) The gross enrolment ratio in all the states has increased drastically during 2006-07 and 2013-14. The improvement in poor states reduced the inequality across states.
- (ii) Pupil teacher ratio has also improved among all the selected states. The major improvement has been noticed in the states like Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal. In these states, per teacher number of students was more than 50 in 2006-07 and it reduced to around 30 in 2013-14.
- (iii) Another finding is that the availability of a classroom also increased during 2006-07 and 2013-14. Due to this, the ratio of student classroom ratio has declined.
- (iv) To promote extracurricular activities, the availability of playgrounds in the schools were promoted through Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, and Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act in 2009. Except in Odisha, West Bengal all the other states have increased availability of playgrounds. But the significant improvement has been noticed in case of Punjab and Maharashtra.

On the basis of above analysis, it is clear that efforts of policy makers through various programmes on educational promotion in India have remained successful over time.

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