

Education is an Asset we Cannot Afford to Neglect in India

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Abstract

The building blocks of an Indian nation are the citizens of its tomorrow. The way these seeds will sprout will always depend on the way you choose to water them. India’s Education sector is one of the extent sunrise sectors in the economic and social growth of the country. India’s education sector has expanded speedily in the last decade but the quality of learning remains pathetic on statement of unimaginative and misguided policies. In an increasingly knowledge-based global economy, quality education is more vital than ever. Education has the potential to become a powerful motivation for development, serving as a bridge from poverty to benefit, from division to understanding, from exclusion to participation. But for education to complete these objectives, it must inspire and develop children to think innovatively, reason systematically and release their potential to frame their own future. Education can be truly transformative if it is entirely, ambitious, and inspirational in its approach. Yet even after more than seven decades of independence, India is facing a major education situation.

Introduction

Literacy is officially defined as the capability of “a person aged seven and above who can both read and write with understanding in any language” - is admittedly an inadequate measure of human capability in a modern economy. Based on this minimal definition, India’s literacy rate according to the 2011 Census was 72 per cent, well below the global average of 86 per cent. This has improved only slightly since then. The latest Annual Status of Education Report (ASER 2018) survey - the most authentic barometer of India’s educational health - shows that its findings are not inspiring, and in some cases quite dismal. The fragile foundation of basic education augurs a dim horizon for India’s future human capital. The students are not able to learn the basics of reading, writing, and arithmetic and do not meet even elementary mathematics standards.

While enrolment has improved sharply since 2006 for both boys and girls, not only at the primary but also in the 11-14 age group, literacy and numeracy skills remain dismally below par. The ASER survey covered 5.46 lakh children in the age group 3-16 across 596 districts. What is alarming is the decline in reading and arithmetical abilities at the Class VIII level since 2012, with government schools faring worse than private ones: more than a quarter of all children at this level cannot read a Class II text, while over half of all children

cannot do division (three digits by a single-digit number). Seen along last year’s ASER survey on learning abilities of the 14-18 age group, those about to enter the workforce, it would seem that India’s “demographic dividend” is turning into a sour joke.

These figures are a serious concern in a country where only 74 per cent of its 1.2 billion inhabitants are literate, making India home to the largest illiterate population in the world. We all know that a sound and productive education system needs to focus on science, math, engineering and technology — the skills today’s employers are looking for to fill jobs right now and in the future.” Inefficient teaching methods, such as rote learning, which focuses on memorisation as opposed to critical reasoning, are still widespread at the primary and secondary school levels. The rote teaching methodology has demonstrated shortcomings. Studies by the Programme for International Students Assessment, an OECD initiative, and Wipro found that students at the primary and secondary school level have fallen back in math, science and reading literacy in recent years

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Education in India

Education in India is provided by public schools (controlled and funded by three levels: central, state and local) and private schools. Under various articles of the Indian Constitution, free and compulsory education is provided as a fundamental right to children between the ages of 6 and 14. The approximate ratio of public schools to private schools in India is 7:5. India has

made progress in increasing the attainment rate of primary education. In 2011, Approximately 75% of the population, aged between 7 to 10 years, was literate.[5] India’s improved education system is often cited as one of the main contributors to its economic development.[6] Much of the progress, especially in higher education and scientific research, has been credited to various public institutions. While enrollment in higher education has increased steadily over the past decade, reaching a Gross Enrollment Ratio of 24% in 2013,[7] there still remains a significant distance to catch up with tertiary education enrollment levels of developed nations,[8] a challenge that will be necessary to overcome in order to continue to reap a demographic dividend from India’s comparatively young population. More Indian children are in school today than ever before, but the quality of public schools has sunk to abysmally low levels, as government schools have become the reserve of children at the very bottom of India’s social ladder. The Right To Education Act has been quite successful in achieving three broad objectives: higher enrolment, lower dropout and completion of mandatory basic education.

The bane of the modern examination system is its regressive testing regimen which we stubbornly refuse to reform. Exams are no longer a metric for the test of learning or intelligence. Instead, they have degenerated into an awfully pernicious ritual designed to produce compliant drones who can regurgitate facts faithfully. What we test is the acquisition of a narrow collection of facts, not whether children have the skills for fruitful employment or the ingredients for gainful adulthood. Children are being coaxed into learning merely to pass tests. Schools are not fostering love for learning. Moreover, they do not inculcate the all-round skills they need when they leave the portals of learning to the world of competition outside. Real education is more about wide reading, deep thinking and asking hard questions rather than simply reproducing crammed answers faithfully. Formal teaching needs to be supplemented by in-school pull-out programmes, after-school tutoring, and summer camps supervised by NGOs with emphasis on non-conventional innovative pedagogies.

Problems of Education

Despite our best efforts, our educational development remains at a low level.

1. Lack of funds

The lack of sufficient funds is the main problem in the development of education. Outlay for education in Five Year Plans has been decreasing. Due to insufficient funds most educational institutions lack infrastructure, science equipment and libraries etc. Due to this reason, desired results cannot be achieved.

2. Expensive higher education

University, professional and technical education has become costly in India. Fee structure of technical and professional institutes like IIM’s is quite high IIM’s charge Rs. 2 lakh per semester for MBA classes. It is beyond the reach of common man. Privatization of higher education has led to the growth of profit-hungry entrepreneurs. Now a day’s higher education is much costly affair.

3. Neglect of Indian languages

The medium of instruction particularly in science subjects is English. So rural students who are not well versed in English, cannot study science properly in English. They suffer a lot; Indian languages are still under developed. Standard publications are not available in Indian language.

4. Problem of Brain drain

When intelligent, talented and deserving candidates do not get suitable jobs in the country, they prefer to go abroad for seeking jobs. So our country is deprived of good talent. This phenomenon is called ‘Brain drain’.

5. Mass illiteracy

Despite constitutional directives and economic planning we are not able to achieve cent per cent literacy. -Even now 35 per cent people remain illiterate. In India, the number of illiterates is almost one-third of the total illiterates in the world. Advanced countries are 100% literate; the position in India is quite dismal.

6. Wastage of resources

Our education system is based on General Education. The dropout rate is very high in primary and secondary level. Most of the students in 6-14 age groups leave the school before completing their education. It leads to wastage of financial and human resources.

7. General education oriented

Our educational system is of General Education in nature. Development of technical and vocational education is quite unsatisfactory. So our education is unproductive. Hence number of educated unemployed persons is increasing day by day. This has become a great concern for Govt.

8. Problems of primary education

Our primary education is ridden with too many problems. Large number of primary schools has no buildings what to talk of basic facilities like drinking water, urinals and electricity, furniture and study materials etc. Large numbers of primary schools are single teacher schools and many schools are even without teachers. So the drop rate is very high and a cause of concern. Concluding, we can say that there is quantitative expansion of education but in qualitative development we are still lagging behind.

Conclusion

Education needs more champions than health and environmental advocates because it is one rising tide that can lift all the boats. Since education has more room for innovation than any other development sector, there is a unique opportunity for social entrepreneurs. We need to transform curriculum and teaching practices to focus less on rote learning or straightforward calculation and more on relevant skills, like communication, reasoning ability, problem-solving and reasoning ability, and critical and independent thinking. We are under an illusion that our children are digitally savvy but more often their knowledge is only screen-deep. If young people are to be empowered citizens, they will need to understand how technology affects every aspect of our life. Greater tech literacy will be essential to ensure that the human implications of the ongoing fourth Industrial Revolution are positive.

If India is to truly rise as a global economic power, the policymakers and education specialists must focus their efforts on developing its public schools into a world-class education system. Catchy announcements like “blackboard to digital boards” will have relevance only when we translate rhetoric into commitment and into genuine action. Goals without actionable strategies are just good intentions. The proof should come by first addressing the fundamental concerns of public education. Nelson Mandela famously said: “Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.”

Adequate resources, higher standards for teachers and the flushing out of corruption must all be part of a reform package that seeks to make Indian education the nation’s top priority. Improving education outcomes demands a relentless focus on quality, equity and results.

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