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Access to elementary education in India country analytical review

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Abstract
The Government of India has created numerous policies around special education since the country's independence in 1947. Although the Government of India has attempted to create policies that are inclusive for people with disabilities, their implementation efforts have not resulted in an inclusive system of education, nor have they reached their goal of "education for all" across the country. The three basic models, segregated, integrated and inclusive special education, have been differentiated between by international and governmental agencies, and overwhelming support is being shown by human rights activists, nonprofits, governmental organizations, governments and international agencies, all in favor of inclusive special education as the most beneficial type of education for people of all ability levels. The Government of India needs to bridge the gaps in their education system to build a strong system of inclusive education in India.

Keywords: India, Government, Education, Elementary, Access, Country, Analytical, Organizations, ability, etc

Introduction

India made a Constitutional commitment to provide free and compulsory education to all children up to the age of 14 nearly sixty years ago. The goal, which was expected to be achieved by 1960, remains elusive, even now. Yet, one has to admit that developments in recent years have had significant impacts on the situation, raising the hope that universal basic education could be a reality within a reasonable period of time [1]. Three factors seem to be making a distinct difference in the growth trajectory of elementary education in the country. The first factor is the increased direct involvement of the central government in strengthening infrastructure and delivery of elementary education [2]. This is important as historically the state governments have had almost complete responsibility for producing and delivering public elementary education. State governments, of course, continue to provide a major share of recurring financial expenditure, but the proactive manner in which the Government of India has acted following the adoption of the National Policy on Education 1986 stands out as a landmark innovation in educational policy. This changed centre-state framework of action has made the central government the prime mover in designing and implementing development initiatives in elementary education in many states, although the situation is not uniform across the country. This relationship has become further reshaped as external aid agencies have also claimed an important place in the partnership framework involving the central as well as state governments. Coupled with this enhanced initiative from the central government is the adoption of the district level as the base for planning development inputs for elementary education, and the concurrent move to decentralize governance by empowering local self-governance mechanisms through panchayati raj (local self-government) institutions. This second factor has added a new dimension to the multi-layered planning and implementation framework and created a new dynamic at the grassroots level [3]. The third factor that has begun to significantly reshape the elementary education scene in India in recent years is the massive social mobilization drive.

Review of Literature

This has been encouraged over the last 10-15 years within Mission. This has resulted in

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increased demand for elementary education, on the one hand, whilst substantially enhancing the role of non-state actors in the provision of elementary education and support services in the country, on the other. Almost all official documentation, and in particular the successive Five Year Plans at national level, acknowledge these factors as significantly impacting the progress of elementary education [4]. But what the nature and extent is of impact of these developments on improving access to and participation of children in elementary education across the country? Are more children accessing and completing the elementary education cycle and moving to secondary schools? How different is the scene across different regions and social groups in the country? To what extent has the system overcome social and gender inequities in progressing towards the goal of universal elementary education? What factors seem to facilitate or hinder the smooth flow of children within the school system? To what extent are school factors responsible for ensuring that children attending schools achieve the expected levels of learning? These are critical questions that might possibly

determine whether India achieves the targets and goals set at the national level under the flagship programme of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), as well as the international level under the Dakar Declaration on Education for All (EFA) and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) [5].

The State of Elementary Education in India
The Indian scenario is too complex and varied to be effectively captured through aggregate national figures in relation to the availability of schooling facilities across the country and their optimum use for educating all children. At one end of the spectrum, there is Kerala with practically every child completing elementary school and transitioning to secondary school; and almost every school having at least five teachers and five classrooms. At the other end, there is Bihar where only one out of two children in the relevant age group is in school; the majority of children entering school fail to complete an elementary cycle; many schools are understaffed; and teachers are often untrained and given little academic support.
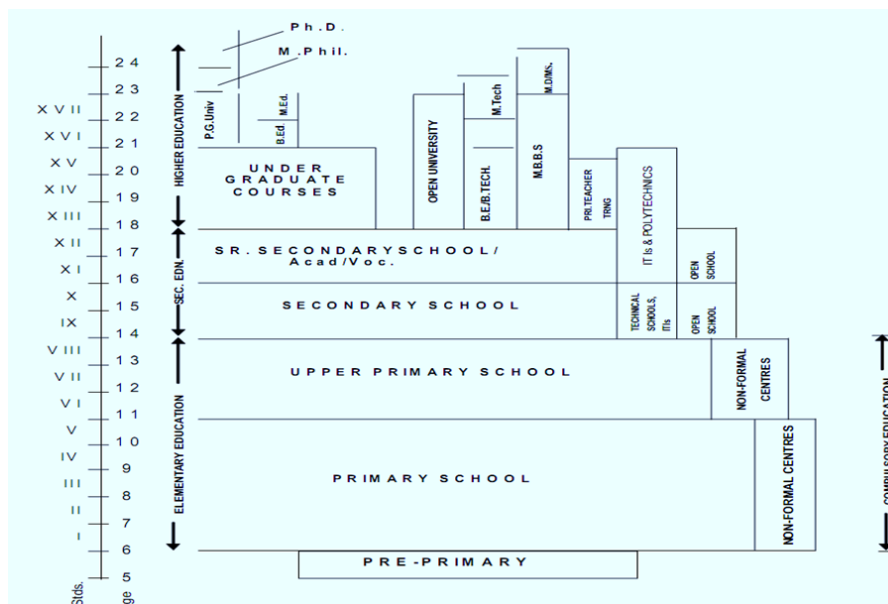
Fig 1: The Structure of the Education System in India

Coverage and Growth of Schooling Facilities
The Seventh All India Educational Survey (AIES) conducted by the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) provides an overview of the availability of schooling facilities in 2002 in India (NCERT, 2005). In 1993-1994 according to the Sixth AIES, 83.4% of habitations in the country had primary schooling facilities within a distance of 1 km (NCERT, 1998). The percentage of habitations served by upper primary schools at a distance of up to 3 km was 76.2% of the country. By 2002, around 87%

of habitations had a primary school within a distance of 1 km, while 78% of habitations had an upper primary school within 3 km (NCERT, 2005). This suggests that physical access to school has continued to improve over the years, although at a relatively slow pace. The Seventh AIES reveals that among the major states in India, numbers of habitations with access to primary schools within walking distance, varied between around 94% in Andhra Pradesh; 75% in Himachal Pradesh and 77.2% in Jharkhand (which has a large tribal population).

Table 1: Progress in Education in India since 1950

Indicators	1950-1951	2000-2001	2001-2002	2002-2003	2004-2005
No. of Elementary Schools	223,600	845,007	883,667	897,109	1,042,251
No. of Teachers in Elementary Schools (in millions)	0.624	3.22	3.39	3.49	3.75
Enrolment in Primary Schools (in millions)	19.20	113.83	113.90	122.4	130.8
Enrolment in Upper Primary Schools (in millions)	3.00	42.81	44.80	46.9	51.2
Enrolment in Elementary Schools (in millions)	22.20	156.64	158.70	169.3	182.0

Education Providers

Besides government managed schools, private pre-primary, primary and upper primary schools have also increased in numbers in recent years [6]. Many of these schools are equipped with better facilities and are generally considered to function better and more regularly than government schools. It should, however, be noted that despite the expansion of private schooling in recent years, government and local bodies continue to be the main providers, managing around 91% of primary schools and 73% of upper primary schools (Table 2).

Table 2: Number of Schools by Provider

Type of School	Government		Local Bodies		Private Aided		Private Unaided		Total
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	
Primary	332,565	43.3	359,772	46.9	19,593	2.6	55,590	7.2	712,239
Upper Primary/ Middle	118,026	43	80,327	29.2	17,616	6.4	58,762	21.4	274,731
Pre-primary	34,597	54.4	18,369	28.9	4,359	6.9	6,271	9.9	63,596

Schooling in Small Habitations and for Hard-to-Reach Children

Provision of primary schools in the villages/habitations that qualify for the opening of formal a school is generally at a satisfactory level. However, children who live in smaller habitations with very small population groups continue to face difficulties in accessing schooling facilities within walking distance (i.e. 1 to 3 km). These habitations now are being provided with small schools under the Education Guarantee Scheme. Known as EGS Centres or alternative schools, these function as transitory facilities until they can be replaced by formal government primary schools [7-9]. The centres are opened in habitations with at least 25 out-of-school children in the 6-14 age groups (or the 6-15 age groups in case of hilly, desert and tribal hamlets). The teachers or instructors in such centres are recruited by local self-government bodies and are managed locally. In addition, around 2,785 NGOs are involved in implementation of EGS and AIE schemes (GoI, 2007b). More generally, the EGS and AIE schemes support diversified strategies for educating under-privileged children who are at risk of not enrolling or not completing elementary education. These include:

- ❖ Provision of education to children living in remote, habitations which do not have schools.
- ❖ Provision of education for children who migrate.
- ❖ Support to Maktabs/Madrasas to adopt a formal curriculum.
- ❖ Bridge courses/back to school camps for the re-entry of drop out children into formal schools.
- ❖ Long duration residential camps for older out-of-school children.
- ❖ Centres for remedial teaching.
- ❖ Short duration summer camps or schools.

Disparities and Inequities in Elementary Education

It is important that access and equity go together in order to make UEE a reality. Almost all programmes and plans aim at bridging gender and social gaps in enrolment, retention and learning achievement at the primary stage [10]. Children from minority groups, children living below the poverty line, migratory children and children in the hardest-to-reach groups Recent years have witnessed some positive developments with respect to girls' education in India.

Conclusion

The school system and statistical collection procedures have evolved differently in the various states over time. Even if a National System of Education is launched (as envisaged by the Education Commission and the National Policy on Education 1986, it would take a long time to streamline age of entry and progression across the country. It will be a complex task to determine the actual progress of the various age groups towards eight years of schooling. It is essential not only to assess this progress, but also to refine strategies and programmes to move towards universal elementary education. The school Education, Training & Skill Development sector is rapidly gaining significance in the present scenario. The Central Govt. has realized the direct correlation of skill based education and gainful employment for the youth of our country. The rising unemployment amongst youth educated in conventional streams has further accentuated the importance of Education and Skill Development. Education Act-as well as continuing with the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan scheme

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