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## Recent reforms in elementary education in north-east region states of India through RTE act—Achievement and unfinished tasks

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### Abstract

Measuring educational productivity is a subject of much enquiry nowadays specially after the implementation of RTE Act, 2009 in India. Undoubtedly, efforts initiated by the successive Governments have played a positive role in the expansion of elementary education in North-East part of India. However, the overall standard of education is well below the global standard. As a need of the hour, India has made huge advancements in the Education sector and the Union Budget makes an attempt to broaden the education standards in the country every year. In absolute terms, the increase in expenditure on education in India during the 68 years time span after independence may appear to be *very impressive*, but experts on the subject often consider the amount as less than the relative necessity of this sector. It has been claimed by the official authorities that India has achieved near universal enrolment and enhanced hard and soft infrastructure. However, while India has made considerable progress in improving Elementary Education when measured by the quality of schooling inputs including student enrolment and retention, the progress on learning outcomes has been minimal. ASER reports regularly highlighted the fact that learning outcomes were stagnant and more recently worsening. Based on data generated by ASER and DISE on elementary education, the present study is an attempt to show that there are large scales inter-state and intra-state variations with respect to fulfilling the requirements of RTE norms in North East region of India. These regional disparities in educational development and widening gap between financial allocations and outcomes do raise some important governance questions.

**Keywords:** Educational productivity, Universal enrolment, hard and soft infrastructure, student retention, learning outcomes, regional disparities

### Introduction

Northeast India is the eastern-most region of India. The region consists of seven sister states namely Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura and the Himalayan state of Sikkim. The region is located between latitudes 290 and 220 North and longitudes about 89.46 and 97.5/ East. The region is covering an area of 2,62,230 sq. km, which is nearly 8 per cent of the total geographical area of the country. The region has a population of 45,587,982 (2011 census) that is 3.1 per cent of the total population of India. The region has a vast coverage of forest nearly 55 per cent of the total geographical area. The States of the region are surrounded by China, Bangladesh, Myanmar and Bhutan. In fact, the region has a long international border of (5182 km), which is more than 99 percent of its total geographical boundary. These States have international border with China (1395 km), Bhutan (455 km), Myanmar (1640 km), Bangladesh (1596 km) and Nepal (97 km). On the other hand the region is connected with the mainland India through a very narrow strip of land with the width of about 22 km called '*chicken neck*'. The region is best known for its charming topography, cultural heritage, ethnic beauty and rich natural resources.

Border areas have their own problems and peculiarities. Such areas are in general less accessible, making provision of basic facilities more difficult and costly. Such areas are often more vulnerable to illegal infiltration of population, which adds pressure on their economic and environmental resources.

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The Northeast region with 99 per cent of its boundary being international border, the problems and peculiarities are even more accentuated. In spite of resourcefulness the entire region is regarded as underdeveloped. The remoteness, difficult terrain, infrastructural bottlenecks and unfriendly neighbors are the serious impediments of the development of the region. Being a border area, the region is suffering from specific problems like illegal cross-border movements, law and order, security, insurgency, smuggling etc.

India has not been able to warm up its North East to the idea of turning it into a corridor of prosperity both for the state and the region. The failure can be partly ascribed to the insurgencies and internal ethnic conflicts, and to a large extent, the socio – economic impasse the seven sister states find them in. Lack of employment and scopes of higher education has driven the youth out of the states for better facilities and opportunities; and -in most cases- to frustration and anger over the present state of affairs. Such a situation, in turn has wielded additional pressure to the already full cart of the hills, brimming with inter-ethnic and administrative problems – creating an atmosphere of distrust, hatred and sectarianism. While hatred and separatist movements cannot be a solution to the problems of these North east region (seven sister) states, there is a need to taking long term and immediate measures that can ensure participation of the youths in the local and national, as well as, global socio-economic processes. The respective state governments in the region and the centre therefore, started including its people in this process by making sure that education reaches all; - i.e., through Right to Education Act (RTE), 2009.

#### **Objectives of the study**

- i) To analyse the present status of Elementary education in North-east Region states.
- ii) To see whether there is any intra-state and inter-state variation existed in meeting the RTE norms or not.

#### **Methodology**

The methodology included secondary data which has been collected from different government report, websites, ASER report, DISE report, Census 2011 etc.

#### **Right to Education (RTE) Act**

The World Conference on Education for All held in Jomtien in 1990 adopted a declaration calling upon all member states and agencies to strive for achieving Education for ALL (EFA) by the year 2001. The country is still struggling to achieve the same. At the time of independence, only fourteen percent of the population was literate and only one child out of three had been enrolled in primary school. As per 2011 census the literacy rate of the country has reached 74%. It may be mentioned that most of the developed countries of the world achieved near 100% literacy more than a century ago and India continues to be the country with largest number of illiterates of the world. Achievement of India does not compare well even with comparable developing countries. However, there is renewed effort to achieve universalization of elementary education (UEE) through various policy measures and interventions

Sixty years after India adopted the Constitution, Indian children finally got the right to free and compulsory education as indicated in its Directive Principles. The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act 2009 guarantees to all children within the age-group 6-14 years the right to education in proper schools with trained teachers. It was a long, long time coming, but this historic legislation, despite

the many loopholes, has the power to transform the lives of millions of poor Indian children who have so far been deprived of the opportunity to make their lives better than those of their parents. Education in India is on the concurrent list. This means that while the Centre is responsible for providing general direction in terms of educational policy and curriculum, the running of the vast school network is the responsibility of individual state governments.

#### **Special initiatives for promoting education in North East region of India**

The centre and the respective state governments have opened up various programmes or projects to promote education in this North-eastern region of India. The nationwide initiative of spreading mass education started back in 2001-2002 with pioneering Sarva Shiksha Abhiyaan (SSA)– the GOI mission to 'educate all' following the mandate of 86th amendment to the Constitution of India that advocates free and compulsory Education to the Children of 6-14 years age group, as a Fundamental Right.

The SSA has been fairly successful in the north eastern region. It has supplied the states with plum monetary and infrastructural support in the course of the implementation of the project. For example, the state of Mizoram had received a total amount of Rs.1,14,25,000 during 2000 – 2001 for its Saiha district and capital Aizawl alone, by the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD). And not only Mizoram, the whole region was being considered for a further 15% concession by Parliamentary Standing Committee on Human Resource Development (HRD) for the low amount of internal revenue generated by the seven sisters states, while the rest of the country, barring Jammu and Kashmir, was asked by the centre to bear half the cost of SSA in their respective states.

Schemes like communalization of elementary education, community mobilisation, progress of civil works and actions on drop-out children have been implemented. Apart from SSA which mainly aims at universalising elementary education, the UPA government has come up with National Common Minimum Programme (NCMP), which mainly focuses on higher education. Apart from its main objective to translate the broad scenario in education, one of its main commitments is that all North Eastern States will be given special attention to upgrade and expand infrastructure.

However, it cannot be claimed that the centre and the respective state governments in the region have been greatly successful in addressing the demand for education, for the obvious factors - ranging from lack of infrastructure, political unrest to corruption in terms of distribution of fund allocated to the states by the centre - acting as practical deterrents. Though, various national universities like the Indira Gandhi National Open University are aiming at spreading higher education in the region through various SSA initiatives, it will take a long time before the infrastructure can be built and adequately made use of.

If the Look East Policy, popularly endorsed by the politicians and media, do take shape –the face of North East may change for good. After all, why a region would be deprived of the fruits of changing socio-economic climate the rest of the country is having a taste of? But, it is needless to say, that the region can savour its due share of the pie, only when its own people can take part in this huge economic surge. They can do that by being conducive for the market and supplying it with employable youths. Two chief factors can help attain this goal- peace and education.

The rate of literacy is not a problem here, since the rate is higher than the national average; hence, the drive should be more on adequate and standard secondary and higher education. Since, there is not much scope of employment in the region; the employability of the graduates should be kept in mind before taking initiatives to opening up new educational institutions or courses. The new courses or institutions should ensure that their graduates are employed, if not in the region, at least outside it. The lack of employment in the states of North East is a nagging problem and cannot be solved easily - keeping in mind the region's complex mosaic of demography, polity and economy. R.S. Mooshahary – the State Chief Information Commissioner, Assam, once expressed grave concern over the number of unemployed youth registered with the employment exchange of Assam. And not only Assam; - Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim – all these states have the same story to share. It's the identical fact of unemployment and potential reserve of youth made redundant by lack of work; and many times - also employability.

**Some steps taken for promoting Education**

**i) Strengthening of Teachers Training Institutions**

The Centrally Sponsored Scheme of Restructuring and Reorganization of Teacher Education was initiated in 1987 pursuant to the formulation of the National Policy on Education, 1986. The Scheme was revised in March, 2012. The Scheme envisages integration of teacher education with the overall education development in the States in keeping with the mandate of RTE. It will also help in the expansion of the capacity of the Teacher Education Institutions especially in some of the deficit States of East and North-Eastern Region (NER) and also address the problem of large number of untrained teachers. Central assistance is extended to States/ Union Territories (UTs) for civil works, purchase of equipments, pay and allowances, training and research programs, etc. The funding pattern will be in the ratio of 75:25 for all States/UTs but it is 90:10 for North-East region States. The total amount allocated for Teacher Training Institutes has been constant over the past three financial years at INR 500 crores, of which INR 50 crores was allocated separately for the NER states in the last two budgets.

**ii) National Programme of Mid-Day Meals in Schools**

With a view to enhance the enrolment, retention, attendance and simultaneously improving nutritional levels among children, the National Programme of Nutritional Support to Primary Education was launched as a centrally sponsored scheme on 15 August 1995, initially in 2,408 blocks in the country. Gradually, it has been expanded to cover children at primary level in all blocks in the country. The total amount allocated for the Mid-day Meals Programme had increased from INR 11,830 crores in 2012-13 to INR 13,215 crores in

2013-14 and has remained the same in 2014-15 budget. But, the amount allocated for the North-Eastern states had increased from INR 1,194 crores in 2012- 13 to INR 1,321 crores in 2013-14, and has been accounted for with an increase in the General Education Budget in 2014-15.

**iii) Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA)**

Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) is a flagship program of Government of India. It is being implemented in partnership with the States/UT Governments for universalization of elementary education in the country. The SSA covers all districts in the country in order to ensure access, retention and quality improvement in elementary education.

The sharing of expenditure between the Centre and the States during the 10th Plan was on 75:25 basis. For 11th Plan period the funding pattern has been revised as: 65:35 for the first two years of the Plan, 60:40 for the third year, 55:45 for the fourth year and 50:50 thereafter. With respect to the eight North-Eastern States, the funding pattern is 90:10, with the central share re-sourced from the 10 percent earmarked funds for the North-Eastern Region from the SSA's Central Budget. However, with the operationalisation of the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act, with effect from 1 April 2010, the funding pattern in respect of RTE-SSA program for the period 2010-11 to 2014-15 has been revised as 65:35 for States/UTs other than North-Eastern States. For the eight North-Eastern States, the existing fund sharing pattern of 90:10 between the Centre and States would continue. The allocation for NER states had increased from Rs. 2519 crores in 2012-13 to Rs. 2725 crores in 2013-14 before being integrated with the General Education Budget in 2014-15.

**iv) Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA)**

The implementation of the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) led to a massive increase in the number of students completing upper primary level. As a follow-up to SSA, it has been felt necessary to meet the increased demand for access to Secondary Education. Accordingly, a new scheme, Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA) was launched in March 2009. Implementation of the scheme commenced in 2009-10. The total allocation for the RMSA in 2012-13 was INR 3,123 crores, which increased to INR 3,983 crores in 2013-14 and INR 4,966 crores in 2014-15. The allocation for North-Eastern states was INR 312 crores in 2012-13 and INR 336 crores in 2013-14 before the integration into the General Education Budget in 2014-15.

The 2014-15 budgets has done away with separate allocations for the North-East Region and has integrated the expenditure with the general education budget but the Centre-State share of funding for programs appears to remain the same at 90:10.

**Literacy Rates of North East Region states**

**Table 1:** Literacy rates in NER states

States	Assam	Meghalaya	Mizoram	Nagaland	Manipur	Tripura	A.P	Sikkim	India
Overall literacy	73.18	75.48	91.58	80.11	79.85	87.75	66.95	82.20	74.04
Male literacy	78.17	82.4	93.72	83.29	86.49	92.18	73.69	87.29	82.14
Female literacy	67.27	64.36	89.40	76.69	73.17	83.15	59.57	76.43	65.46
Literacy Gap	10.90	18.04	4.32	6.6	13.32	9.03	14.12	10.86	16.68

Source: Census 2011

Overall literacy rates of all the Northeast region states are quite satisfactory. In all the cases literacy rates are more or less at par with the national average. Among the North-east region states Mizoram has got the highest percentage of literacy rate of 91.58%, following Tripura has got 87.75% and

Sikkim has got 82.20%. Male literacy rates and female literacy rates are also good. But variations are there in case of literacy gaps between male and female. It is very high in case of Meghalaya (18.04%) but very low in case of Mizoram (4.32%).

**Table 2:** Name of districts with highest and lowest literacy rates

States	Total literacy rate	Name of district with highest total literacy rate	Name of district with lowest total literacy rate	Gap
1.A.P	66.95	Papumpare (82.14)	Kurung Kumei (50.67)	31.47
2.Assam	73.18	Kamrup metro (88.66)	Dhubri (59.36)	29.30
3.Manipur	79.85	Imphal West (86.70)	Tamenlong (70.40)	16.30
4.Meghalaya	75.48	East khasi Hills (84.70)	Jaintia Hills (63.26)	21.44
5.Mizoram	91.58	Serehip (98.76)	Lawngtlai (66.41)	32.35
6.Nagaland	80.11	Mokokchung (92.68)	Mon (56.60)	36.08
7.Sikkim	82.20	East Sikkim (84.67)	North Sikkim (77.39)	7.28
8.Tripura	87.75	West Tripura (88.91)	South Tripura (85.41)	3.50

Source: Census 2011

The Census 2011 results revealed that within a State also there is wide variation in the total literacy rates. For instance, Mokokchung in Nagaland has highest total literacy rates of 92.68% while Mon's total literacy rate is as low as 56.60%, a

gap of 36.08 percentage points. This clearly shows that a greater degree of effort in implementation of National Literacy Mission is needed in districts showing low literacy rates within a state.

**Table 3:** Comparative statement of schools meeting the selected RTE norms, 2014

Selected RTE norms/NER states	Assam	Meghalaya	Mizoram	Nagaland	Manipur	Tripura	A.P	Sikkim	India
PTR	34	60	83.9	92.1	92.6	81.4	69.4	91.9	49.3
CTR	70.1	67.3	77.3	73.9	36.1	47.7	68.7	78.6	72.8

Source: ASER 2014

Intra-state variations are very prominent in meeting the RTE indicators among the North eastern Region states. From the above table it can be seen that in Assam 70% schools are meeting the CTR (class room –teacher ratio) norms but only

34% schools are meeting the PTR(pupil-teacher ratio) norms. In case of Manipur, PTR is high (92.6%) but CTR is very low at 36.1%. Tripura has also high PTR but low CTR.

**Table 4:** Comparative statement of schools meeting the selected RTE norms, 2014

Selected RTE norms/NER states	Assam	Meghalaya	Mizoram	Nagaland	Manipur	Tripura	A.P	Sikkim	India
Office store/Building	52.1	41.2	91.7	81	79.2	87.6	75.6	87.7	76.7
Play ground	56.3	54	72.2	43.8	51.4	75.2	61.7	91.9	65.3
Boundary wall	24.3	9.7	51.1	52.6	9.6	28.2	44.9	42.7	58.8
No Library	54.7	76.4	83.2	85.4	82	40	75	44.7	21.9

Source: ASER 2014

From table.4, it can be seen that in meeting the other RTE norms, wide scale inter-state variations are there in NER states. In Mizoram, 91.7% schools are having the office store and office building but in Meghalaya it is just 41.2%. Again,

in Sikkim 91.9% schools do have play-ground but it is just 43.8% in Nagaland. Same variations are there in case of meeting the RTE indicators regarding boundary wall and library.

**Table 5:** Comparative statement of schools meeting the selected RTE norms, 2014

Selected RTE norms/NER states	Assam	Meghalaya	Mizoram	Nagaland	Manipur	Tripura	A.P	Sikkim	India
Drinking water	65.3	16.5	68.5	23.4	15.7	56.2	53.5	74	75.6
Toilet useable	58.7	38.8	33.7	68	53.1	58.7	35.1	73	65.2
Girls' toilet useable	47	16.8	28.1	45	19.8	57.1	24.5	65.2	55.7
Kitchen-shed for MDM	82.7	83.3	94	79.2	52.8	97.1	57.4	97.3	88.1

Source: ASER 2014

Table.5 shows the variations of NER states in meeting the other RTE norms like, drinking water facility, useable toilets, provision for girls' toilet and kitchen shed for cooking mid-day meal. In Sikkim, 74% schools have drinking water facility but in Manipur it is as low as 15.7%. In Meghalaya, 83.3% schools have kitchen shed for cooking mid-day meal but only 16.8% schools have girls' toilet facility. In Mizoram, 94% schools have cooking shed but only 28.1% schools have girls' toilet facility. So, inter-state as well as intra-state variations are there in meeting the RTE indicators.

#### School enrollment & out of school children (age group 6-14) all

In case of school enrollment and out of school children also there is inter-state variations among the NER states. From table no.6, we can see that in Tripura enrollment in Government school is 89.4% but in Manipur it is as low as 24.4%. Whereas, enrollment in private school is very high in Manipur(73.3%). Out of school children are very high in Meghalaya(4.2%) among the other NER states.

**Table 6:** School enrollment & out of school children (age group 6-14) all, 2014

States	Govt.	Private	Other	Not in school	Total
Arunachal Pradesh	73.4	24.5	0.1	2.1	100
Assam	77.8	17.3	1.8	3.2	100
Manipur	24.4	73.3	0.5	1.8	100
Meghalaya	42.7	51.7	1.4	4.2	100
Mizoram	59.3	40.0	0	0.7	100
Nagaland	58.4	38.9	0.1	2.6	100
Sikkim	67.8	31.3	0	0.9	100
Tripura	89.4	9.1	0.9	0.7	100
India (rural)	64.9	30.8	1.0	3.3	100

Source: ASER 2014

### Performance of Children in North-East Region (NER) states

It has been claimed by the official authorities that North east region has achieved near universal enrolment and enhanced hard and soft infrastructure. However, while these region has made considerable progress in improving Elementary Education when measured by the quality of schooling inputs including student enrolment and retention but the progress on learning outcomes has been minimal. ASER reports regularly highlighted the fact that learning outcomes were stagnant and more recently worsening.

### Learning levels of NER students

#### Comparative learning level statement of NER states

**Table 7:** % of children in std. IV who can read at least std.I level text

States	2010 (Govt.)	2014 (Govt.)	2010 (Private)	2014 (Private)
Arunachal Pradesh	57.4	49.1	60.1	52.2
Assam	59.3	42.9	73.7	72.9
Manipur	62.1	60.4	81.4	79.8
Meghalaya	82.7	75.1	89.0	80.8
Mizoram	95.5	61.9	82.9	81
Nagaland	67.5	58.9	88.6	84.3
Sikkim	75.7*	70.7*	---	--
Tripura	71.2	64.1	---	--
India (rural)	65.5	49.2	76.2	73.1

Source: ASER 2014

**Table 8:** % of children in std. IV who can do at least subtraction

States	2010 (Govt.)	2014 (Govt.)	2010 (Private)	2014 (Private)
Arunachal Pradesh	62.7	54.9	64.3	57.1
Assam	44.9	25.7	66.0	58.4
Manipur	56.4	67.4	78.8	79.9
Meghalaya	64.4	33.0	74.2	54.9
Mizoram	89.5	78.5	79.2	84.5
Nagaland	69.6	55.0	79.1	72.7
Sikkim	77.5	64.0	----	----
Tripura	66.8	52.8	----	----
India (rural)	55.1	32.3	67.7	59.3

Table.7 shows us that in all the NER states learning level has declined from the year 2010 to 2014 both for private as well as in Government schools. From table 8, we can see that except Manipur, in all the other NER states arithmetic skill has decreased during this time period for Government schools. In private school performance Manipur and Mizoram are the exceptions but in all other NER states, learning level has decreased.

From the above two table, it can be said that RTE Act., is failed to improve the learning level of children during this four years time span. In all the cases, the learning level has declined. Though, there is no provision of improving the learning skill of children in RTE act, but it is implied that such long list of norms and regulations are for improving the quality of education. Actually, RTE act. is very much silent about improving the learning level of students. It has mainly focused on infrastructural development only. It is unfortunate that the radical transformation of the schools and the larger educational system that was expected from the RTE Act has not happened. The failure of the state to deliver on its own legal and constitutional commitments on a mass scale is unfortunate.

### Conclusion

India has not been able to warm up its North East to the idea of turning it into a corridor of prosperity both for the state and the region. Border areas have their own problems and peculiarities. The Northeast region with ninety-nine per cent of its boundary being international border, the problems and peculiarities are even more accentuated. In spite of resourcefulness the entire region is regarded as underdeveloped. But, it is needless to say, that the region can savour its due share of the pie, only when its own people can take part in this huge economic surge. They can do that by being conducive for the market and supplying it with employable youths. Two chief factors can help attain this goal- peace and education. The centre and the respective state governments have opened up various programmes or projects to promote education in this North-eastern region of India. It has been claimed by the official authorities that NER has achieved near universal enrolment and enhanced hard and soft infrastructure. However, while NER has made considerable progress in improving Elementary Education when measured by the quality of schooling inputs including student enrolment and retention, the progress on learning outcomes has been minimal. ASER reports regularly highlighted the fact that learning outcomes were stagnant and more recently worsening. Based on data generated by ASER and DISE on elementary education, the present study showed that there are large scales inter-state and intra-state variations with respect to fulfilling the requirements of RTE norms in North East region of India. These regional disparities in educational development and widening gap between financial allocations and outcomes do raise some important governance questions. The bulk of the expenditure on education is being spent on maintaining capital than producing capital. Government schools are the beneficiaries of such maintenance costs, despite an actual decrease in the quality of education (as shown by the ASER reports). The problem with the education policy of the government will continue to persist if the focus remains on merely creating schools and spending disproportionately on their maintenance. The focus of

expenditure needs to shift to one that is based on performance-based evaluation to create a scenario in which schools function efficiently to deliver quality education. The importance of the School Assessment Programme suggested in the 2014-15 budget cannot be stressed enough in this context and needs to be implemented nation-wide as soon as possible to fix a system that has led to wasteful expenditure, by stressing on mere quantity rather than the quality of education. After all, universalization of education is pointless without universal quality of education.

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