

Access and Equity in Education- Indian Perspective

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Abstract: In this paper, education is reaffirmed as an effective agent towards achieving national prosperity through improvement of every future citizen. Hence it has been acknowledged worldwide that it is constitutional obligation for a Nation to provide equal access to all citizens for good education. Indian Government, in particular, had set a target date for providing ‘free and compulsory education’ to all children in the age group 6 – 14 years. This presentation enumerates certain reasons, as to why the slogan ‘Education for All’ could not be materialized in Toto. The remedial measures taken by the Government of India as well as by the State Governments are also discussed. Some data provided analyses the present status of the ‘Education for All’ programme. In addition, some suggestions are also provided as to how all pupils can be offered equal and justified opportunities for education. Claiming that the education is an agent for social reforms and people need education useful to lead a comfortable life. Some light is also thrown on as to what kind of reforms are to be made and what should be the ‘vision’ for ‘Education for All’ in India in particular and the world in general, in the coming decade.

Keywords: National Developments, Universalisation of Education, Rural Urban Imbalance, Indices of Inequalities, Collaboration Communities.

Introduction

“Education is refuge in adversity”

Education has a pivotal role in determining the economic, social cultural, political, scientific and spiritual development of a country. Development usually refers to the totality of all human and material resources as well as the knowledge in various walks of life – economic, scientific, philosophic, socialistic and cultural, possessed by a country. For a country to be prosperous, the above resources and knowledge are to be put in to maximum use for the benefit of the maximum number of people.

Education, in its real sense can achieve such a target and hence is said to be an agent through which national development can be realized.

If you fail to plan, you plan to fail

To ensure national development, and achieve maximum prosperity in all walks of life, every citizen has to prosper. His over-all living conditions are to be improved. It goes without saying that this is possible only if each citizen of the country is well educated.

Thus the onus of national development, which is dependent upon the development of each individual, falls on the national government. In other words, imparting education for all becomes a commitment of the Government.

Indian Scenario

India has a huge and pluralistic societal structure with over 143.5 million students studying at various stages of school education, in about a million of schools (engaging over 370 thousand teachers) spread over 539 administrative districts. These dimensions speak the efforts made by the government for the expansion of educational facilities. This picture may not be so gloomy yet it cannot be satisfactory/ adequate either for a huge population of one billion. Following clip may illustrate it:

Plan India, New Delhi handout invokes us to workout a strategy for such a dismal situation as “Did you know India has: *The largest population of street children in the world, 15000 children missing every year and over 90 million child laborers etc.*”

As far as elementary education is concerned the facilities in view of various aspects are not justifiably distributed across its habitat. The quality of education offered needs much to be desired.

This concern has been shown through inclusion of appropriate provisions in Art. 45 of the Constitution of India. This states “The State shall endeavour to provide within a period of 10 years from the commencement of the constitution, for free and compulsory education for all children until they complete the age of fourteen years”.

Primarily education in India starts at the age of 6 years (in more than 50% of the states), the Government should ensure free and compulsory education to all within the age group of 6-14 years (see **Box 1** for status). It is hoped that beyond this age, the student can continue education on his/her own because his/her chances of good employment will otherwise be bleak. This also implies that the education imparted by the State to all irrespective of their caste, creed, colour, sex, region etc. should be an enriching and thrilling experience. Strictly speaking it is preparation to lead productive, useful and contented life. A continuation of such education will enable a child to become an asset of the country – an agent who can transform our human and material resources to economic and intellectual wealth. Such a young and energetic citizen

“Serves the nation to grow and grows himself to serve”

Today’s slogan is sophisticated that says, “choreograph pupil to reflect purposefully”. Such children would be the nation’s pride and if opportunities are provided to them, the nation sees the progress.

Box 1**Present status of Indian Education****Student enrolment**

India lives in villages yet the enrolment of boys and girls outnumber in urban localities. Yet the number of physically handicapped pupil is far more in rural sector than its urban counterpart

Success rate

Rural school boys have 21% and girls have 14% lower success rate respectively than their urban counterparts

Teacher facility

Rural schools are far behind in quality teachers as well as female teachers, which are the backbones of child education. Student teacher ratio is enormous in rural schools. Administration has lot and varied expectations from the teachers of villages. Students cannot think of tutorials.

Assistance

Rural schools hardly get financial and need based assistance as and when required. The encouragement is prominently missing.

If a country can produce an army of well-educated children with the right aptitude and attitude, the nation develops fast into a prosperous one. The benefits will be maximum when each and every individual is given opportunity for '*right*' type of education depending on his/her ability, interest and aptitude. That is why many countries have adopted programmes like

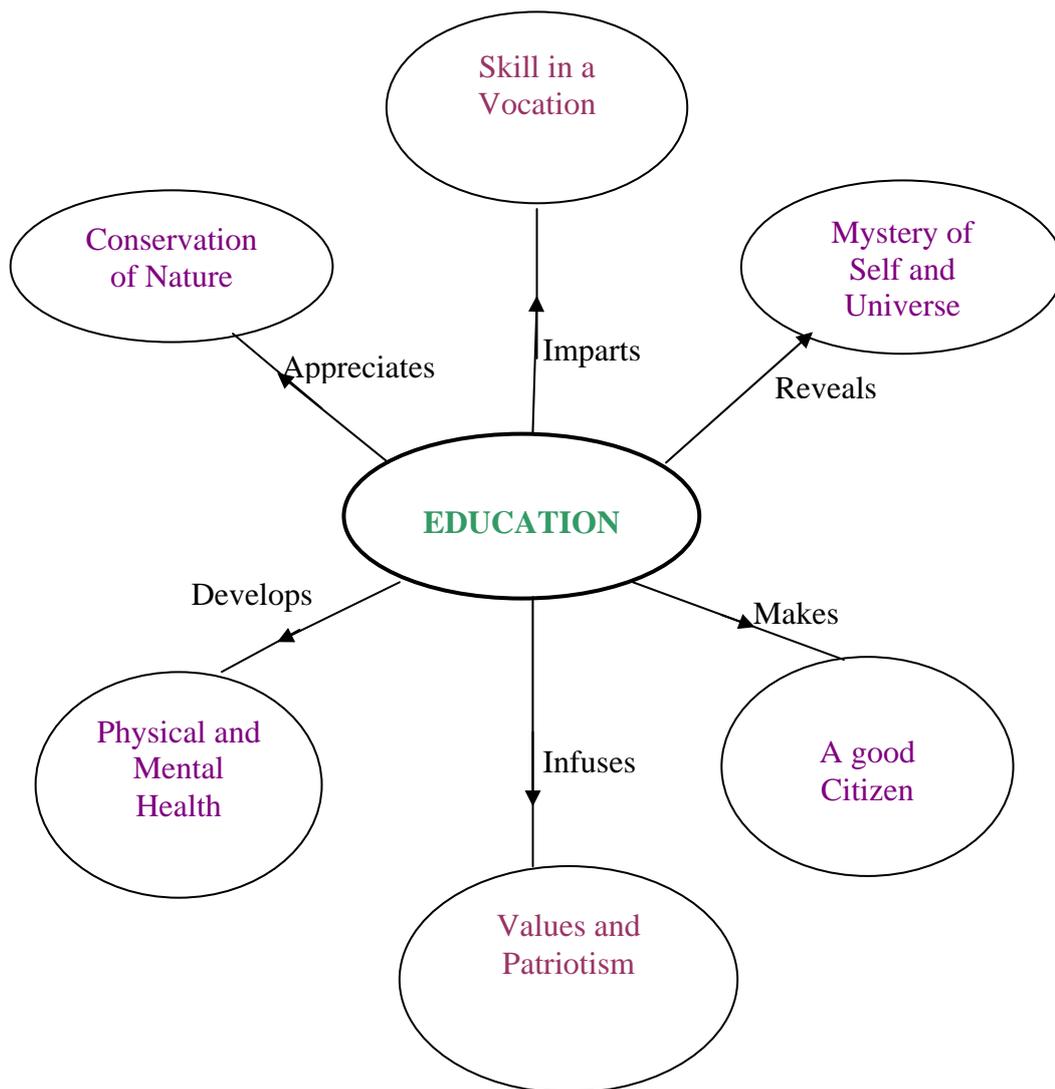
“Equal opportunity of education”

“Education for all”

India is a vast country with variety of natural resources, adequate for its holistic development. But nature always conserves. Her people are also gifted with varied cultures, religions, race, regional practices, status, economic strata and abilities. While providing 'equal' opportunities for all, one has to keep in view all these differences and provide appropriate 'education'.

'Equal' opportunity, does not mean providing 'same' type of education for all irrespective of their differences since such education will bring out a disparity in their achievement levels. The very purpose of equality of education is to ensure a common level of achievement by all pupils of a given age group.

The plan below summarizes as to what can be achieved through such education.



Have we provided equal opportunities to all? If we look back at the present education scenario in India the answer to the above question is a simple ‘no’.

Due to various social, political, economic, cultural, and other causes we are lagging behind in our goal. Hence the constitutional pledge of achieving ‘education for all’ is not realized. This has resulted in not developing our country to the fullest extent. The targets are not reached.

As per the Constitution, free and compulsory education target should have been reached within 10 years of the day the constitution was enforced (26 Nov 1949), i.e. by 1960. Due to various economic and political reasons as also other various dimensions of complexities, it remained as a myth, and hence the time for achieving the goal was deferred to successively 1970, 1976 and ultimately to 1990. But as far as the achievement is concerned, the ‘status-quo’ remains and hence the POA -1992 (Programme of Action-1992) gave a sufficiently longer realistic time of up to the beginning of 21st century. Universalisation of Education cannot be realized unless equal opportunities for education are provided to all.

Even though the government is taking various measures, the reasons for not fulfilling the targets are varied, profound and many. Some of them are:

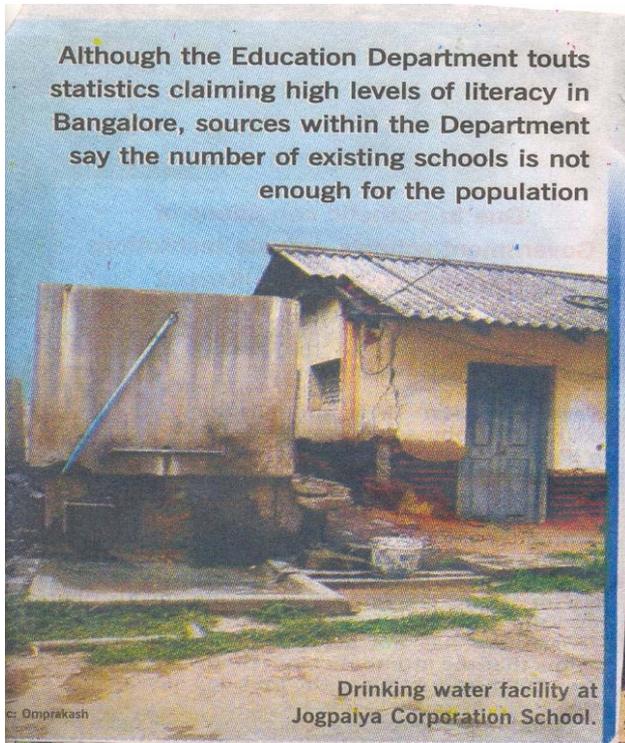
- i) The huge population to be educated belongs to various economic levels and to narrow down such differences is not an easy task. People who cannot afford basic needs of food, shelter and clothing rarely think of education! On the other hand we have millionaires who have become so by commercializing education.
- ii) The weaker sections of the society have very low literacy levels and do not enroll their children in schools, even wherever they exist (see Table 1).

Table 1: Elementary Education (Figure relate to 2004 unless otherwise stated)

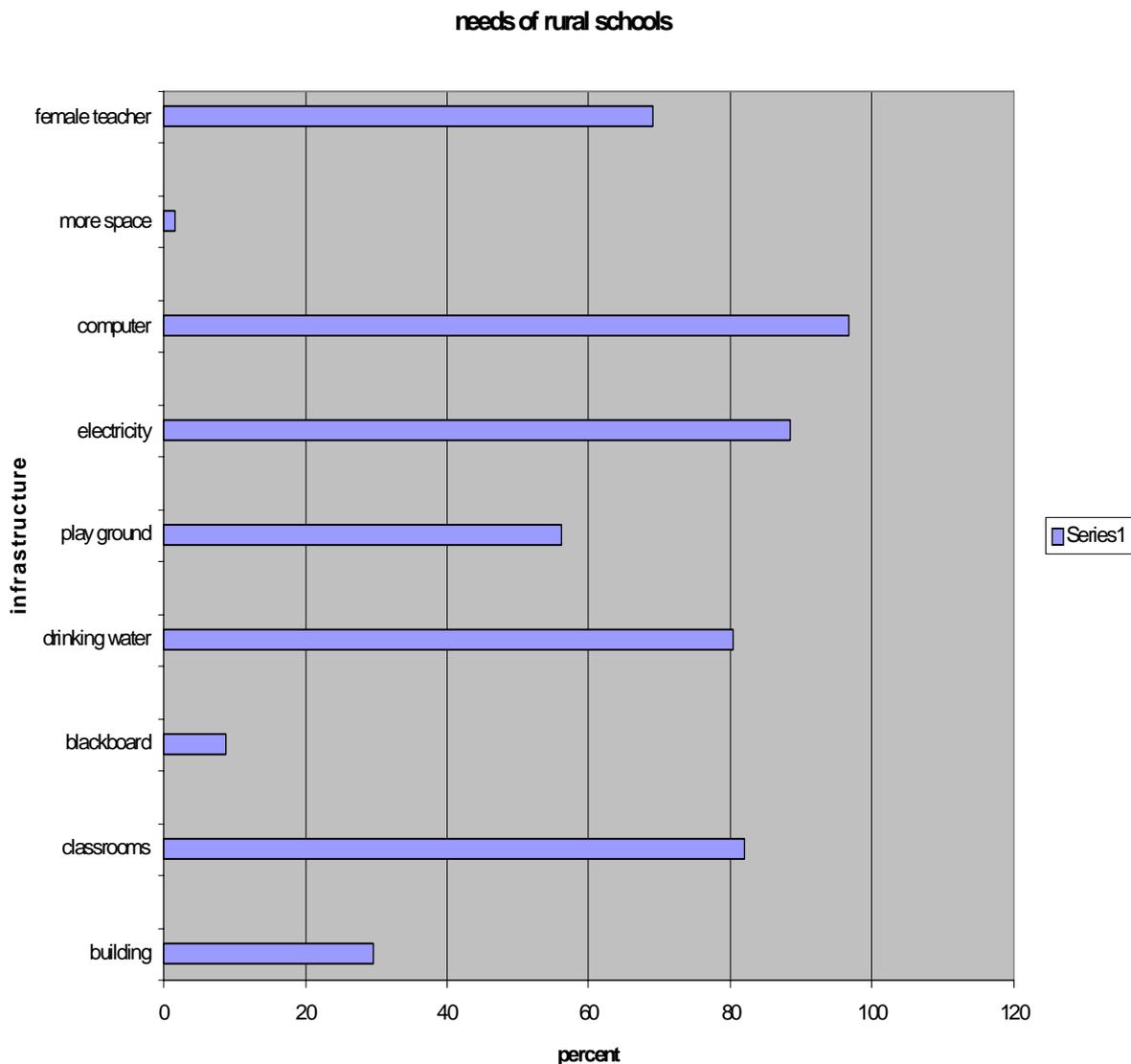
Number of districts	539
Total number of schools Urban	90537 (Exclusively elementary 54715)
Rural	581225 (Exclusively elementary 717574)
Total enrolment	143536061
Total teachers	3665673

No.	Description	Urban		Rural	
		Number	%	Number	%
1	Infra structure				
1.1	Pucca Building	39723	72.7	409298	70.42
1.2	Schools with no classrooms	5006	9.15	45277	7.97
1.3	Schools with no Black board	4782	8.74	512640	8.82
1.4	Shift schools	9121	9.03	9823	1.69
1.5	Schools with no drinking water facility	15092	16.67	114443	19.69
1.6	Schools with playground	27368	50.02	254576	43.80
1.7	Schools with Electricity	26071	47.65	66608	11.46
1.8	Schools having computers	5613	10.26	19529	3.36
2	Teachers				
2.1	No teacher schools	897	1.64	6567	1.13
2.2	No female teacher schools	1685	3.08	13775	2.37
2.3	Female teachers (Male teachers)	156938 (79027)	66.51	443661 (991240)	30.92
2.4	Teacher provided with in-service training				
	Female	20973	26.54	411463	41.51
	Male	43864	27.95	199647	45
3	Enrolment				
3.1	Students per class		42.5		46.22
3.2	Boys	9860225		47989156	
3.3	Girls	9182158		43097526	
4	Education of disadvantaged				
4.1	Scheduled caste	1710749	17.53	10615201	22.1
4.2	Scheduled Tribe	485123	4.92	4865711	11.29
4.3	Handicapped boys	89316	0.009	695774	0.014
4.4	Handicapped girls	64807	0.007	91903	0.002
5	Matters of concerns				
5.1	Success rate Boys	9256779	93.88	34993693	72.92
	Success rate Girls	7545897	82.18	29314937	68.02
5.2	Survival upto class V	15673785	82.31	54433401	59.76

- iii) In some tribal, rural, hilly areas remote from the main stream of population, schools are not within the access of pupils.
- iv) Wherever the schools exist they lack basic facilities like classroom, teachers, blackboard, sanitation facilities, furniture, playground, etc. (see exemplary photos). Laboratories, Libraries are luxuries, which cannot be thought of in such schools (see bar diagram).



Bar diagram to show how rural schools are desperately looking ahead for the facilities (Ref. A C Mehta)



- v) Students are not supplied textbooks in time, and those that are supplied are not learner friendly. They lack clarity in diagrams; sizes are small and so on.

The quality of education offered needs much to be desired. A recent survey conducted by a national daily “India Today “ shows that only in about 39% schools the quality of education is tolerable.

There are many causes as to why quality education cannot be made available and schools cannot be made accessible to all i.e. opportunities could not be equally provided to all for good education. The parameters are subtle and many. A complete study of all and solution to such a problem is neither easy nor readily available.

India is mainly an agricultural country, a land of villages. It is found from various studies at national level that inequality arises due to imbalances between facilities provided in rural and urban areas. Here some data is provided to list out various aspects that cause imbalance between rural and urban areas (refer **Box 2**). A glance of these data speaks volumes about the

rural urban imbalances in educational opportunities. Based on these data some reforms and suggestions as to how an attempt can be made to set right the imbalance are provided.

Box 2

Factors of rural - urban imbalance

- *Regional, state and district differences in educational provisions and participation
- *Concentration of educational facilities
- *Quality schools/expensive public schools catering to high society
- *Unequal education of different ethnic or racial groups
- *Radically different school environments
- *Non-uniform infrastructure

Indices of inequalities

- *Uneven enrolment rates for deprived social groups and classes
- *Low transition ratio/high stagnation rate
- *Different levels of educational attainments
- *Non-availability of instruction in mother tongue
- *Gap in instructional quality: low salary / low quality / inexperienced teachers
- *Unfriendly class size
- *Availability of learning material

Compared to students in urban area, rural students are at a disadvantage and for none of their fault they are not at par with their urban counterparts. It is very clear therefore that unless the gap between these underprivileged and urban class students is narrowed down or completely eliminated, equity in education remains a dream. If all are not given equal opportunity to learn, universalisation of education cannot be achieved.

Though the Table 1 gives an overall view of urban and rural Indian school system as compiled by A C Mehta of NIEPA, first scrutiny of the table suggests that

% does not reflect the real status (it should be w.r.t. the actual number)

More female teachers need to be appointed

More health awareness needed in rural areas

What the Government is doing to ensure equity in education?

Some special measures/programmes are being taken/proposed to achieve equity. Let us discuss them briefly.

- a) Providing free / subsidized school transport for pupils, student concession passes on railways and buss are issued.
- b) The learning materials like free textbooks, notebooks and free uniforms, food grains are provided.
- c) To encourage regular attendance of children free mid-day meals are provided.
- d) Sufficient numbers of trained teachers are appointed and it is being made compulsory that they should reside very near to the school to ensure their regular attendance.
- e) Teachers are given in-service training about how to implement new textbooks, adopt new methods of teaching to ensure better learning.
- f) A minimum number of working days for the school in a year (like 240 days / year) and the number of working hours per day (5 – 6 hours) are prescribed uniformly for all schools.
- g) Schools organize ‘Compulsory Education Drives’ once or twice in a year to identify children who are not enrolled and to admit them to schools.

- h) Formalities like insisting birth certificate, transfer certificate, etc. is overlooked and reasons for non-enrollment are not asked.
- i) Government ensures that all pupils have school in their area within a walk able distance.
- j) Government is financing liberally for projects like DPEP (District Primary Education Programme), Operation Blackboard, and Adoption of Schools by NGOs.
- k) Apart from curriculum, co-curricular activities are given importance through cultural exchange programme in residential school specially meant for rural and tribal children.
- l) Government is trying to make education accessible to remote and isolated schools through various techniques using Education Satellite (EDUSAT), Teleconferencing, Gyan darshan, etc.
- m) NPE-2005 emphasizes education through mother tongue. Efforts are on to make mother tongue a medium of instruction even at higher levels of education.
- n) It should try to alleviate suspicions expressed by people of concerns viz. Cartoon clip by Somaiah (04.03.06 in Vijay Times) “Education Budget?” Fine! “ But no mention of ‘pipelines’ which would ensure that funds reach their allotted destinations!”

Objects of global concern (*items) and options for the immediate solution

*Students do not spell out their cultural difficulties

Provide them a secular platform where they can be fearless and more vocal

*There has to be emotional and social difficulties, which inherit basic skill deficiencies

Increase the residential schools especially for those regions where such differences are prominent

*Pupils are not a part of learning environment where they can participate

Encourage cognitive apprenticeship culture

*Pedagogy and content are not always in unison

Train educators to create a kind of Pedagogical context to support collaborative communities using socially relevant content domains which would encourage and act as stimulant for all the participants of the community

*The teacher does not reach each pupil

Its teacher who can raise the attainment level there should be no compromise on the teacher student ratio

*What to do with the belief that education spoils the girls?

Propagate that the education is sine qua non of useful existence of upcoming society

Not a spoiler agent. Further it is a social equalizer too.

*Uneducated parents do not want to shelve child’s earnings

Schemes like payment of some *lump sum* amount can ease the problem. It may be noted here that one of the state government has announced a fixed amount to be deposited in girl child’s name when she clears IX standard

It may be quoted that the UNESCO declares that

Any distinction, exclusion, limitation, or preference based on race, colour, sex, language, religion, opinion, social origin, economic condition or birth cannot

- i) Deprive any person to access to education of any type at any level
- ii) Limit education to inferior standard
- iii) Maintain separate education institution for a group of persons
- iv) Inflict conditions which are incompatible to dignity of human

Hence

- i) Difficult or dirty access to the school

- ii) Lack of basic physical and material facilities
 - iii) Negative attitude towards children of poor construction workers, sweepers, garbage collectors, petty vendors, domestic workers etc which are force to stay in slums
- must be the concern of the government.

The need of the hour is to have a fresh paradigm “let learning be a personal reconstruct, less clinical and more human”

What more can be done

National accreditation centers can be set up to form benchmarks in excellence
 Establish national centers of excellence in various disciplines (like curriculum, pedagogy, material development, evaluation, co curricular activities, flexible learning modes, psychology etc), which would serve as guide centers
 Credit hours, credits may be uniformly introduced in place of pass-fail with no detention policy up to secondary terminal
 Joyful classrooms with play material, e-gadgets and furniture suited to age be provided
 Library of books, audio video materials, and museum for nurturing hobbies may be set

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