

## **Elementary Education: Rising Expenditure, Poor Quality**

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Universal elementary education in India is yet to be achieved despite being on the agenda of public policy since independence. Increased attention to it after the adoption of the National Policy of Education 1986 (NPE-86), recently with a programme on Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan in 2001 and the 86<sup>th</sup> Amendment making education a Fundamental Right, etc have made a significant impact on elementary education and there has been considerable progress in the area. Despite this, the goal still eludes. A number of factors both supply and demand related viz, school effectiveness, poor quality of schooling, poor infrastructure, inadequate financing, poverty, high household cost of schooling have been identified as being critical to the growth of schooling. Of late, factors relating to governance and management viz, lack of teacher accountability, teacher politics, centralized management and the nexus between teacher unions and politics have been identified as obstructing the target of achieving universal elementary education. These factors interplay at varying degrees across various states in India, posing a major challenge to the achievement of the long cherished goal. However, a few states besides Kerala, especially Himachal Pradesh and Tamil Nadu have recorded outstanding successes in educational development in a short time span through the adoption of committed public policy with relatively efficient public delivery system. At the other end, the experience of economically and educationally least developed and often populous and geographically larger states viz, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Orissa, Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, provides a glimpse of the hard reality of India.

The book under review examines the problems and prospects of achieving UEE in the educationally backward states – by focusing on Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Assam, West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh and an educationally advanced state Tamil Nadu. It analyses access and coverage of schools, enrolment, teachers, physical facilities both in government and private schools through a survey specifically designed for this purpose. It also identifies the magnitude of non enrolled or non-participation of children in schooling and the reasons for the same. Yet another important aspect covered is the household cost of education, examined in many of the dimensions viz., by caste, income, occupation, educational level of parents, gender, rural-urban, type of schools, etc.

The book runs into eight chapters with a first chapter being the synthesis of seven state studies (Andhra Pradesh not included) and rest focusing on the popular triangle of Indian

education i.e, access, equity and quality and also the family costs and public financing of elementary education in seven states. The first chapter by Santosh Mehrotra and also editor of the book provides a lucid synthesis of not only the eight state studies but also the emerging trends, problems, issues and perspectives in other states and India as a whole. How household and school related factors affect the demand for education has been examined focusing on the cost and financing of elementary education. Further, it also examines private schools and their share in total schools and enrolment and their better infrastructure than government schools. Examining the two domains that of public expenditure and household expenditure on elementary education is an important component of the book. Further, the recent initiatives of state governments to attain the goal have been highlighted. An important aspect of potential and additional reforms required has been put well in place. This chapter categorically brings out the pathetic situation of sub-standard government school system leading to widening inequality and social segmentation. It further identifies two fundamental causes for this phenomenon the fiscal problems of the states and their unwillingness or inability to ensure teacher accountability and to improve the quality of government schooling.

Ravi Srivastava examines the status of elementary education by looking at the access, internal inefficiency (attendance, drop-out and repetition) by government and non-government schools; school infrastructure in terms of physical infrastructure, student teacher ratios, teacher qualification, training status and vacancies, etc. Further, the chapter analyses household cost of schooling in private and government schools and components of household costs. Performance is better in private schools while access and equity in terms of government schools. Public resources for education in UP in comparison with other states are examined. Central and external funding under UPBEP and SSA are also discussed. He finds that revenue receipts and cost recovery from education is very low in elementary education. Recent initiatives in elementary education and the state policy on education of UP are also discussed. Central government initiatives lead to decentralisation and community participation in education but VEC role is yet to be established. Resource requirements for UEE is clearly the beyond the fiscal capacity of the state. There are several challenges to be faced and the future of elementary education depends upon how the challenges are turned into opportunities in the state. As the situation is dismal: low access, with 20-25 per cent of child population being out of schools; lagged availability of schools and infrastructure; low quality; low accountability of teachers; low efficiency, and slow participation and low resources.

Failure of public provision in elementary education in Bihar is examined by Anup K. Karan and Pushpendra. Data on access to education brings out that majority of SC, ST and OBC children attend government schools that 'dalitisation' of government schools is taking place in terms of students not in terms of teachers. Educational institutions grow at a very slow pace and physical facilities in government are poor compared to that in private schools. Teachers grew at very slow rate leading to pupil-teacher ration (PTR) as high as 90 in 1999-2000. The share of single-teacher and two-teacher schools was more than 65 per cent, the highest among all the eight states. Focus group discussions bring out the caste hierarchy in upper castes sending children to private schools and lower castes to the dysfunctional government schools or not send them to school at all. The dismal trends

in public expenditure on elementary education is brought out: Very low expenditures on education and elementary education with 99 per cent being spent on salaries; declining per capita expenditure, and only 11 to 41 per cent of resources being utilised under DPEP. The state has no money to meet even the matching grants to utilise the CSS. Household costs of elementary education and by government and private schools by social groups, by items of expenditure (uniforms – highest share, next fees). Opportunity cost of education is estimated. Potential for new reforms suggested are: Improving the supply side factors in terms of provision of more schools, or EGS; at least two teacher for a school or para teachers; regularizing and ensuring teacher attendance; creating a congenial environment for lower caste students; operationalising anganwadis; decentralisation giving more power and responsibility to panchayati raj institutions (PRIs). Private schools both recognized and unrecognized comprise a high proportion of all schools. The advantage these schools offer is in terms of facilities and curricula but regulation and reservation is essential. Creating an interface between government and private schools would improve quality all round..

The chapter on costs and financing of elementary education in Rajasthan by Sunil Ray brings out that even though the number of elementary schools is growing, physical distance(access) is still a problem in that 21 per cent villages do not have primary schools or NFE centers. Remarkable progress in GER and NER are however not matched by the appalling gender gap among the socially deprived in rural areas. Reasons for non-enrollment and drop-outs are found both among children engaged in non-economic activity and economic activities. Coupled with failing pedagogy, indifference of teachers makes the learning process inefficient in government schools. External motivation from teachers, quality of education and availability of facilities are all important attributes for the children to be in schools. Private sector schools have registered an explosive growth in the urban areas. The trends in public expenditure on elementary education bring out the declining share of expenditure, resulting in inadequate supply side factors along with inefficiency in the system and teacher absenteeism but surprisingly, increasing salary disbursements. Household expenditure and demand for elementary education brings are two important issues. There is a critical minimum household income required by households to cover the opportunity costs of education and there has to be household motivation or willingness to educate their children. Educational reforms suggested include the continuation of para schools and para teachers. Resource mobilization at the local level with deep decentralization, involving PRIs and civil society is suggested to complete UEE. Further, restructuring spending and improving effectiveness could solve some of the problems.

The success of decentralized governance in improving the enrolment in Madhya Pradesh is examined by P.R.Panchamukhi. Teachers' experience and mean years of schooling of teachers are higher in government schools than in private aided and unaided schools. But the physical facilities are low in government schools. Focus group discussions bring out a number of supply side inadequacies, viz., teachers absenteeism, access to school, physical facilities, private tuitions, etc. Household education costs are higher in urban and among socially affluent communities. Public expenditure on elementary education and per capita expenditure on elementary education show a declining trend. Government initiatives for

UEE are through the Education Guarantee Scheme (EGS). The growth of EGS centres has been faster than formal schools because the cost of setting up an EGS centre is one tenth that for a regular school and the quality, in terms of attendance and achievement in the former are better than in regular schools. But, the problem is its sustainability. The para teachers' pay as well is one-tenth that of regular teachers. Because of the low pay, the initial commitment may not sustain in the long run and could lead to unionization of teachers. The policy suggestions are: Focused initiatives for the deprived and girls in rural areas--first-born children to be provided with monetary incentives instead of multiple incentives; reducing avoidable household costs of elementary education (uniforms, shoes, etc); improving teacher accountability VECs taking up monitoring and supervision in all villages; increasing the reliance of the state on EGS; levying an educational tax in panchyatas and zila parishads to augment resources for education, and separate allocation for drinking water and toilet facilities by Department of Education and not through the integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP) or rural development programmes.

The challenge of financing UEE in Assam is analysed by Raghavendra Chatopadhyaya. The transition from primary to middle school is the biggest hurdle as the middle schools are far away from the residences of the children. Further, the most unserved children are STs in the hills. Financial constraint is the major reason for drop outs. These are children of SC/ST, illiterate parents and agricultural labourers whose household annual incomes are below Rs.12000. A negligible proportion of children are enrolled in private schools. Government schools lack facilities, often with the verandah being used as a class room in rural areas. Teachers' training is poor and the system has a low proportion of trained teachers. Assam spends the highest share of SDP and also revenue expenditure on education. Since 1990-91, plan expenditure in elementary education constitutes 25 per cent of the total. Sustainability of the progress made under DPEP once it is wound up is an issue needing some thought.

West Bengal is not an educationally backward as it falls just above the national average in terms of literacy. Tapas Majumdar examines the issues using a rights-based approach. Schools are viewed as a heterogeneous system of serving a divided society – as different type of schools serving a hierarchical society of elite and the poor. Quality as reflected in single-teacher schools and student teacher ratios ranged between 48 and 67 in the 1990s. Upgrading primary to upper primary is taking place at a slow pace even with the ratio of primary to upper primary schools being 5.8 to 1, the highest in the country. Survey findings on access in terms of GER and NER indicate that NER is very low in rural areas and among girls. Never enrolled and dropped out children were high in rural areas due to access. This chapter offers a district-wise analysis, unlike other chapters. The role of the private sector is very small--only 3 per cent of children are enrolled in private unaided schools and only in urban areas. All SC/ST and OBC go to government schools. Infrastructure in all private unaided schools is better than in government and government-aided schools. In the majority of the government schools teachers are trained unlike in private unaided schools. Household costs by caste, income and gender, by rural and urban areas are examined as are the trends in government expenditure on elementary education from 1980-81 till 2000-01. The chapter also provides per student expenditures in current

and constant prices.. Priorities identified are improving the attendance of SC and ST and girls in these communities in urban schools. Eight tracks of energisation need to be given serious thought. The government policy statements suggest that children who face socio-cultural barriers should be enrolled with the help of para teachers. The parallel approach with child education centers and their number and enrolment at all DPEP districts is growing.

The chapter on the educationally advanced state of Tamil Nadu by Tilak and Nallagounden brings out that non-attendance rates at primary and upper primary is 9 and 26 per cent, respectively. Even though enrolment is progressing retention and quality are major concerns. Drop out rates are higher at upper primary levels and in rural areas. The share of private sector schools is high but not the share of enrolment. Expenditure on education is analysed in an inimitable style by looking at expenditure on education in current and constant prices, expenditure on education by other departments, relative priorities in terms of inter-sectoral allocation, inter-sectoral allocations in five-year plan, intra –sectoral allocations and expenditure on elementary education; plan and non-plan expenditures, per student expenditures, and itemized expenditure on elementary education. Utilization of resources was low due to poor management practices. Household costs of elementary education are looked at by caste, rural-urban, management type, household costs by income, parental education and parental occupation, itemized expenditure by gender by primary and upper primary education. Policy implications are mainly on finances and on allocation viz., higher allocation to elementary education, 6 per cent of SDP from 11<sup>th</sup> plan; utilization of resources in CSS, etc. The advantages of TN has in elementary education (as the authors have noted, p. 321) was not adequately brought out for the other educationally backward states – especially given that the state has not gone in for either para schools or para teachers and yet could almost achieve near universal primary enrolment if not universal elementary enrolment. Are there any lessons that can be learnt from the experience of an educationally advanced state for other educationally backward states?

Some points brought out from the survey results need to be reexamined. For example, higher household cost in rural than in urban areas in Rajasthan; household costs higher for girls than boys irrespective of type of management of schools in MP; household costs of education is extremely high in rural than in urban areas in WB, and in Tamil Nadu private unaided schools..

Even though some of the issues brought out in the book are not new, for instance poor infrastructure and quality of government schools, the volume reinforces the challenges posed by the development of education to public finance. The book is particularly valuable for its linking public expenditure on education with private provision and household costs. It categorically brings out that “No amount of additional resources can change the quality of schooling without the system of accountability changing” (p.40). Instead of maintaining teacher accountability, the state adopts a short-cut by appointing para-teachers which has its own weakness. While problems may not crop up in the short run this will have serious quality repercussions in the long run. EGS, so successful in Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan can be solution in the short run but cannot continue for

long. As noted by Tapas Mazumdar of A.K. Sen's, "the reliance on SSKs should not reduce the recognition of the urgency of reforming and enhancing the main avenue of primary education, viz., primary schools".

Growth of one level of education at the cost of another is an inappropriate strategy. The number of primary schools upgraded to upper primary is yet another important aspect in many states, viz., Assam, West Bengal. If the Upgradation policy operates from both the ways bottom to top and top to bottom down as in Maharashtra, this would enhance the access and transition rates and reduce drop-out rates to a great extent.

There are some minor problems, for instance table 8.13 in Chapter 8 relating to children benefiting from incentive schemes ('Do the children in private unaided schools benefit from incentives?') and the corresponding text in page 307 do not match.

This book is certainly a value addition to the existing literature on the Economics of Elementary Education in India. It should be of special interest to the policy makers, planners, donors, researchers in the field of education, especially elementary education and education financing.