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School Education in India: Striving for Adequacy, Accessibility, and Efficiency Targets

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ABSTRACT

Education constitutes the basis for enhancing the quality of a county's population. In India, the objective of universalisation of elementary education had been omnipresent in the policies and programmes of the country. The country has made remarkable progress in the GER in elementary education though such gains are seriously compromised by its high dropout rates. The success rate is also low revealing high wastages in the education system. The problem in elementary education is compounded by the fact that the levels of learning attained by a large number of students fall short of the requirements for that level.

KEYWORDS: Capital adequacy, Capital requirements, Commercial banks, Risks.

1. Introduction

Education constitutes the basis for enhancing the quality of a county's population. By imparting knowledge and skill it empowers the people to participate effectively and adequately in the social, political and economic domain which in turn ensures the optimal functioning of the institutions and the processes that constitutes them.

India, from its very inception, had recognised its grossly inadequate educational infrastructure, especially at the primary level which found expression in its Constitutional commitment to ensure free and compulsory education for all children up to the age of 14 years. The objective of universalisation of elementary education had been omnipresent in the policies and programmes of the country including the National Policy of Education (NPE) 1986, and the Programme of Action (POA) 1992. This objective was sought to be realised by a massive exercise on a mission mode in the form of the Sarva Shiksha Abhiya (SSA). A major development in recent years was the enactment of the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act, 2009 which makes the provision of free and compulsory education to children of the age group 6 to 14 mandatory.

2. Adequacy of Provision and Access to Education

The emphasis laid in education by the country is evident in the allocation of resources to education as a percentage of the GDP in India which had steadily increased over the years from 2.49 percent in 1980-81 to 4.18 percent in 2000-2001, representing a 67.87 percent increase (Ministry of Human Resource Development, Various Years). Among the three levels, elementary education has enjoyed the maximum hike (52.29 percent) in allocation followed by secondary education (20.99 percent) and higher education (13.16 percent). This reflects the priority that the government has put on elementary education and also the strong impulse that it wants to impart to the flagship SSA programme that seeks to address the stated national commitment of universal literacy.

But then UNESCO(2007) data reveal that the percentage of GDP allocated to education in India in 2005, at 3.8 percent, is very low in comparison to allocation in developed countries like USA (5.6 percent), UK (5.4 percent) or even to fast developing countries like Brazil (4.4 percent) and Mexico (5.4 percent), in the same period. Under the circumstances there has been vociferous demand for greater provision for education in India, given its favourable demographic structure to reap the benefit of the Demographic Dividend.

However, indicators like the percentage of GNP that is allocated to education can only provide a limited perception of the access to education as they threw no light on the coverage of the target groups by the educational programmes or for that matter the efficiency with which such programmes are administered. In recent years Gross Enrolment Ratio1 (GER) is being increasingly used to indicate relative extent of access to education as it represents the number of pupil enrolled in an educational programme of a specific level as a ratio of the total population in that relevant age group.

Table-1: Human Development in Education, 2011

Human Development Level	Country	Rank	Adult Literacy Rate	Gross Enrolment Rate		
				Primary	Secondary	Tertiary
Very High	Norway	1	-	98.7	110.4	73.5
	USA	4	-	98.2	93.6	85.9
High	Russian Federation	66	99.6	96.8	84.8	77.2
	Brazil	84	90.0	127.5	100.8	34.4
Medium	Sri Lanka	97	90.6	96.9	87.0	-
	China	101	94.0	112.7	78.2	24.5
	India	134	62.8	116.9	60.0	13.5
Low	Pakistan	145	55.5	85.1	33.1	5.2
	Bangladesh	146	55.9	95.1	42.3	7.9

Source: Human Development Report 2011, UNDP (2011)

In India remarkable progress is observed in the GER in elementary education since 1950-51 as the parameter increased from 32.1 to 94.9 in 2005-06. In fact the GER in primary education at that point of time was an outstanding 109.4 whereas it was significantly lower for upper primary education at 71.1 (Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2005-06). However international comparisons in Table-1 reveal that countries with lower rank in the Human Development Index (HDI) like Brazil, China and India exhibit very high GER that is not translated into comparable GER at the secondary and tertiary levels or into greater Adult Literacy Rate. The relatively lower GER at the secondary and tertiary levels, imply the pervasiveness of school dropout at the very primary level and the failure to enrol in the next level among those who clear the primary level. This has serious efficiency implications for India as it reflects colossal wastages in potential human capital as well as in resources invested in them.

3. Inefficiency and Wastages

Efficiency in education refers to the relationship between the inputs in the educational programme and its final outturn in the form of those who have emerged from the programme equipped with the requisite knowledge and skills. In these context dropouts constitutes wastages in the educational system which has serious implication for the sector as well as for the society. The dramatic gains made in the GER by India are seriously compromised by its high dropout rates. The deplorable state of affairs was evident as late as 1981 where 58.7 percent of the total enrols in primary level dropped out. The picture was even more adverse with high levels of wastages at the elementary and secondary levels in the form of dropout rates of 72.7 percent and 82.5 percent respectively. Although there had been improvement in the dropout rates in 2005-06 at the primary level (28.7%), the elementary level (48.8 %) and the secondary level (82.5 %), however retention of the children for the duration of the educational cycles still poses a great challenge.

The extent of the wastage and the enormity of the problem become more apparent when the dropout rates of the scheduled caste and scheduled tribes 2 students are taken into account. Traditionally these marginal groups along with other backward communities like the Muslims had exhibited a greater propensity to exit educational programmes before the cycle could be completed.

Given the magnitude of student wastages in the form of dropouts, it remains a matter of grave concern that such a huge proportion of the children in India fail to complete even the primary educational cycle. The rate of dropout increases as one move up the educational levels, which again reaffirms the fact that despite huge allocation made in education, massive wastages takes place which needs to be urgently corrected through better material provision, more efficient service de-

livery and through a comprehensive programme aimed at increasing social awareness on the minimum need for elementary education.

Table-2
Drop-Out Rates of All Categories of Students

Year	Primary (I-V)			Elementary (I-VIII)			Secondary (I-X)		
	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total
1980-81	56.2	62.5	58.7	68.0	79.4	72.7	79.8	86.6	82.5
2000-01	39.7	41.9	40.7	50.3	57.7	53.7	66.4	71.5	68.6
2005-06	28.7	21.8	25.7	48.7	48.9	48.8	60.1	63.6	61.6

Source: Ministry of Human Resource Development, Time Series Data, 2005-06

The success rate constitutes another criterion for efficiency in school education. A high proportion of failure in the relevant examination results in wastages in the education system but more importantly it leads to a loss in morale, self esteem and dignity of the unsuccessful student who is scarred for life.

Taking 2006 as the sample year, it is observed that the success rate in the secondary examination was only 67.86 percent implying 32.14 percent of the students who take the examination experience failure. The number of unsuccessful students in the secondary level examination turns out to be colossal when the rates are expressed in absolute terms. Although the success rate is marginally higher at the senior secondary level however the overall high rates of failure in both levels of examination reflect great inefficiency in the school education system which results in so much trauma for so many students who access the system.

Table-3
Success Rates of Secondary & Senior Secondary Examinations (2006)

Examinations	Gender	All	SC	ST
Secondary Level	Male	66.3	59.07	53.75
	Female	70.26	63.29	53.45
	Total	67.86	60.38	53.04
Senior Secondary Level	Male	67.49	64.36	57.76
	Female	77.25	70.48	64.62
	Total	71.28	66.65	60.24

Source: Ministry of Human Resource Development, Time Series Data, 2005-06

The rate of failure significantly increases for marginal groups like the scheduled castes and the scheduled tribes which undermine affirmative action by the state to close the social and economic gaps between the general populace and the groups who are positioned in the margins of the society. This is a cause for great concern which has to be resolved if the noble objectives of social and economic equity is to be realised.

Efficiency of education also stems from the levels of learning among the outturns of the various programmes. In India the problem in elementary education is compounded by the fact that the levels of learning attained by a large number of students fall short of the requirements for that level (Beteille, 2002). This is established by results from extensive surveys carried out by Pratham (2007) where 47 percent of Class-V students could not read texts meant for Class-II students. The inadequacy was also observed in arithmetic where 55 percent of the Class-V and 25 percent of Class-VIII students failed to correctly complete task of simple division. Expectedly cross country comparisons indicate that achievement levels of Indian students are well below international average (Kingdon, 2007).

4. Conclusion

Since independence, India recognising the wide spread prevalence of illiteracy and its inadequate educational infrastructure, had been consciously endeavouring to built up its educational system. Over the years significant attainments were made in the GER which had reached levels comparable with developed countries, though such attainments were largely undermined by the high dropout rate reflecting massive wastages in resources. Besides, a question mark had been put on the efficiency of provision of education given the high failure rate in examinations and the inadequate level of learning at various levels of education. The latter has been a matter of serious concern.

Note

1. Gross Enrolment Ratio in a specific level of education, is the enrolment in that level of education, regardless of age, expressed as a percentage of the population in the official age group corresponding to this level of education
2. Scheduled Caste (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST) are sections of the population that are recognized by the Constitution of India as socially & economically backward and relatively isolated.

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