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Improved Learning Outcomes Still A Challenge For Schools In India

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Introduction

The contemporary education scenario in India is beset with numerous unanswered questions on issues concerning retention and learning outcomes. Research studies have identified several factors that multiply this phenomena and perpetuate exclusion in schooling processes that impact the learning outcomes of children, especially the marginalized and girls. In fact there was a systemic exclusion of the marginalized groups and girls from the formal education system since 19th and 20th century in India. In fact it may not be vague to argue that the base for this exclusion was the Brahminical and Persian systems of education which catered to the elite and noble families. The labour classes received vernacular and vocational education that was informal in nature where the vocational education was mainly inherited and acquired. All this reveals that the quantitative expansion of schooling across the country has not resulted in qualitative changes and schools are not able to reduce learning gaps. Therefore it will not be wrong to state that schooling does not result in learning.

National & International Perspectives

- The Article IV of the World Declaration on Education, 1990 on Education for All stated that the actual learning should be the focus of basic education.

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- The United Nations Declaration of the Rights of the Child states that education shall “promote a child’s general culture and enable him/her, on a basis of equal opportunity to develop his/her abilities, his/her individual judgment, and his/her sense of moral and social responsibility, to become a useful member of society.”

- The World Bank since the year 2000 has committed over \$2 billion to education in India. Since 2003, the Bank has been working with Central and State governments, to support the SarvaShikshaAbhiyan program and RashtriyaMadhyamikShikshaAbhiyan (RMSA) to improve access, equity, management and quality.

- India five year plans paid special attention from the 3rd Plan and in all subsequent Plan periods for increasing retention rates, specially the 12th Five Year Plan talks about learning outcomes and providing quality education.

- Two important policies that attempted to address issues related to equity, equality and quality concerns in education were the National Policy on Education, 1968 and the National Policy on Education, 1986.

- The National Curriculum Framework (NCF)-2005, portrayed children as a natural learners and knowledge as an outcome of their engagement with the world around. It recommended curricular expectations/ learning outcomes to be laid out stage wise as the abilities, skills, and dispositions that are essentially expected to be accomplished by all children over a period of time.

- The recent Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act (RTE), 2009 has made elementary education for all mandatory.

The multiple non-government agencies working at local levels have also contributed towards access, enrolment and retention of children from all communities, especially the hard to reach groups. It is not wrong to claim that India has made progress in increasing access to education and building a strong policy and planning framework for education but the challenge lies in ensuring quality education system which would produce positive learning outcomes for all children in India.

Pressing Issues

There are several quality concerns in Indian education system. Be it mushrooming of private schools, exorbitant fee structure and recruitment of para teachers or lack of professional development programmes for teachers and school leaders, all of these make the

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quality of education questionable in Indian schools. It is imperative to ensure that; there are competent and trained teachers with knowledge and experience of handling socio-economic and cultural diversities of learners, there is a provision of sufficient funds for improvement of basic amenities in schools e.g. Drinking water, Separate Hygienic Toilets for boys & girls, there is proper infrastructure in schools which include sports grounds, Teaching Aids, Laboratories, equipment's etc. Learning/assessment both quantitative and qualitative are crucial to quality education, but we are not measuring learning outcomes nor do we have standardized assessments in place. Therefore the action of government to measure the level of learning outcomes can prove helpful to take corrective measures and reforms for improving educational outcomes in the country.

Conclusion

Policy makers and educators in India must recognize that the knowledge, skills and productivity of young and dynamic work force forms the backbone of our economy. To reap the benefits of such demographic advantage, we need to implement the reforms in the education system and also bring forth new factors of production, namely knowledge, skills and technology which have the ability to unleash the productive frontiers of the economy in the most efficient and dynamic way. The issue of quality and low levels of learning outcomes in Indian schools have opened deliberations for necessary strategic intervention by the government. On one hand, there is need for improvement of schools & service providers to schools, on the other hand there are number of issues which need to be taken up at policy level and by the state machinery. To sum up, in spite of many efforts, the problem of improved learning outcomes is still a challenge for the education system in India and can be improved only by bringing about qualitative improvement in education through renewal of curricula, improvement of textbooks and teaching learning materials, teacher improvement, provision of adequate infrastructure, and improvement in national assessment. Therefore, it is necessary to expand the efforts for improved and effective teaching learning methods in schools for improving student outcomes especially the marginalised and girls. If all the suggested measures given at national and international levels are implemented in the true spirit, the objective of achieving quality and increasing learning outcomes with increased retention in primary and secondary education can be attained in near future.

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Education in India is divided between privileged and less privileged. The well-to-do are given excellent schooling by the private institutions while poor go to government -run schools where there is dearth teaching, equipment, infrastructure, etc. But, even in the so-called 'hi-fi' schools, the pestilence of indoctrination is rampant. Children are made to by-heart without thinking of the subject, even science lessons are taught unscientifically. Scriptures sre have also become a part of many school routine curriculum. Besides, fundamentalists of all religions run schools. The high-class-highly-educated occupy important government posts while the poor, lower castes tribals, advisasis ,etc., have the same work assigned to their castes. The privileged, due to their rich-oriented culture, cannot understand hardships of the poor. Hence, there is a need to thorough overhauling of education system and complete revision of syllabus.

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