

## Primary education system of India and its challenges

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### Abstract

A strong education system is the cornerstone of any country's growth and prosperity. In education system primary education is like pillar of any foundation. From last many years Indian education system changed revolutionary in its primary perspective. Numbers of student completing their primary education and going for higher education with skill education. Indian primary education system is growing sensibly with the growth of private school having English speaking abilities among students. So now in 21<sup>st</sup> century Indian primary education is getting new globalized heights.

**Keywords:** Primary education, globalisation, teaching methods, Government, education

### Introduction

Over the last decade, India has made great strides in strengthening its primary education system. The country ranked 63 out of 64 in the latest Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) study, with some of its best schools ranked about average among those surveyed. The 2011 ASER stated that only 48.2% of students in the fifth grade can read at the second grade level. The number of students completing their primary education with inadequate numeracy and literacy skills is startling. To see this manifest in an economic sense, one may attribute India's productivity growth — lagging behind that of East Asian economies — to a lack of progress in the foundational elements of countrywide, high-quality education.

India's private-schooled, English-speaking urban elite may attract global attention, but they are in the minority. The vast majority of Indian children attend government-run primary schools in rural areas. In 2008-2009, rural India accounted for more than 88% of India's primary-school students, of whom over 87% were enrolled in government-run schools. This is where we see some of the nation's toughest challenges.

### A Diverse Set of Problems

India's education system has not achieved strong learning outcomes for reasons that are as diverse and nuanced as the country itself. Key among these reasons is poor teaching quality, which results from a multitude of factors.

**Inadequate Teacher Qualification and Support:** Teachers working in primary schools across rural India have a difficult job. With more than two decades of experience in rural primary education, explained the multiple challenges they face: Teachers have to teach multiple grades, textbooks are pitched far above the comprehension level of students, and each classroom has children with different levels of learning achievements. The average school teacher in India does not get adequate pre-service or in-service education, nor does she get the support to overcome these problems. Compounding

this is the relatively low educational qualifications of many teachers themselves. In 2008-2009, on average, 45% of these teachers had not studied beyond the 12<sup>th</sup> grade.

**Low Teacher Motivation and High Absenteeism:** A key factor affecting the quality of primary education appears to be low levels of teacher motivation. In 2002-2003, 25% of primary-school teachers in rural India were absent on any given day. The impact of absenteeism is exacerbated by the fact that the average primary school in India has a workforce of no more than three teachers. At a school for girls in rural Rajasthan, we observed this problem first hand: Of the eight teachers assigned, only five were present. The three who were actually teaching were juggling eight different grades.

The obvious reason — remuneration — does not appear to be a driver. In fact, both education experts and ordinary citizens argue that government-employed school teachers are paid relatively well. UNESCO surveys from as early as 2004 indicated that the annual statutory salary of primary school teachers in India with 15 years' experience was more than \$14,000, adjusted for purchasing power. This was significantly higher than the then-statutory salaries of \$3,000 in China and Indonesia, and the Indian GDP per capita in 2004, which was \$3,100.

Indian primary-school teachers may not be underpaid, but some argue that they may be overworked. Primary school teachers employed by the government, particularly in rural India, are required to perform a wide range of duties completely unrelated to imparting education. These duties — including administering government programs such as immunization clinics, assisting with data-collection for the national census, and staffing polling stations during elections — in addition to their teaching responsibilities, place significant demands on teachers' time.

Another disheartening factor has been a highly bureaucratic administrative system that discourages bold decision making and makes implementation difficult. For example, "it is difficult to test new practices on a small scale before rolling

them out: If a new program has been developed, the philosophy is that every school must have it.” Such indiscriminate application often means that teachers are implementing programs without understanding their key principles and ultimate goals.

**Flawed Teaching Methodology:** In India, rote learning has been institutionalized as a teaching methodology. Primary school teachers in rural India often try to educate students by making them repeat sections of text over and over again. Often they do not explain the meaning of the text, which results in stunted reading comprehension skills over the course of the children’s education. For example, many students in grades two and three in one particular school struggle to read individual words, but can neatly copy entire paragraphs from their textbooks into their notebooks as though they were drawing pictures.

**Linguistic Diversity:** Finally, India’s linguistic diversity creates unique challenges for the nation’s education system. The country’s 22 official languages and hundreds of spoken dialects often differ considerably from the official language of the state or region. The teacher not only has to account for varying learning abilities within the classroom, but also dialectic nuances which affect students’ comprehension of the subject matter.

Government-school-educated children from rural India struggle to speak even basic sentences in English. Students with rural primary schooling are at a significant disadvantage as they transition to higher education, because India’s best universities teach exclusively in English. Part of the problem is that there is no one to teach them. When teachers themselves know little English, especially spoken English, how will students learn?

### **A Parallel, Non-governmental Education Universe**

Since the late 1980s, government efforts to augment rural primary education have been supplemented by the emergence of an intervention-based non-governmental system that spans multiple institutional types.

While private schools have emerged as a parallel system over the last two decades, their impact is limited because they serve less than 13% of India’s rural primary-school children. However, do private schools really make a difference? Some studies have found a small, but statistically significant, “private school advantage” in rural India.

Behar was skeptical about the superiority of private rural schools over their government-run counterparts, noting, “Once we control for a child’s socioeconomic background, private schools add little-to-no value. In many ways, private schools are in much worse shape.” However, according to Khatwar, “more and more parents in small towns are choosing to send their children to private schools if they can afford it” — perhaps with good reason, because, on average, the number of students in each classroom in private schools is often smaller and school heads exert greater control over teachers.

Some organizations are attempting to innovate with new formats and systems of education. Avasara Academy, a new school for girls, is a private institution whose mission is to mold leaders from among the best and brightest girls in India,

regardless of their background. While admission is merit-based, the school intends to draw half its students from disadvantaged rural and urban backgrounds, awarding them full scholarships. In addition, it is developing a special curriculum that encourages excellence beyond academics. “Avasara seeks to identify high potential young women and guide them along a powerful journey of leadership development. We expect that our graduates will form a network of leaders who will collaborate to drive positive change across the country,” explained Mangala Nanda, humanities department chair for Avasara. While still in the early stages of its development, Avasara’s successful implementation would provide a viable model for high-quality, accessible education and integration across socioeconomic boundaries.

### **Governmental Efforts**

The Indian government at every level recognizes the need for educational reform and has made a conscientious effort to achieve it.

The midday-meal plan, for example, is a highly publicized nationwide program through which government school children across India are provided with a midday meal every day of the school week. The program is largely considered a success. A study in 2011 by Rajshri Jayaraman and Dora Simroth found that grade one enrollment increased by 20.8% simply if a midday meal was offered.

According to Behar, “The Indian government has worked very hard to provide rural schools with adequate infrastructure, something that was critically lacking a few decades ago.” For instance, DISE reported in 2012 that more than 91% of primary schools have drinking-water facilities and 86% of schools built in the last 10 years have a school building. However, there is still a long way to go: Only 52% of primary schools have a girls’ toilet, and just 32% are connected to the electricity grid.

In 2012, the Central Government enacted the Right to Education (RTE) Act, under which every child between the ages of six and 14 receives a free and compulsory education. In addition to regulating access to education, the act contains certain provisions that could positively impact the quality of education. According to Jhingran, one of its major achievements has been “the dramatic reduction of non-teaching duties assigned to government school teachers, freeing up valuable time and lowering absenteeism.”

### **Partnering with the Government**

Over the past few decades, many organizations have begun working with government schools and teachers to improve learning outcomes.

Pratham, a joint venture between UNICEF and the Municipal Corporation of Mumbai, runs multiple programs to supplement school education, such as learning support classes, libraries and additional learning resources. A hallmark of these initiatives is that Pratham engages volunteers from local communities and trains them to run these programs. Another important initiative that has resulted from Pratham is the annual ASER, an assessment that measures reading and arithmetic abilities by surveying more than 600,000 children across 16,000 villages in India. This remarkable exercise in

data-gathering constitutes the foundation for informed decision-making and benchmarking.

Other initiatives address teaching quality by placing specially trained teachers in government schools. Teach for India, modeled after the Teach for America program, was introduced in 2006. Young, motivated Indian college graduates and professionals apply for two-year fellowships to teach at government-run and low-income private schools that lack sufficient resources. An important distinction of Teach for India is that instruction is, by design, always in English. As Mohit Arora, fellowship recruitment manager for Teach for India, noted, the organization's philosophy on this point is that "learning English is essential to future success, as English in today's world is more than just a language. It is a skill set." Students who do not speak English may have some difficulty initially, but the organization has made learning at these schools experiential and therefore engaging. The dynamics of one particular grade 3 Teach for India classroom were in stark contrast to other classrooms at the same school — students were listening intently, contributing in class, answering questions beyond the textbook and demonstrating a strong command over English. The challenge is scaling this model to rural India.

Still other organizations focus on capacity development of teachers in government schools, such as the Azim Premji Foundation. As CEO, Behar is categorical in his view that the foundation "works in partnership with the government," and that it "does not believe in supplanting the government school system." The foundation has established scores of institutes at the district level that provide in-service education and also empower teachers to learn from each other. For example, Behar described a voluntary teacher forum in a district of Rajasthan, initially organized by the Azim Premji Foundation, but now being run increasingly independently by teachers in the district.

### Conclusion

Education in India has improved dramatically over the last three decades. Schools are accessible to most children, both student enrollment and attendance are at their highest level, and teachers are adequately remunerated. The RTE Act guarantees a quality education to a wider range of students than ever before. However, challenges in implementing and monitoring high standards in teaching and learning outcomes across regional, cultural and socioeconomic subsets prevent India from fully achieving this goal. In addition, teacher support and scalability of high-performing teaching professionals in disparate areas, funding allocation for schools in remote districts and limited use of technology in the classroom remain barriers to reforming primary education.

India's growth story remains one of the most anticipated global economic trends, and its fulfillment relies on a well-educated and skilled workforce. Improving education is a critical area of investment and focus if the country wants to sustain economic growth and harness its young workforce. A weak foundation in primary education can derail the lives, careers and productivity of tens of millions of its citizens. Already, a significant proportion of the adult workforce in India is severely under-equipped to perform skilled and semi-skilled jobs. As Rajesh Sawhney, former president of Reliance

Entertainment and founder of GSF Superangels, noted, "No one is unemployed in India; there are just a lot of people who are unemployable."

Furthermore, in order to develop India as a consumer market of global standards, it is imperative that all of its children reap the full benefits of a high-quality education. Otherwise, large segments of the population in rural India will continue to have low purchasing power, find themselves in highly leveraged scenarios and, more often than not, continue to make a living through agricultural means. While some of this can be attributed to deficiencies in secondary and tertiary education, the root of these issues lies in low-quality primary education.

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