TRENDS IN GENDER INEQUALITY: A STUDY OF ELEMENTARY EDUCATION IN INDIA

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Abstract

As the engine of growth, education helps in the progress of the country. It increases the economic returns and also has a significant effect on poverty, income distribution, health, and overall quality of human life. In India the National Policy on Education (NPE) was set up in 1986 for the eradication of illiteracy and to obtain universalisation of elementary education. This is achieved with the help of District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) and Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA). Educational indicators like literacy rate, gross enrolment ratio, net enrolment ratio, dropout rate, gender disparities etc. results in growing awareness and government efforts. So, literacy rate in India has an upward slope. This paper attempts to examine the enrolment and dropout of the elementary education in India. Admitting that providing resources for educating the masses is the biggest challenge, the study emphasizes the need for better access through improved quality and providing incentives for enrolment and attendance.

Introduction

Education is the future of our country. Education should, at the very least, equip every individual with skills that enable him/ her to participate meaningfully in social, political and economic processes and to avail of opportunities to learn advanced skills throughout life. It holds the key to economic growth and social transformation. Though the major indicators of socio-economic development viz., the growth rate of the economy, birth rate, death rate, infant mortality rate (IMR) and literacy rate, are all interconnected, the literacy rate and the enrollment ratio has been the major determinant of the rise or fall in comparison to the other indicators. The recognition of this fact it has created awareness on the need to focus upon literacy and elementary education programmes, not simply as a matter of social justice but more to foster economic growth, social well-being and social stability. Education should, at the very least, equip every individual with skills that enable him/ her to participate meaningfully in social, political and economic processes, and to avail of opportunities to learn advanced skills throughout life.

In the field of elementary education many people contributes their efforts to focuses' the various aspects of the field. Among them, Tara Beteille (2002) in his article explains that education equip every individual with skills to participate meaningfully in social, political and economic processes, and to avail of opportunities to learn advanced skills throughout life. The tenth five year plan report also highlights about the enrollment in the elementary education. It provides various data related to the enrollment in elementary education. Mehta (1998) in his paper, Education for All in India- Enrolment Projections highlights about the enrollment in education in all India level. He also focuses about the drop out ratio throughout various time periods.

Objective

This paper focuses about the trend and growth of enrollment in the field of elementary education in India. The gross enrollment ratio for boys and girls, enrollment ratio by the various school types are presented here. Its objective is to collect and analyze information about accessibility, manner and degree of utilization, and satisfaction of beneficiaries of education services. The government of India has made various schemes like Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), National Programme for Education of Girls at Elementary Education (NPEGEL), Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBV), and Mid Day Meal Programme for the enhancement of elementary education. Some of these schemes are also briefly discussed here.

Methodology

By using the secondary data, a set of indicators is developed and analyzed. The analysis is confined to all-India level, however wherever necessary, state-specific situation is also analyzed. Some of the indicators that are developed and analyzed are literacy rates, habitations covered by schooling facilities, enrolment rates, pupil-teacher ratio, and ratio of primary to upper primary schools and indicators of internal efficiency of education system. In addition, out-of-school children and additional enrolment that would be required to achieve the goal of universal enrolment is also worked-out. Further, the article also takes a view of the recent enrolment projection exercises and attempts to redefine the concept of universal elementary education.

Elementary Education in India

India has the second largest education system in the world after China. Indeed, over a third of population below 18 years, constituting 19% of world's children resides in India. The scale of operation in elementary education involved to ensure quality in the country is "Education for All" which is unique and challenging. At the same time, the nature of problems affecting the education system are so diverse and often deep rooted that the solution cannot lie in the alteration of any one factor - it's not about just shortage of money or just shortage of trained teachers or lack of political will. All these undeniably contribute to the problems affecting the education system today - however, there is a need to look at the entire set of problems and deal with the issue holistically taking into consideration the specific context of the different communities. At the same time, it is essential to acknowledge the work done by the government to make this large and unwieldy system work. Education is a very important part of economy. It is said to an investment in human being. Perhaps this is the reason that every nation tries his best to develop the strategy of education. Thus education plays an important role in the development of a nation education is the primary right of every child in a democratic society. Elementary education covers the primary (6-11 years) and upper primary (11-14 years) age group. In most Indian states, this translates into the successful completion of prescribed educational requirements till Class VIII. The essence of the goal is for every 14-year old to have acquired foundation skills such as the ability to read and write with fluency, numeracy, comprehension, analysis, reasoning and social skills such as teamwork. Equally, elementary education should instill in children courage, confidence, curiosity, independence, resourcefulness, resilience, patience and understanding. Deprived of knowledge, he falls in the darkness of ignorance and becomes a victim of evil social practices. The problem of drop-outs at primary level is quite serious poor parents force their children to stay at home and look after younger kids. Some are compelled to work as child labourers in homes, shops restaurants and factories. More community centers and adult education cent res have to be opened to educate man and woman who were deprived of the fruits of education during their formative years. Our aim should bet to provide education to all the people of India.

It is a very important question in the field of education what type of education should be given? This is a reality that ours means of education are limited but our needs are unlimited. So it should be decide that which type of education should be given. So, national policy of education 1986 has announced the system of education. There have been many proposals for the introduction of education in school. Some of them have been tried success and are going on well. As far as India is concerned, it is a democratic country. Education is primary of every child in a democratic society. India has the second largest education system in the world after China. Indeed, over a third of population below 18 years, constituting 19% of world's children resides in India. Consequently, the scale of operation involved to ensure quality of Education for All in the country is unique and challenging. At the same time, the nature of problems affecting the education system are so diverse and often deep rooted that the solution cannot lie in the alteration of any one factor - it's not about just shortage of money or just shortage of trained teachers or lack of political will. All these undeniably contribute to the problems affecting the education system today - however, there is a need to look at the entire set of problems and deal with the issue holistically taking into consideration the specific context of the different communities. At the same time, it is essential to acknowledge the work done by the government to make this large and unwieldy system work.

Introduction to Gender inequality in Education

Gender is not synonymous with women, nor is it a zero-sum game implying loss for men; rather, it refers to both women and men, and to their status, relative to each other. Persistent disparities between women and men not only have negative implications for women themselves, but for the society as a whole. Education plays the most important link in achievement of development goals through promotion of gender equality. The recognition of this fact has created awareness on the need to focus upon literacy and elementary education programmes, not simply as a matter of social justice but more to foster economic growth, social well-being and social stability.

Education as private good benefits directly those who receive it, which in turn affects the individual's future income stream. At the aggregate level, a better educated workforce is thought to increase the stock of 'human capital' in the economy and increase its productivity. Considering the externalities in education, it is widely accepted that the state has an important role to play in ensuring equitable distribution of educational opportunities to the entire population. Despite aggregate improvements in education levels, glaring inequalities in basic education continue to persist. Disparities between regions (states) and across gender, caste,

class, religious groups; and other marginalized sections of society continue to present the biggest challenge for policy makers and educationists. Many states like Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, and Rajasthan lag behind because they are caught in a 'vicious' cycle where non-egalitarian social structures continue to reproduce disparities through a kind of state complicity. Hence, in the states with high levels of disparities it is even more important that the State invest in social sectors with a special focus on marginalized groups so that deep-seated social inequalities of gender and caste can be addressed. Unfortunately, globalization is based on assumptions of homogenous social structures and its prescriptions for disparities of all sorts are based on economic mobility as the panacea.

Trend in enrollment and gender inequality

Education is said to an investment in human being. Perhaps this is the reason that every nation tries his best to develop the strategy of education. Thus education plays an important role in the development of a nation education is the primary right of every child in a democratic society. We have made a law to provide free and compulsory education up to the age of fourteen i.e. up to middle standard level. Deprived of knowledge, falls in the darkness of ignorance and becomes a victim of evil social practices. The problem of drop-outs at primary level is quite serious poor parents force their children to stay at home and look after younger kids. Some are compelled to work as child labourers in homes, shops restaurants and factories. More community centres and adult education centres have to be opened to educate man and woman who were deprived of the fruits of education during their formative years. Our aim should bet to provide education to all the people of India. This aim can be fulfilled by enhancing enrolment in this sector.

Enrollment is considered as one of the important indicators for the development and growth of elementary education in India. Here we have taken the gross enrollment ratio of boys and girls of different school type. Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) is defined as the percentage of the enrolment in the primary stage (Classes I – V) and Upper Primary Stage (VI – VIII) and/or Classes I – VIII to the estimated child population in the age groups 6 to below 11 years and 11 to below 14 and/or 6 to below 14 years respectively. Enrolment in these stages included under age and average children. Hence the percentage may be more than 100% in some cases.

Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER), calculated as a ratio of the gross enrolment of children as a portion of the total children in the relevant age group, is an indicator to assess the extent of access of children. The Net Enrolment Ratio (NER), calculated as a ratio of the net enrolment of children of the right age group as a proportion of the total children in the relevant age group, is an indicator to assess the extent of access of children of the target age group. Under ideal circumstances, the GER and NER should be the same – a phenomenon that can be achieved only when all children of the right age group take admission in schools in grade I, there are no repeaters and no case of dropouts; thereby, no child enrolled in any grade would be under-aged or over-aged.

On the whole, there has been a steady increase in school enrolment starting from 1990. The acceleration in enrolment in recent years is plausible, given a number of schemes such as the recruitment of local teachers, increasing proximity of schools, serving of hot-cooked meals in schools, and incentives for girls do encourage children to enroll in schools. However, official figures on enrolment are often unreliable. To begin with, the reporting of Gross Enrolment Ratios (GERs) exceeding 100 is explained as a technical aberration due to the enrolment of children in the primary stage who are outside the age group of 6-11 years. However, the large gap between such ratios and reports on actual attendance reduces significantly the credibility of the enrolment figures. In many instances, enrolments figures are fudged for a variety of reasons including the pressure to report universal enrolment, the opportunity to get additional allocations of food and other materials that can be siphoned out, and sometimes even the need to retain a teacher's post. This happened because the counts of over- and under- aged children in the schools were not adjusted while calculating the GER. This problem still continues to be present in the system. The problem gets more complicated as the drop-out rates, in spite of a declining trend, continue to be high. Educationally backward states, and, within them, backward districts, have lower NER than the all- India average. Since universal enrolment is the most important component of UEE, a detailed analysis of growth of enrolment is undertaken. In addition, out-of-school children and additional enrolment required to achieve the goal of universal enrolment, is also estimated.

Educationally backward states, and, within them, backward districts, have lower NER (Net Enrollment Ratio) than the all- India average. Elementary education was given the highest priority in sub-sectoral allocations within the education sector, indicating a strong reiteration of the country's resolve to achieve the goal of EFA during the Plan period.

Enrolment Ratios

A perusal of Table 1 reveals that the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) at the primary and upper primary levels improved significantly between 2000-06. At primary level, enrollment increased from 95.7 per cent in 2000-01, to 109.4 per cent in 2005-06. For elementary, the corresponding figures were 81.6 per cent and 94.9 per cent, respectively. Table -1 shows an increasing trend in the enrollment.

Table – 1
Gross Enrollment Ratio 2000 – 2006

YEAR	Primary I-V (6-11 Years)			Elementary I-VIII (6-14 Years)		
	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total
2000-01	104.9	85.9	95.7	90.3	72.4	81.6
2001-02	105.3	86.9	96.3	90.7	73.6	82.4
2002-03	97.	93.1	95.3	85.4	79.3	82.5
2003-04	100.6	95.6	98.2	87.9	81.4	84.8
2004-05	110.7	104.7	107.8	96.7	89.9	93.5
2005-06	112.8	105.7	109.4	98.5	91	94.9

Source: Selected Educational Statistics: 2005-06 MHRD, GOI, New Delhi, 2008. (Provisional)

Dropout rates

Dropout rate is defined as the proportion of children that cease to remain enrolled in the schooling system. There are a number of methods for estimating dropout rate. One of them, followed in the Selected Education Statistics (SES) of the Ministry of Human Resource Development. The drop out ratios of primary and elementary education of India is highlighted in table-2. The time period varies from 1990-2005. From the table - 2, it is found out that the dropout rate is gradually decreasing from the year 1990 to 2005. It shows that the children are interested towards the education to build their future and it enhances the human development.

Table - 2
Drop-Out Rates at Primary, Elementary (1990-2005)

	Primary (I-V)			Elementary (I-VIII)		
Year	**Boys**	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total
1990-91	40.1	46.0	42.6	59.1	65.1	60.9
1992-93	43.8	46.7	45.0	58.2	65.2	61.1
1995-96	41.4	43.0	42.1	56.6	61.7	58.8
1996-97	39.7	40.9	40.2	54.3	59.5	56.5
1997-98	37.5	41.5	39.2	53.8	59.3	56.1
1998-99	40.9	42.3	41.5	54.2	59.2	56.3
1999-00*	38.7	42.3	40.3	52.0	58.0	54.5
2000-01*	39.7	41.9	40.7	50.3	57.7	53.7
2001-02*	38.4	39.9	39.0	52.9	56.9	54.6
2002-03*	35.85	33.72	34.89	52.28	53.45	52.79
2003-04*	33.74	28.57	31.47	51.85	52.92	52.32
2004-.05*	31.81	25.42	29.00	50.49	51.28	50.84
*provisional						

Source: Selected Education Statistics, 2004

Table- 3 focuses on the gross enrollment ratio by various school types like primary, upper primary and elementary. It is found out that in the primary sector the enrollment ratio is more as compared to other two school type. Similarly the enrollment figures of the girls are more as compared to the enrollment figure of the boys.

Table-3
Gross Enrolment Ratios (GER), by School Type from 1990-2004

	Primary(I-V)			Upper Primary (VI - VIII)			Elementary(I-VIII)		
Year	**Boys**	**Girls**	**Total**	**Boys**	**Girls**	**Total**	**Boys**	**Girls**	**Total**
1990-91	114	85.5	100	76.6	47	62.1	100	70.8	86
1991-92	113	86.9	100	75.1	49.6	63.1	101	73.2	87.7
1992-93	95	73.5	84.6	72.5	48.9	64.1	87.7	65.7	77.2
1993-94	90	73.1	81.9	62.1	45.4	65.1	80.2	63.7	72.3
1994-95	96.6	78.2	87.7	68.9	50	66.1	87.2	68.8	78.4
1995-96	97.1	79.4	88.6	67.8	49.8	67.1	86.9	69.4	78.5
1996-97	97	80.1	88.8	65.8	49.2	68.1	85.9	69.4	78
1997-98	99.3	82.2	91.1	66.3	49.7	69.1	87.4	70.7	79.4
1998-99	101	82.9	92.1	65.3	49.1	70.1	87.6	70.6	79.4
1999-2000	104	85.2	94.9	67.2	49.7	71.1	90.1	72	81.3
2000-01	105	85.9	95.7	66.7	49.9	58.6	90.3	72.4	81.6
2001-02	105	86.9	96.3	67.8	52.1	60.2	90.7	73.6	82.4
2002-03	98	93	95	65	56	61	85	79	83
2003-04	101	96	98	67	58	62	88	81	85
2004–05	111.4	105.5	108.6	74.8	65.8	70.5	97.6	90.6	94.2
2005–06	112.8	105.8	109.4	75.2	66.4	71.0	98.5	91.0	94.9
2006–07	114.4	107.8	111.2	77.4	69.5	73.6	100.3	93.3	96.9

Source: Educational Statistics Hand Book

Schemes of Elementary Education

The various schemes to enhance the enrollment in the field of elementary education introduced by Government of India are as follows:

Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA)

Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) is the national flagship programme launched in 2001-02 for achieving the goal of Universalization of Elementary Education (UEE) through a time bound approach in partnership with States and local bodies. It is also an attempt to provide an opportunity for improving human capabilities to all children (6-14 years age), through provision of community-owned quality education in a mission mode It is a response to the demand for quality basic education all over the country. Is an effort to universalize elementary education by community ownership of the school system The SSA programme is also an attempt to provide an opportunity for improving human capabilities to all children, through provision of community-owned quality education in a mission mode? The SSA covers all States and Union Territories and reaches out to 19.4 crore children in 12.3 lakh habitations.

National Programme for Education of Girls at Elementary Education (NPEGEL)

The NPEGEL, launched in September 2003, is an integral but distinct component of the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan. It provides additional provisions for enhancing the education of underprivileged/disadvantaged girls at elementary level through more intense community mobilization, the development of model schools in clusters, gender sensitization of teachers, development of gender sensitive learning materials, early child care and education facilities and provision of need-based incentives like escorts, stationery work books and uniforms etc. for girls.

Under NPEGEL, 35,252 model schools have been opened in addition to supporting 25,537 Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) centers. Besides, 24,387 additional classrooms have been constructed, and 1.85 lakh teachers have been given training on gender sensitization. Remedial teaching has also been provided to 9.67 lakh girls, apart from holding bridge courses covering 1.53 lakh girls and additional incentives like uniforms, etc. to about 71.46 lakh girls (up to October 31, 2007). An outlay of Rs. 708.44 crore was provided under NPEGEL for 2007-08. All Educationally Backward Blocks have been included under NPEGEL.

Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBV) Scheme

The Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBV) scheme was launched in July 2004 for setting up residential schools at upper primary level for girls belonging predominantly to the SC, ST, OBC and minority communities. It is designed to encourage greater participation of girls in education at the upper primary level. The Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya scheme ran as separate scheme for two years but was merged with Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan w.e.f. April 1, 2007. About 2,180 KGBVs were sanctioned by Government of India up to March 2007. Of these, 270 KGBVs have been sanctioned in Muslim concentration blocks, 583 in ST blocks, 622 in SC blocks. As on October 31, 2007, 1,564 KGBVs are functional (71.74 per cent) and 1, 09,786 girls (26 per cent SC girls, 33 per cent ST girls, 26 per cent OBC girls, 11 per cent BPL girls and 5 per cent minority girls) were enrolled in them.

Under the scheme, 2075residential schools at upper primary level have been sanctioned for girls belonging predominantly to SC, ST, OBC and minority communities in educationally backward blocks having high gender gaps and low female literacy. A minimum of three-fourths of the seats are reserved for girls from marginalized or minority communities and the remaining are made available to girls from families below the poverty line.428 KGBVs have been set up in blocks having predominance of Muslim population and 441 in ST blocks.

Mid Day Meal Programme

The Mid-Day Meal Programme undoubtedly exerts positive influence on enrollment and attendance in schools. Hunger drains children of their will and ability to learn. A hungry child is less likely to attend school regularly. Chronic hunger delays or stops the physical and mental growth of children, and leads to malnutrition. A malnourished child finds it difficult to concentrate on and participates in teaching-learning activities in school. Apart from enhancing school attendance and child nutrition, mid-day meals have an important social value and foster equality. As children learn to sit together and share a common meal, there is erosion of caste prejudice and class inequality. Moreover, cultural traditions and social structures often mean that girls are much more affected by hunger than boys. Thus, the Mid-Day Meal programme is critical to reduction of gender gap in education, since it enhances female school attendance. Briefly, the Mid-Day Meal Scheme (MDMS) is effective in:

Concluding Remarks

Based on the analysis presented above on different components one gets the impression that the country progressed tremendously but still it has certain areas of concern, which are primarily responsible for unfulfillment of the goals of universal literacy and enrolment. Across the country, educational facilities are now available to a large segment of population and areas but compared to primary, upper primary facilities are not yet available to all areas and population. Over a period of time, ratio of primary to upper primary schools improved significantly but the same is not as envisaged in the policy directives. The country also failed to

adequately create, utilize and make available alternative facilities in all un-served habitations and areas where out-of-school children concentrate.

A large number of children continue to dropout from the system before completion of an education cycle, which severely affects the efficiency of the education system. The children are taking more years to become primary graduates than ideally required. The unfinished task in terms of un-enrolled and out-of-school children is a challenging one. Rigorous efforts are needed to bring and retain them under the umbrella of education system.

- Disaggregated planning with block as its unit may help to identify disadvantage groups and areas.
- Micro planning exercises in this regard and development of village education plans may be useful. This has been experimented in the DPEP and the response is encouraging. Local people and functionaries are made involved in developing and implementing district plans that, if experimented elsewhere may bring a sea change in quality of plans and their implementation.
- Keeping this in view, the Government of India recently initiated a new programme called Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan: An initiative for Universal Elementary Education. Before the end of the ninth plan, all the districts of the country are expected to cover under this programme.

Education is universally recognised as an important investment in building human capital, which is a driver for technological innovation and economic growth. India has to see education not just as a component of social development, but as a means of securing her future in an information society, resplendent with knowledge, research, creativity and innovation. To achieve this vision, several reforms have to be initiated. Primary education should be made compulsory and free. Secondary education should be compulsory as well. There is no getting away from enforcing the Constitutional commitment to compulsory education for children up to the age of fourteen years. Pre-school and primary education should migrate from teaching to 'sensory learning' to foster creative joy and healthy psychological development of children. Learning through practices and experiences should be emphasised and the teacher's role should transform to one of a facilitator. Trained teachers should serve for a specified period in the rural areas as part of their development. A common national system for educational content at the school level, after providing for regional and local variations, should be introduced. Value education and physical education at pre-primary and primary level and vocational education at the secondary level must be stressed.

It is found from the above that the enrollment which is the major indicator of elementary education is increasing year- wise. So it has a positive impact on the growth of the status of education and it also enhance the human development because as we know that when students are got educated the human development will take place and it will be helpful for the growth of the nation. Government has to consider the major schemes which will further accelerate the rate of enrollment as an indicator of economic development. The schemes of education are very much helpful to enhance the enrollment status of the elementary education.

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