



## Indian Education Sector: Grading of Primary Schools to help in improving the Learning outcomes

- *Elementary Education in India*
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## Highlight

*India has undoubtedly been successful in evolving a national structure for elementary education in the last fifty years. Primary education is now provided in the mother tongue or regional language in all the States and Union Territories. There has been substantial increase in access to elementary education. First generation learners, girls and the underprivileged sections of society have been provided with unique opportunities for vertical mobility. Literacy standards have been substantially improved across the country.*

*The Government has made concerted efforts towards making elementary education, a fundamental right of all children in the age group of 6-14 years. A number of programs have been launched by the government, one of them being “Sarv Siksha Abhiyaan (SSA)”. Schools and enrolments have certainly increased but so has the number of out-of-school children. The country today has one of the largest illiterate population in the world. While the demand for quality education is showing perceptible increase because of improved awareness and social mobilisation through organised efforts, supply is generally inadequate. The educational administration in most States and UTs is yet to effectively tackle endemic problems concerning shortage of teachers, inadequate and improperly designed school buildings, lack of teaching/ learning equipment, need based teacher training and a curriculum related to real life requirements.*

*In order to improve the quality of learning and enhance the penetration further, there is a growing need to develop a framework to assess the performance of the schools operating under Sarv Siksha Abhiyaan. This would help in monitoring the quality on the basis of student, school and teacher specific indicators.*

# Background

## Primary or Elementary Education in India

Formal education plays a vital role in the development of skills and knowledge. Developing nations need to believe in the expansion of education in order to increase the pace of development. India made a constitutional commitment to provide free and compulsory education up to the age of 14 years by 1960. The goal has still not been achieved. However, over the last decade, India has made great strides in strengthening its primary education system. There has been an increased direct involvement of central government in strengthening infrastructure and delivery of elementary education. The 2011 Annual Status of Education Report (ASER), which tracks trends in rural education, indicated that enrolment rates among primary-school-aged children were about 93%, with little difference by gender. The District Information System for Education (DISE) reported in 2012 that 95% of India's rural populations is within one kilometer of primary schools. The vast majority of Indian children attend government-run primary schools in rural areas. However, behind the veil of such promising statistics, the learning outcomes of India's children show little progress. The country ranked 63 out of 64 in the latest Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) study in 2009, with some of its best schools ranked at par with those surveyed. The 2011 ASER stated that only 48.20% of students in the fifth grade can read at the second grade level.

At the operational level, elementary school is generally divided into two parts with five years of primary schooling (grades 1-5) followed by three years of upper primary or middle school (grades 6-8). While the above description gives the general picture found in national level, actual decisions regarding the organization and structure of school education are the prerogative of state governments. Consequently, considerable variations are found in the organizational patterns of schooling across the different states of India.

## Universalisation of Elementary Education in India

Universalisation of Elementary Education (UEE) is an educational term which signifies that education is for all and must be accessible irrespective of caste, creed or religion. This concept accepts that education is the birth right of every child. The government of India took significant steps in the field of universalisation of elementary education. In different five-year plans, considerable importance was given to education. Financial allocations for different sectors of education were made in union and state budgets. The primary education sector in India was opened to enthusiastic external aid organizations on a large scale. With the help of international agencies, Indian state started the new educational programme named District Primary Education Program (DPEP) and SSA, but all programmes which were formulated after 1990's viewed education as an economic good. Therefore in the programmes main emphasis was on maximum enrolment of the children rather than improving human capabilities of children, through quality education. It replaced the regular and trained teacher by a Para teacher and low quality education was legitimized for the poor children in the form of alternative schools and education guarantee scheme schools. So, in nutshell, the policy perspective in the universalisation of elementary education in India got a drastic change and during the course of time, the state endeavour to achieve the goal of universalisation of elementary education has undergone major paradigm shift.

## Sarv Siksha Abhiyaan

Government of India (GOI) launched Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) in January 2001 for providing useful and relevant elementary education to all children in the age group of 6 to 14 years by 2010. The main objectives of SSA were:

- (i) To enroll all children in age group of 6 to 14 years in schools, education guarantee centres, alternative and innovative schools by 2032;
- (ii) To ensure five years' primary education to all children by 2007;
- (iii) To focus on quality of elementary education with emphasis on education for life;
- (iv) To bridge all gender and social category gaps at primary stage by 2007 and at elementary education level by 2010; and
- (v) To ensure that all children complete eight years of elementary schooling by 2010.

Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) is the government's flagship programme to provide universal access to elementary education for children 6-14 years old. The scheme aims to improve enrolment, retention, and the quality of education to enable children to achieve grade appropriate levels of learning. It also aims to eliminate gender differences and gaps between different social categories.

### Progress Made under the "Sarv Siksha Abhiyaan"

With improved coverage, the number of schools imparting elementary education increased manifold. From 2002-03 to 2012-13, the number of primary schools increased from 8.53L to 14.31L. During the same period, enrolment at the primary level of education has also increased significantly from 101.16 million in 2002-03 to 134 million in 2012-13. Over a period of time, enrolment in upper primary classes has also shown consistent increase. From 50.91 million in 2007-08, it has increased to 64 million in 2012-13. The Gross Enrolment Rate (GER) at primary level based on the DISE data also increased from 81% in 2002-03 to 105.98% in 2012-13. 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. As per the DISE 2012-13, a growth can be seen in the ratio of girls to boys enrolment. In primary school, the share of girls' enrolment in 2012-13 was 48.36% as compared to 48.22% in 2007-08.

Transition rate at the primary stage was 64% for the year 2002-03 and it increased to 86.74% in 2012-13. There is considerable regional variation in the transition rate with Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh causing the most concern. The retention of students in state schools is also not up to the mark, especially in the case of girls. Gender disparity still prevails in rural India and parents prefer boys over girls to attend school. Thus gender becomes a major reason for dropping out of girls. The repetition rate for primary grades (grade 1-4/5) at all states level for the year 2007-08 is 6.11% and in 2012-13 the rate has declined to 1.24%.

Dropouts in this study are those students who enroll themselves in schools and withdraw prematurely before they complete primary/elementary level. At all states level the dropout rate was 9.36% in 2007-08 and it decreased to 4.17% in 2012-13. Promotion rate has increased between the year 2007-08 and 2012-13 at all states level.

**Table 1: Primary Education Performance Indicator**

Process and Efficiency Related Indicators	2002-03	2007-08	2012-13
<b>Student Specific Indicator</b>			
Gross Enrolment Rate-Primary	81%	113.94	105.98
Net Enrolment Rate- Primary	-	84.53	90.78
Transition Rate from Primary to Upper Primary School	64.48	81.13	86.74
Retention Rate	-	73.71	80.07
<b>School Specific Indicators</b>			
No. of Elementary Schools	853601	1250775	1431702
% primary schools with single teacher	14.4	10.13	11.79
Pupil Teacher Ratio	40	33	27
Drop Out Rate	-	9.36	4.17
Repetition Rate (Primary)	-	6.11	1.24
Repetition Rate (Upper Primary)	-	6.02	0.85
Average Student Classroom Ratio	43	35	27
% primary schools with girls toilet	22.22	50.55	85.28
% primary schools with drinking water	73.28	86.75	92.71
% primary schools with boundary wall	59.99	50.22	
<b>Teacher Specific Indicators</b>			
% female teachers	-	42.72	46.37
Average Number of Teacher per School	3.7	4.5	5.1
Percentage of Professionally trained Regular Teachers	-	77.68	78.58
Percentage of Professionally trained Contractual Teachers	-	45.63	54.01

According to DISE, the **percentage of schools (all schools) having girls' toilet** (in addition, schools may also have boys' and common toilets in co-educational schools) increased from 50.55% in 2007-08 to 85.28% in 2012-13.

Availability of teachers is an important variable for quality education. All the schools in the country now have an average of 3 teachers and more. School-wise analysis based on District Information System for Education (DISE) 2012-13 indicates that 46 per cent of primary and 34 per cent of upper primary schools have poor Pupil Teacher Ratio (PTR). Also, many states have insufficient supervision structure or weak capacity to implement a programme at the scale of SSA.

Many states like Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka lack adequate numbers of teachers in state schools. Some state schools are functioning only with single teacher and a single classroom. However, the concept of para-teacher (PT) (contract teachers) in state schools has somewhat increased the numbers of teachers in state schools, yet the results are not satisfactory due to several reasons like low qualification and lack of professional training of PT. Girls' enrolment at both the primary and upper primary stages increased sharply.

## Problems Pertaining to Elementary Education in India

**Lack of Infrastructure:** Cleanliness is a matter of concern in most primary schools, especially those in villages in interior areas. Drinking water, sanitation facilities and electricity is a big problem. Besides, the absence of proper access roads to schools and the long distance students have to travel to reach school means that girls, particularly those at puberty, drop out because of their parents' concerns about their safety. National data indicates that around 10.21 per cent of habitations or villages do not have a school or an alternative school facility within one-kilometer radius. Lack of building or unusable classrooms hinders the process of teaching and learning as the classes cannot run in all-weather conditions, particularly in India that experiences a long rainy season, very hot summer and chilling winter. Single teacher schools most of them with just single room are unable to provide even the basic environment for learning. Inadequate infrastructure like school buildings, teachers, drinking water and toilets also discourage the children to attend the school resulting in low attainment. Many schools still do not have a building of its own and classrooms are held in all seasons in a temporary shed or in the open ground.

**Low attendance: Classroom absence has been identified as a major concern responsible for falling standard in school education system.** Almost everywhere, children's attendance as noted in the school register was far below enrolment. Only around 70 per cent of children enrolled in the primary classes were marked present. Although the enrolment rate has increased yet, the number of student attending school is irregular. The problem related to high absenteeism can be attributed to a number of reasons such as family health or financial concerns, poor school infrastructure, transportation or conveyance issues, poor teaching skills, teacher absenteeism, education not recognized as worthy enough by family members, etc.

**Teacher Deployment and Absenteeism:** The pupil-teacher ratio has shown little improvement over the years. The proportion of schools with only one teacher appointed has shown no improvement since 1996. It has remained at 12 per cent. Teacher absenteeism in state schools has become a major problem in developing countries like India. A World Bank report reveals that 19 per cent teachers, on an average, were absent from their schools in Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Peru, Ecuador, and Uganda. The various reasons behind high absenteeism varies from unauthorised leave without a valid permission to participation in orientation courses and seminars and other non-professional works like preparation of voter list, survey for different purposes, campaign against disease like polio and other official works given by their superior authorities. This absenteeism worsens the performance of students in state schools in India with an already less number of teachers and high students-teachers ratio.

**Low learning achievements:** Although the objective of universal enrolment of children in state schools and providing primary schools within the radius of 1km of the habitation in almost all the areas has been achieved yet the level of students' attainment is very low in state schools in the rural parts of India and the level of education provided is at the worrying level. Even in schools where teaching was going on, children were not learning much of what the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) assures them. Classroom activity was dominated by mindless rote learning, senseless chanting, and blind copying from the board. Low attainment of students indicates that education policy does not achieve its aim of providing essential level of learning to the students in state schools

## Analysis

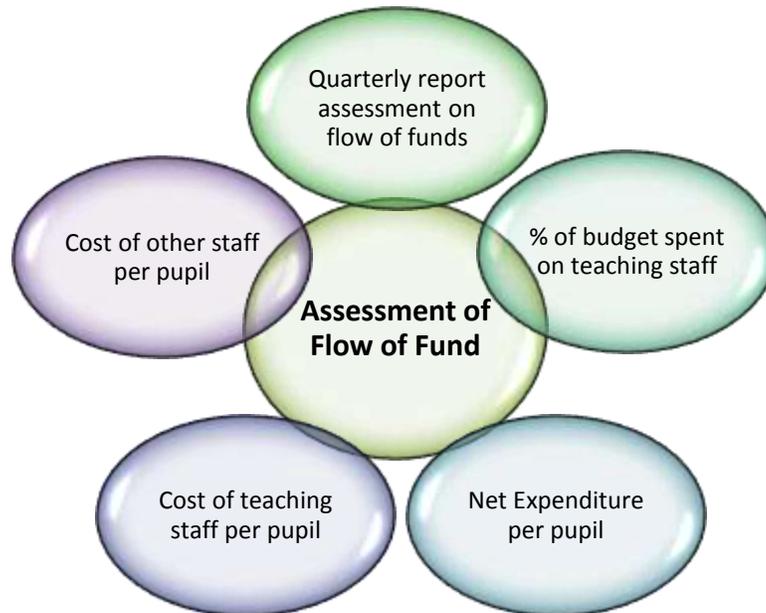
### *Third party assessment of schools under Sarv Siksha Abhiyaan is going to improve the level of teaching imparted and the quality of students passing out of schools*

Education in India has improved dramatically over the last three decades with schools becoming more accessible to most students and growth in enrolment rate and attendance. The Right to Education (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 socio-economic 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.

A well-educated and skilled workforce is going to help India in acquiring a growth trajectory. Improving education is a critical area of investment if the country wants to sustain economic growth and harness its young workforce. 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.

The enrolment of children has doubtlessly increased close to the desired level, however the important question is whether all these children attend school regularly or they just get enrolled to be benefited by the incentives like Mid- Day Meal, scholarship, free books and free school uniform for girls provided by the government. Although a lot of effort has been put up by state level and central government, yet physical infrastructure is inadequate, not all children are enrolled, retention is poor with girls lagging behind boys, drop-out rates remain high, children belonging to scheduled caste, scheduled tribe, and Muslim communities are largely excluded, inequalities persist, quality is poor, and learning achievements are low.

An accountability framework for quality of primary education that includes learning outcomes of children as well as co-scholastic activities, optimal use of financial resources and community participation needs to be built up. SSA being a programme with long term and far reaching objectives, regular and periodic financial monitoring is needed for the effective and efficient implementation of the programme. Review processes should include monitoring the status and distribution of free textbooks, infrastructure development plans that target converting temporary structures to permanent ones before spending on maintenance and upgrades, assessment of teachers and their skills. Ensuring community contribution and enhancing the role that local communities play, could improve the implementation and monitoring of the scheme.



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## Contact Us

**Shalu Malaviya**

+91 1244125732

[shalu.malaviya@onicra.com](mailto:shalu.malaviya@onicra.com)

### **HARYANA**

#### **Gurgaon**

#### **Corporate Office & Rating Office**

5th Floor

Plot No, 21-22, Udyog Vihar

Phase-1V

Gurgaon-122015,

India

### **KARNATAKA**

#### **Bangalore**

N-705, 7<sup>th</sup> Floor, North Block,

Manipal Centre

47, Dickenson Road

Bangalore – 560042

India

### **MAHARASHTRA**

#### **Mumbai**

520, 5<sup>th</sup> Floor

Nirmal Corporate Centre, LBS

Marg, Mulund (West)

Mumbai – 400080

India

### **GUJARAT**

#### **Ahmedabad**

603, Aniket, Above Metro

Showroom, Opp. Jain Derasar, C G

Road, Navrang Pura,

Ahmedabad-380009

India

### **WEST BENGAL**

#### **Kolkata**

3DNF, 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor, Jindal Tower,

Block A, 21/1A/3, Darga Road,

Kolkata - 700017

India

### **UTTAR PRADESH**

#### **Noida**

B10, Sector - 59

Noida – 201301

India

### **TELANGANA**

#### **Hyderabad**

#7-1-28/12/1

4<sup>th</sup> Floor, Serenity Plaza, Shyam

Karan Road, Near Andhra Bank,

Ameerpet Branch, Ameerpet,

Hyderabad

India

### **TAMIL NADU**

#### **Chennai**

Mercury, #25

Flowers Road, Level 2,

Kilpauk, Chennai – 600084

India

#### **Lucknow**

Aman Palace, Purani Chungi,

Kanpur Road

Lucknow

India