ISSUE OF ENROLMENT AND DROP OUT: AN UNSETTLED CONCERN

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Introduction

Education is considered as the most important pillar in the development of a country. Whether the development is measured in terms of social, economic or technological, the key factor should always remains the education. Even at individual household level, the strength of the literate household of the family helps in improving the socio and economic conditions when compared with the less illiterate household. It means, it is the backbone of development, which results in broadening of employment opportunities and income levels in future. "Education is a powerful driver for poverty reduction and sustainable economic development. It empowers people with the knowledge and skills they need to increase production and income, to create and take advantage of employment opportunities and to reduce hunger and malnutrition. Social change and long-term prospects for economic growth rely considerably on the expansion of quality learning opportunities for all. Greater equity in both education enrolments and school quality across all population groups will result in a more equal income distribution and reduce socioeconomic inequalities in general" (UNESCO, 2010). The regional MDGR (Millennium Development Goals Report) by Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) states the primacy of education and its promotion through a human rights-based approach, according to which education should be considered a human right and therefore a State obligation. "Education is more than a right associated with full personal development. It is also a key factor in determining the opportunities and quality of life accessible to individuals, families and communities. There is a wealth of evidence which demonstrates that education has a positive impact on income and health, family structure (in terms of fertility and its members'

participation in the economy, etc.), the promotion of democratic values and civilized co-existence and the autonomous and responsible pursuits of individuals." (ECLAC, 2005)

The Education Commission (1964-66) professed, "The destiny of India is now being shaped in her classrooms". After independence first policy on education came into existence in 1968, named as National Policy on Education (NPE) and thereafter number of amendments was done in NPE. In 1990 at the World Conference on Education for All, the participants of various countries agreed to a broad range of educational goals including that of attainment of Universal Primary Education (UPE) by the year 2000 which was further extended to 2015. A key milestone in the history of Indian Education System was laid down in December 2002, when 86th Constitutional Amendment Act was passed making free and compulsory education a Fundamental Right for all the children in the age group of 6-14 years. Further the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act, 2009 under the Article 21-A of the Constitution of India was passed and became operative in the country on 1 April 2010 which also boosts education upto the age of 14 years. Every effort is made by the government for easy access of education to each and every part of the country but still we have children with no education.

Now the country has also embarked on the ambitious path of making universal secondary education, but still we have quality concerns even at primary and upper primary level. While the government is still trying to reach every nook and corner of the country with major focus of educating the masses, the observable fact regarding school dropouts and somewhere very less enrolment remains a blot on the progress of education in India. The problem of dropout is not connected simply with school-related problems such as disinterested teachers and school infrastructure. In the rural communities, it is poverty, ignorance, superstition and cultural constraints (particularly relating to girls) that obstruct schooling. For many of the poor who are deprived of basic education and living in intergenerational debt traps, the preference is given to engage their children in labor for fulfilling basic needs which results in drop-out of children from the schools. National Knowledge Commission (2007) also emphasize on the issue of high dropout rate in some states.

To overcome the issue of drop-out and low school enrolment, Gujarat government adopted two separate programmes involving the entire administrative machinery in the State to implement Kanya Kelavani Rathyatra and Shala Praveshotsav, and Gunotsav to improve the quality of education and teachers. The result has been impressive, with the net enrolment ratio rising to 98.8 per cent and substantially bringing down the drop-out ratio of Class 1 to

V to 2 per cent in 2009-10 from a high of 17.83 per cent in 2003-04. Similarly, the drop-out ratio in Class 1 to VII which was 33.73 per cent in 2003-04 has been brought down to 7.56 per cent in 2011-12. Various other programs are also adopted by local authorities of different states to tackle with these issues effectively. The drop-out status is just not the figures but it shows failure of the system and represents a significant human cost to children and the nation since they will most likely be permanently illiterate.

Government Schemes

There are various government schemes, policies and programs implemented for spreading education at each and every corner of the country. Government is contributing its best efforts just for the upliftment of society and making India as developed nation. Some of the programs and schemes are:

- ✓ Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan

Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) is launched in 2001. It is one of India's major flagship programmes for universalization of elementary education. SSA is being implemented in partnership with the State Governments. SSA Goals are (a) Enrolment of all children in school, (b) Retention of all children till the upper primary stage, (c) Bridging of gender and social category gaps in enrolment, retention and learning; and (d) Ensuring that there is significant enhancement in the learning achievement levels of children at the primary and upper primary stage.

Provisions of Right to Education Act are being implemented through SSA. Accordingly, norms have been revised / modified to align them with the requirement of RTE Act, 2009.

- ✓ Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya

The scheme was launched in July 2004 for the girls primarily coming from SC, ST, OBC and Muslim communities. The scheme provides establishment of schools in far flung areas where habitation is scattered and female rural literacy is low. Under XIth five year plans, the KGBV scheme was merged with Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan. KGBVs generally aim to include those girls who are unable to go to regular schools and Out of school girls in the 10+ age group who are unable to complete primary school. The schools provide residential facilities along with other facilities.

- ✓ National Programme for Education of Girls at Elementary Level (NPEGEL)

The programme mainly targets the girls from identified educationally backward blocks (EBB) of the country. NPEGEL reaches out to girls who are enrolled in school, but do not attend school regularly, out of school girls, overage girls who have not completed their

elementary education and also includes those girls which are coming from marginalized groups of the society.

- ✓ Mid-Day Meal Scheme (MDMS)
- ✓ The Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA)
- ✓ Scheme for Setting up of 6000 Model Schools at Block Level
- ✓ Scheme of Vocationalisation of Secondary Education at +2 level
- ✓ Scheme of ICT at School
- ✓ Inclusive Education for Disabled at Secondary stage (IEDSS)
- ✓ Strengthening of Teachers' Training Institutions
- ✓ Adult Education and Skill Development Schemes
- ✓ Scheme of Infrastructure development in Minority Institutions (IDMI)
- ✓ Eklavya Model Residential Schools (EMRSs)
- ✓ Pre-matric Scholarship Scheme

Status

Today, India enjoys a pride of place in the international arena not only as a fastest growing and emerging as influential economy but also as a most important destination with vast pool of powerful human resource consisting of suitable and educated personnel. Now-a-days, we could find highly educated, tech-savvy and scientifically trained Indians working in each and every field in every nook and corner of the world. India has started the journey for achieving 100% literacy when the rate of literacy was just at 12% (at the time of attaining freedom) and as per 2011 census, our literacy rate comes to 73.4%, which again inspires us to achieve further heights. In recent decades India has made significant progress on access to schooling and enrollment rates in primary education but dropout rates and low levels of learning remain challenges for the state and central government.

Table 1: Literacy Rates (7+ Age Group) (in percentage)

	2001			2011		
	Total	SC	ST	Total	SC	ST
Total	64.8	54.7	47.1	73.0	66.1	59.0
Male	75.3	67.0	59.0	80.9	75.2	68.5
Female	53.7	42.0	35.0	64.6	56.5	49.4

Data Source: O/O RGI, Census 2001 & 2011

The Government has introduced various programmes and schemes to boost the enrolment which results in the successfully achievement of the target of Universal Primary Education. With enrollment at primary level reaching at least 98 percent in 2014-2015, and girls making up 56 percent of new students between 2007 and 2013, it is clear that many problems of access to schooling have been addressed. Table 2 gives an idea about the increase in growth of number of schools which shows the objective of providing schools in every nook and corner of the country has been a successful mission by the government.

Table 2: Total Number of Schools

	Primary Only	Primary with Upper Primary	Primary with Upper Primary and Secondary and Hr. Secondary	Upper Primary Only	Upper Primary with Secondary and Hr. Secondary	Primary with Upper Primary and Secondary	Upper Primary with Secondary
2013-14	858916	274361	30692	147163	40957	36803	59211
2014-15	847118	277706	37460	147388	38734	45143	52231

Source: U-DISE

Despite these improvements, keeping children in school upto graduation is still an issue and dropout rates continue to be high. Nationally 29 percent of children drop out before completing five years of primary school, and 43 percent before finishing upper primary school. Merely 42 percent students complete High school. Due to this India is accounted among top five nations for out-of-school children of primary school age, with 1.4 million 6 to 11 year olds not attending school. Reasons are varied, may be due to girls toilet facilities, shortage of teachers, girls safety, problems related to household etc.
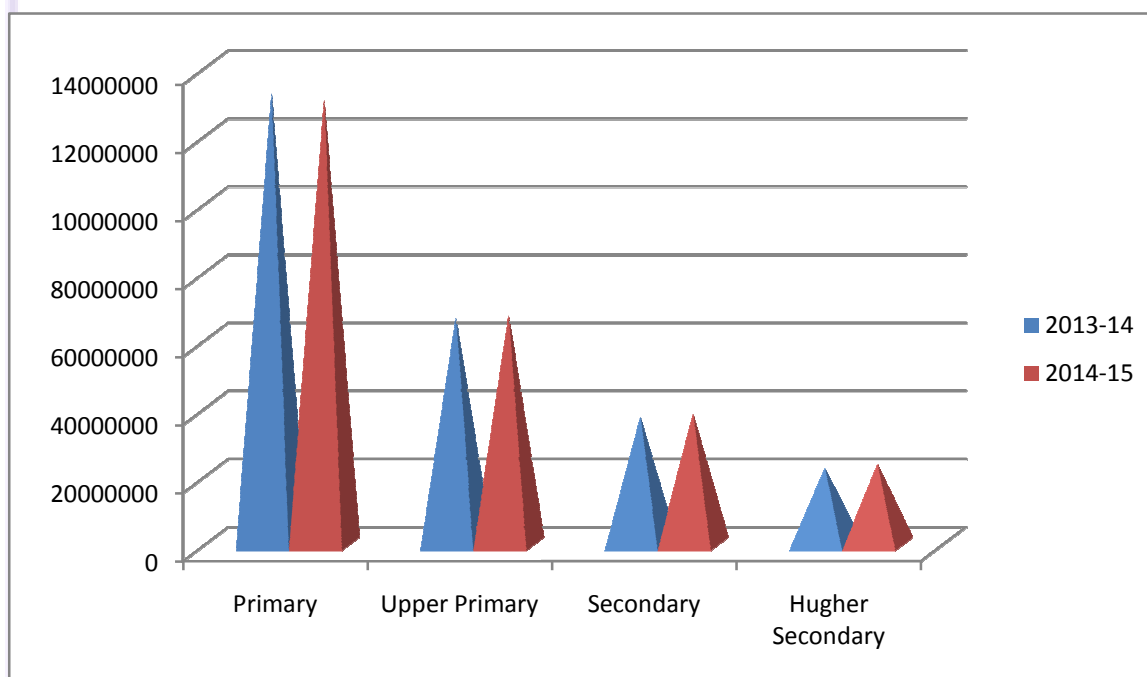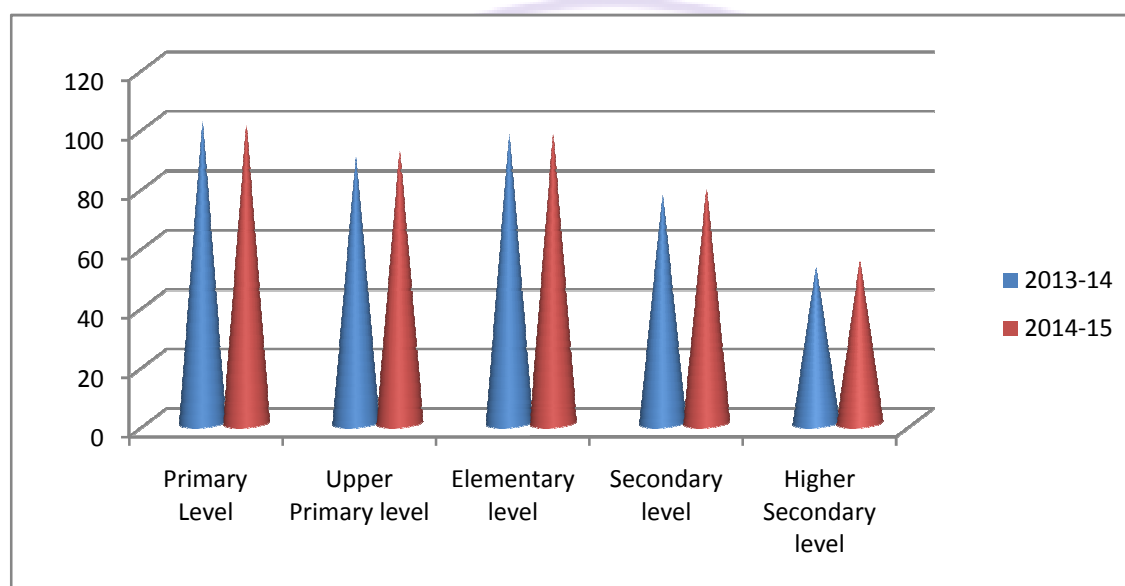
Figure 1: Grade wise Enrolment: 2014-15

Source: U-DISE

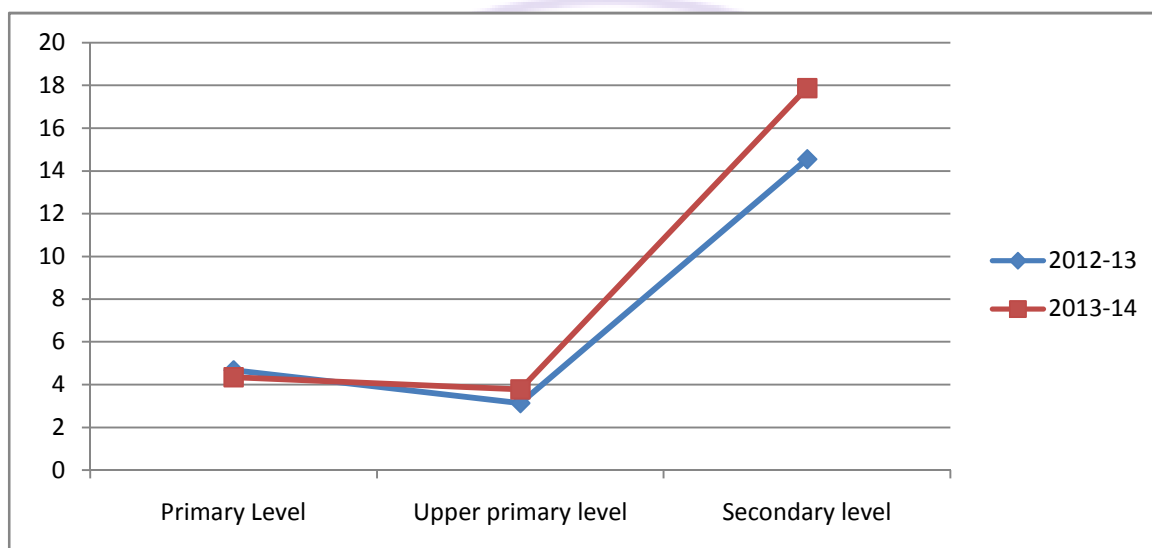**Figure 2: Enrolment by Educational Level**

Source: U-DISE

Figure 3: Gross Enrolment Ratio by Level

Source: U-DISE

Enrolment in educational institutions rose between 2001 and 2015 at every level, most of all in the primary and secondary school-going age of 7 to14 years. Between the age of 7 and 14, over 90 per cent of children are attending school, the numbers show. Higher education still needs some improvement. The enrolment trends of socially marginalized groups indicate the improvement in case of access to education. The government of India Report on 'Education for All: Towards Quality and Equity, published by National University of Educational Planning and Administration (NUEPA) in 2014, states that between 2000-01 and 2013-14, the enrolment of SC and ST children in primary education increased from 21.3 million to 26.3 million with 24.1% hike and 11 million to 14.7 million with 33.6% hike respectively, in just one decade. In terms of gross enrolment ratio, there has been a steep increase from 86.8% to 107.7% in case of SC and 88% to 105.52% in case of ST in the same decade.

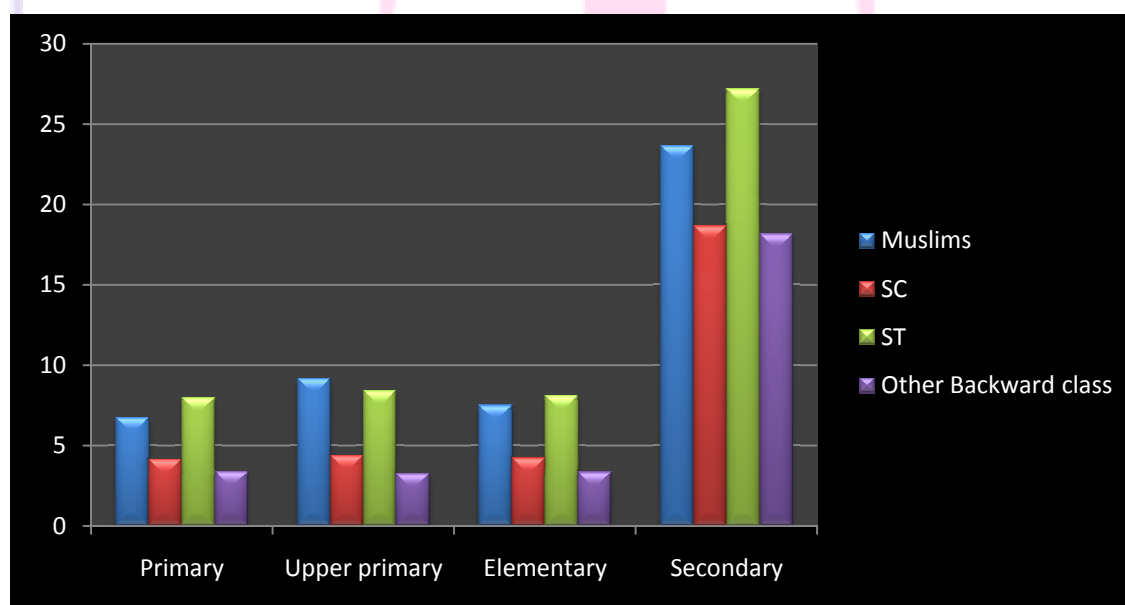**Table 3: Percentage enrolment and population share by social category**

	Percent population share (census 2001)	Percent enrolment share (DISE 2013-14)
SC	16	20
ST	8	11
Muslims	13	14

Source: U-DISE

Figure 4: Average Annual Drop-out Rate: 2012-13and 2013-14

Source: U-DISE

Even we have increased enrolment level but still drop-out issue is under concern and at priority. Despite of continuous efforts from the government to include all the sections of society into the education system without any discrimination, large numbers of young people are still without schooling. Although enrolment in primary education has increased, but the drop-out rate at higher level is still in alarming position. The above graph shows that with the increase in level of education, the drop-out rate also increases.

Figure 5: Average Annual Drop-out Rate of Marginalized Classes: 2013-14

Source: U-DISE

The above graph shows that the drop-out rate is high at secondary level. From the figure we could easily conclude that among all the marginalized classes, drop-out is serious issue in Schedule tribes. The main reason behind this is generational illiteracy but now education is welcomed in these communities as now enrolment rate is increasing and most of the parents' wishes to send their wards to school.

Impact on enrolment and Drop-out

In order to achieve Universalisation of Elementary Education, time to time, the Government of India has initiated various schemes and programs and even the success of these schemes could also be seen in the form of increased enrolment ratio. Sarv Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) has sanctioned hundreds of thousands of schools up to now which results in significant increase in number of primary and upper- primary schools. In 2005-06, the country had only 7, 38,150 primary schools which increased almost by 59 percent (12, 00,772) in 2013-14. In case of Upper primary schools, there is substantial increase in number. Number of upper primary schools in 2005-06 were 3, 85,883 and in 2013-14 the number increased upto 589,796 with 52% hike (Data from U-DISE). The primary schools are normally within one kilometer and upper primary in three kilometers.

With the commencement of RTE Act (2009), every child has to be enrolled in neighborhood schools for elementary education and in case of non possibility of opening a school due to certain genuine reasons, transport facility should be provided to children, so that they could easily attend the school. Residential facilities mostly for upper primary and higher students were also being provided, in case of non availability of schools within nearby vicinity. The special scheme, called Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBV) is implemented within the SSA to provide residential facility to dropped-out girls at upper primary level. Over 2500 KGBVs have been operational and the interventions have created enormous interest and demand. Equitable educational access to tribal, marginalized, SCs and STs is a major concern with policy makers and continuously trials are made to bring them into the nation building process. Governments are working on various initiatives for these and favorable results in the form of increased enrolment and less drop out ratio are seen. Even now the schools have been opened in the areas where there is high concentration of marginalized communities like Scheduled Caste (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), and Muslims which results in increase in enrolment share of these communities.

Since the launch of RMSA, a total of 11,599 new secondary schools were sanctioned and till now even almost 86.9% of these schools i.e. 10,082 are in working condition having total enrolment of 972,000. RMSA not only focuses on construction of new schools but also on

existing schools by providing grants for additional classrooms to these schools. According to Sixth Joint Review Mission Report of RMSA, up to 2014-15 total of 52,715 new classrooms are sanctioned and out of these, 20,839 have been constructed and 16,774 are in progress. All these efforts help in increasing enrolment ratio and spreading education in every nook and corner of the country ultimately achieving the aim of Universalisation of education and help in dealing with drop out issues at higher levels.

The provision of mid-day meal increases the enrolment in the schools along with improving child nutrition level. Children coming from poor families having financial constraints and prefer to work over education for their livelihood are benefited with this initiative, which results in decreasing drop-out rate at elementary level.

Technology is also being used to provide better access to education through several programs such as GIAN, SWAYAM and National Digital Library. With the advent of online courses, drop-out rate ought to drop adequately. University Grants Commission (UGC) has initiated online programs known as e-PG pathshala which delivers various developing courses at post graduate level in different disciplines and subjects. This type of initiative helps students to carry out their studies along with working. It also deals with scarcity of effective and quality teachers.

Our former President and an icon in the history of education system, Dr. A P J Abdul Kalam focused on the framing of a national policy which aimed at creating a "global human resource cadre" in India: an army of youth equipped with special skills and higher education. The launch of National Skill Development Mission on 15th July 2015 to boost skill India Campaign helps in vocationalisation of education and leads to reduction in drop-out ratio in higher education. As of now, the country has 249 training partners, 3222 training centers and 5570476 trainees. With vocationalisation of schools, the youth is oriented towards future employability and skills associated with future jobs.

National Curriculum Framework for School Education (NCERT, 2005) has recommended that inclusive schools should be opened for learners with special educational needs and curriculum having appropriate content with different transactional strategies should be adopted. The material comprises of a number of examples and demonstrations for teaching process in these schools are developed by SSA. 1.58 lakh mainstream teachers under SSA have already trained on this exemplar material.

Challenges and shortcomings

In order to achieve UEE (Universalization of Elementary Education), the Government of India has initiated a number of programs and projects. The Government adopts an integrated

approach in the implementation of the various centrally sponsored schemes, in keeping with principles of the National Policy on Education, to ensure that the education of equitable quality for all to fully harness the nation's human resource potential. The main problems are the high drop-out rate, low levels of learning and achievement, inadequate school infrastructure, poorly functioning schools, high teacher absenteeism, the large number of teacher vacancies, poor quality of education and inadequate funds.

There is substantial increase and good expansion of primary and upper primary schools in terms of number through various schemes implemented by government and the enrolment also reached at nearby universal level, but still gender gap in enrolment and drop-out issues are there. It is important to emphasis here that improving the school infrastructure, quality of education and huge investment in school education can only reduce the extent of dropout to a limited extent. Unless and until there is considerable improvement in the economic status of households and change in the social attitudes of parents, achieving the goal of universalisation of school education will remain a major challenge for India The percentage of marginalized communities enrolled being proportionate to their population is also under concern. The number of children particularly children from disadvantaged groups and weaker sections who drop out of school before completing upper primary education remains high and is very important issue.

Although the above mentioned programs and policies as well as schemes to improve, enhance and strengthen the education system of the country are successfully implemented and some of the desired outcomes are achieved to provide "access to Schooling facility". But real access to education does not demand only infrastructure but also needs adequate teachers and some basic facilities which includes toilets, drinking water etc. Even children who complete their elementary education in some of the areas, does not fulfill satisfactorily, the criteria of quality learning. The main objective of effective learning and quality education still remains there; even there has been a huge increase in investment in physical and infrastructural terms. Annual State Education Report (ASER), National Achievement Survey of NCERT and the international test (PISA) conclude that that the level of learning even in basic competencies of reading and math are much lower than expectations which shows inadequacy in our education system.

Different challenges which acts as barriers in proper implementation of these programs and also increasing drop-out are

- Issues related to girls: Schools are not being considered as safe spaces for girls and sometimes on the way to schools girls face issues like eve-teasing, harassments etc which leads to early drop-out of girls from the schools.

- Caste: It is a major problem, as we are living in 21st century still people fight over this issue. In certain villages teachers of higher caste don't want to teach lower caste students. If teachers are appointed in these areas, they try to change their posting or sometimes force lower caste students to drop the school. The change in mind set of education delivery system could be seen in certain cases but still in some areas the condition is deteriorating. Even in certain higher education intuitions, this problem still persists and yet not tackled. Both school and society should work and join forces to deal with this issue. They both need to be more inclusive, fair to children from these communities so that the Indian society can then truly claim itself to be a democratic society.

- Lack of quality staff in rural areas: Now-a-days everyone wants to live in city areas where they could find every facility so young qualified teachers who are posted to a remote area tend to try to move out as soon as possible as they don't have sense of responsibility and commitment towards society. This behaviour results in irregularity and lateness among them resulting in negative impact on parents.

- No job satisfaction among teachers: Among teachers there is dissatisfaction due to issues related to less salary and the mediocre living conditions and due to this they could not devote to their profession and try to seek other options for income generation. Teachers are also preoccupied with the lack of equipment and the shortage of teaching materials in their classes. In certain cases they face challenges like no support from parents and pupils even after giving their best.

- Disability: It is estimated that out of all CWSN, 34% are out of school and still wondering for equitable education. With sanctioned large grants from center and state governments, still they face challenges such as, architectural barriers, inadequate provisions of aids and appliances, resource support and societal issues. The system did not respond appropriately to their special educational needs forcing them to dropout.

- Displacement: Displacements due to seasonal imbalances, natural calamities or any other issue leads to unevenness in education and hence acutely affects the education

of children. This kind of problem is generally faced by disadvantaged groups and weaker sections.

- In our country many children are compelled to work at home or outside to add the family income. Girls have to stay at home to help the mother, who attends farm work also or to look after younger brothers and sisters. Such children cannot have the luxury of attending school on full time basis.

- Children in general and girls in particular discontinue their studies after primary stage because of the non-availability of a school with higher classes either within the habitation of residence or in the immediate neighborhood.

Along with these, there are many other issues which hinder the progress of education such as age problem for over aged students, language etc. Administrative issues are also there, truly telling generally administrative issues such as non availability of grants, improper implementation, and non-availability of good food in mid-day meals and in some areas even cooked food is not distributed, instead teachers give packets of biscuits and bureaucratic involvements etc act as a hindrance in effective implementation of programs.

Suggestions

With a view to enhancing enrolment, retention and attendance and simultaneously improving quality levels in education, various strict actions needs to be taken. Certain suggestions are suggested by researchers for dealing with these issues, but suggestions are not only sufficient to tackle with the serious issue of drop-out but it need real essence.

- Safety for girls in schools should be ensured by implementing strict rules against harassments.

- Free boarding and lodging facilities for girls living in far flung areas.

- Timely grants should be issued and proper check should be done on the use of these grants, and in case of faults serious punishments should be given.

- Though KGBVs and NPEGEL are successful schemes but there access is limited to certain areas and these should be extended.

- Proper check should be on mid-day meal scheme and timely food is inspected in schools.

- The needs of children displaced due to certain circumstances or calamities would be addressed in an appropriate manner such as seasonal hostel or special training or special schools should be arranged so that their study would not affect.

- Child labor is banned in our country but still children are working in dhabas, shops, tea stalls etc. Ban is only on papers, strict actions should be taken against these serious crimes. To tackle the issue of money for children coming from poor families, 'earn while you learn' type of programs should be implemented. Students after finishing their classes could learn and make and sell small things.

Conclusion

Education acts as a driver in our life which helps us to reach our destination safely while enjoying all the facilities of life. It is the only source which ensures and took guarantee of our better life. Educated citizens could lead the country towards prosperity. India is trying to come out of the issue of illiteracy and contributing its handsome share in each and every field while competing with developed nations. There are, however, a few challenges which need to be addressed in due course to make India, a developed nation. For this, government, society and schools shall thus need to be more committed towards the goal of 100% literacy. With miles already travelled, the government is trying its best and continuously focusing on building individuals who believe in themselves and are able to serve the real purpose of education; and who could contribute in shaping and building the future of the country.

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