

Sustainable Development Goals and Quality Education with reference to India

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Abstract

India has made meaningful progress in the field of education by implementing the policy of Education for All. The focus has been to increase the enrolment ratio of students at primary, secondary and higher education level. Several important programmes have been introduced to provide free and compulsory education to all children in the age group of 6 to 14 years as a Fundamental Right. The New Education Policy has been introduced in 2020 for introducing major reforms in the education system in India. However, one of the important areas of concern in India is that though enrolment rates have increased at primary level, enrolment level at secondary and higher education levels remains a challenge. The focus of this paper is on the current approaches adopted by India to implement the Goal 4 of Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) . The SDG 4 emphasizes on attaining quality education based on gender equality, skill development, vocational training, and entrepreneurship. The paper examines the trends in education attainment levels at primary, secondary and tertiary levels in India and studies some of the latest schemes launched by Government for school and higher education in India. The paper also explores some major challenges in improving the quality of education in India.

Key Words: Sustainable Development Goals, Quality Education , Inclusion, Challenges

Introduction

Education in any country plays a crucial role in enhancing the overall economic progress of the country. Education is considered the foundation for human resource development of the nation. Education has positive externalities on healthcare and improved quality of life. Improving education among citizens is needed for empowerment of all including women . It is also linked to lower population growth in country, reduced maternal and child mortality rates, lower dropout rates among students and better nutrition.

Policy makers in India have always stressed on the transformational role that education can play in our country. India has achieved considerable progress towards the objective of education for all. Government has taken the lead in introducing several policies with the objective of providing free and compulsory education to all children between the age group of 6 to 14 years in India. Right to education has been declared as a fundamental right under the Indian Constitution giving further boost to school education. Flagship programmes such as Sarva Sikha Abhiyan (SSA) has been implemented to boost quality of school education in India. The New Education Policy (NEP)2020 aims to transform India into a knowledge hub by instilling the students with the necessary skills and knowledge upgradation including life long skills of ICT. NEP 2020 with its focus on quality education will bring innovation and research as part of the education system rather than the present rote learning system.

Though there has been significant improvement in enrolment rates at primary level across the country, yet the quality aspect of educations remains a challenge. The learning outcomes expected from the education system in India does not match the required standards. The gap between the required and the actual learning outcomes of students is due to several factors like lack of adequate infrastructure, lack of trained teachers and other factors. A country like India with its young population will enjoy the benefits of young demographic profile only when improvement is made in education, healthcare and skill development.

In view of the above facts, the theme of this article is to understand the current status of the education system in India in alignment with the Sustainable development Goal 4. The paper is distributed into the following sections. The section 2 examines the current approaches adopted by India. The next section examines the trends in attainments levels at primary, secondary and higher education levels in India and the challenges encountered in achieving the objective of quality and accessibility in education. Section 4 explores the recent initiatives undertaken by the Government to implement the NEP 2020 followed by the concluding remarks.

Current approaches to education in India in alignment with Sustainable Development Goal 4: Quality Education

The Sustainable development Goals(SDG) were accepted by member nations during the UN sustainable development summit held in September 2015.Of all the SDG , the one pertaining to education is considered as most important for overall progress of a nation. As a signatory

to the summit, India has committed to provide inclusive and quality education for all children by the year 2030.

The focus of SDG 4 is on the following aspects of education.

- To ensure free education for all children in a nation.
- To ensure that students have access to quality early childhood development and pre-primary education. There is also emphasis on university education.
- To focus on increasing the number of students with relevant technical and vocational skills for employment and entrepreneurship.
- To ensure access to quality education for all including vocational and tertiary education. Gender disparities need to be eliminated in access to education.
- The focus should be on improving overall literacy and numeracy.
- To create an environment that promotes sustainable development through sustainable way of living, safe guarding human rights, promotion of peace and nonviolence and creating global citizens.

Focus of SDG Goal 4:

The Goal 4 is not based on mere number of school enrolment rates or syllabus completion. It pays more attention to early childhood development, outcomes of learning, gender equality and relevant skills for employment. According to SDG 4, inclusive and quality education is the only way forward for creating an environment for sustainable development. India right from independence has focused on inclusivity and quality in primary, secondary and higher education. The Ministry of Human resource development is responsible for implementing universal primary education and creation of world class higher educational institutions. As a landmark policy implementation, the Government has declared free and compulsory education to all children in the age group of 6 to 14 years as a Fundamental right of every child. Sarva shiksha Abhiyan has been implemented to ensure that there is 100% enrolment at the elementary level. Government has also invested in creating institutions like IITs and IIMs to provide world class higher education. While there has been substantial progress in enrolment across all levels of education, there is need to improve the quality aspect of education. Evidence shows that investments in quality related issues like availability of textbooks, teaching learning tools has positive impact on learning outcomes. Education

should be dynamic in all aspects in order to develop the necessary skills, knowledge, values and attitudes among the students.

Trends in attainment levels in India

The following tables gives a glimpse of the status of the attainment levels achieved in education field in India.

Table 1: Trends in Social Sector Expenditure (As percentage to GDP)

Items\Year	2014-15	2017-18	2019-20	2020-21(RE)	2021-22(BE)
Expenditure on Social Services	6.2	6.7	6.7	8.3	8.6
of which:					
Education	2.8	2.8	2.8	3.1	3.1
Health	1.2	1.4	1.3	1.8	2.1
Others	2.1	2.6	2.5	3.4	3.3

Source: GOI, Economic Survey 2021-22

The Table 1 reflects on the social sector spending in India. The social sector spending remained consistent at 6.7% till 2019-20 and then rose to 8.3% in 2020-21. The expenditure on education remained stagnant at 2.8% till 2019-20 and then rose marginally to 3.1 % in 2021-21. It is much below the levels of expenditure incurred by developed countries on education.

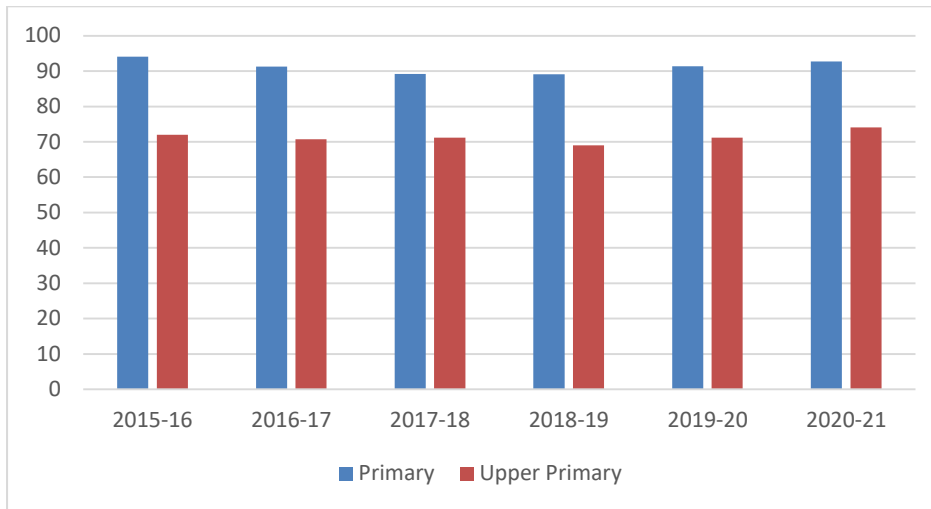
Table 2: Number of Schools, Colleges, and Universities in India

Particulars	2018-19	2019-20
Number of Primary & Upper Primary schools (in lakhs)	12.37	12.22
Number of Secondary and Sr. Secondary Schools (in lakhs)	2.76	2.85
Number of Colleges	39931	42343
Number of Universities	993	1043

Source: Ministry of Education

The Table 2 shows a reduction in the number of Primary and Upper Primary school from 2018-19 to 2019-20 and slight increase in the number of Secondary and Sr. Secondary schools during the same period. The number of Colleges have increased from 39931 to 42343 while the number of Universities increased from 993 to 1043 during 2018-19 to 2019-20.

Figure1: Enrolment Ratio in primary and Upper primary education level



Source : Department of School Education and Literacy, Ministry of Education

The enrolment ratio for primary education has remained around 91% in the last 2 years while net enrolment ratio has remained around 71% for upper primary level. However, there is a gap in the enrolment ratios between primary and upper primary level in India.

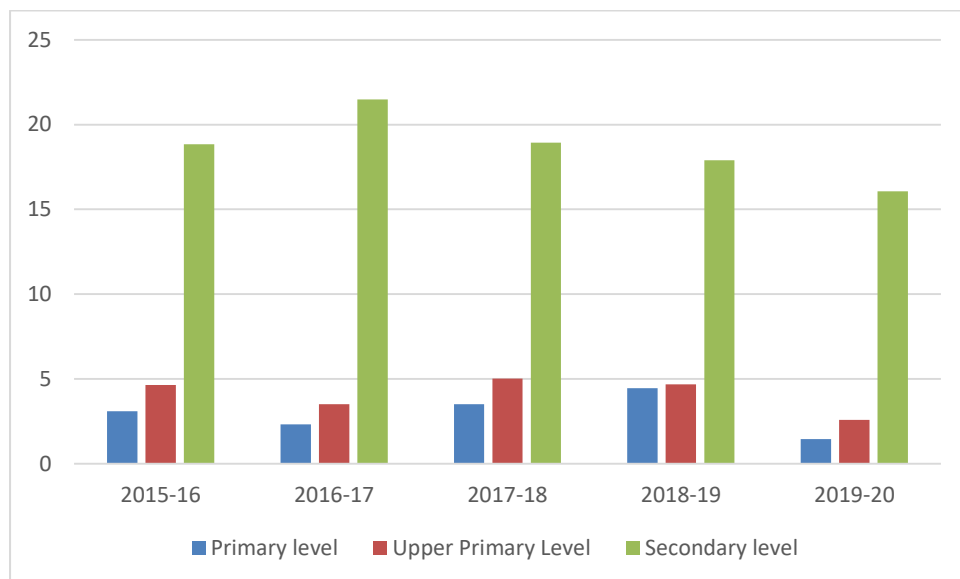
Table 3: Enrolment Ratio of Higher education sector

Year	Ratio(%)
2015-16	48.32
2016-17	43.77
2017-18	48.13
2018-19	50.14
2019-20	51.42
2020-21	53.8

Source : Department of School Education and Literacy, Ministry of Education

Table 3 shows the enrolment ratio for the higher education sector in India. The gross enrolment ratio for higher education has increased marginally from 48.32% to 53.8% from 2015-16 to 2020-21. There has to be effort made to increase the ratio in alignment with NEP 2020.

Figure 2: School Dropout Rates in India (in percent)



Source: Ministry of Education (UDISE+)

The figure 3 reflects on an important indicator of dropout rates at the school level. The drop out rates for primary level reduced from 3.1 % in 2015-16 to 1.45% in 2019-20. The drop out rates for upper primary level has reduced from 4.64 % to 2.58%. The drop out rates for secondary level is much higher than primary and upper primary level. It has reduced from 18.84% to 16.07%.

Major schemes for school education during 2021-22

NEP2020 aims to transform the education in India by introducing necessary reforms in school and higher education system. Some of the initiatives introduced by the government in the field of school education are studied here.

a) Samagra Shiksha Scheme: This scheme covers the school education in India. It looks into accessibility to education from pre-school to class XII. Its objective is to provide all school going students with entry to quality education by providing inclusive class environment and making students an active participants in the learning process.

b) NIPUN Bharat Mission: NIPUN Bharat aims at improving the Foundational Literacy and Numeracy among children upto age of 9.

c) Pradhan Mantri Poshan Shakti Nirman: The National scheme for Mid day meal has been renamed as PM Poshan. It covers students from just before class I till class VIII. It covers the educational requirement of students along with their nutritional requirement.

Recent schemes in Higher education

- a) National Apprenticeship Training Scheme (NATS): The objective of this scheme is to provide apprenticeship opportunity to students in the emerging and frontier technology like Artificial Technology and Drone technology. The scheme is also applicable to students from Arts, science and commerce field.
- b) Academic bank of credit: Under this scheme, credits earned by the students would be digitally stored so that they can be accounted for award of degrees offered by higher education institutions.
- f) E-PGPathshala: e-PGPathshala has been offered to give online post graduate courses in India. Several Universities in India are using the content on this platform as a flip classroom.
- g) Unnat Bharat Abhiyan: The purpose of this scheme is to expand the higher education to the rural areas. Under this scheme , reputed higher educational institutions will be encouraged to expand in rural areas.
- h) Scholarship for weaker sections: Government has introduced scholarship schemes to increase the access to higher education by weaker sections of society. Scholarship includes Central government scholarship for College and University students.

Conclusion

Education is a very important issue in a country like India. For realizing the goal of quality education enshrined in SDG, there is need for collaborative effort from all stakeholders. There is need for adequate infrastructure, safe environment that enables children to attend schools. Efforts have to be made to improve the enrolment ratio at the higher education level. Government has to take the help of civil societies to bring changes in the education sector. Effective implementation and continuous monitoring of the various policies related to education will lead to better outcomes. There is need to coordinate the Central and state government planning to ensure that the vision set by SDG 4 is realized.

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