

Education Reforms: Challenges and Strategies

Ms. Harneet Kaur

*Department of Commerce,
Post Graduate Government College for Girls,
Sector-11, Chandigarh*

Abstract

“Educational Reforms” is one of the key issues of our country which is world’s second largest in population. India has world’s one of the fastest growing economy but the challenges which we are facing because of the education system is inhabiting the growth of our country in various fields of innovation. For the development of our nation, and to convert the population from a challenge to an opportunity, there is a great need for necessary reforms in the education system.

Keywords: Education, Literacy, Obstacles and Achievement.

Introduction

Education starts from the very first day when a child is born. The child tries to convey it by crying to show any sort of discomfort. The process of learning continues throughout our life as we learn something new every moment. There are many challenges which we are facing in our education system. To overcome these obstacles and challenges and to make our education system better, good strategies and reforms are the need of the hour.

Indian Education System

Till 1976, states had the final say in the management of their respective education systems. However, in 1976, education was transferred to the concurrent list through the constitutional amendment to make the education system more effecting, meaningful and transparent. Education, in general and higher education in particular, plays a key role in realizing India’s extraordinary potential and aspirations for economic and technological development.

There are multiple government and professional bodies overseeing key activities in the education sector.

University Grant Commission (UGC)

UGC is responsible for developing and disseminating standards of teaching, examination and research in universities across India. It also disburses grants received from the central government.

Distance Education Council (DEC)

It is entrusted with overseeing the development of open education system in India. It designs fee structures and coordinates the development of instruction material.

Medical Council of India (MCI)

MCI maintains the standards in medical education for UG and PG medical programs run in India. It also grants registration numbers to those with recognized qualification.

Indian Nursing Council (INC)

INC determines standards for nursing education in India prescribing the uniform syllabus. It also registers Nurses with recognized qualification for practice in India.

All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE)

AICTE regulates the norms and standards in technical education in India with fields such as engineer, architecture, town planning, management, pharmacy falling under its purview.

National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE)

Established in 1995 under The National Council for Teacher Education Act, 1993, it coordinates the development of teacher education in India (for Elementary/ Secondary / Tertiary and Formal/Non Formal Education)

These professional bodies work on improving the education system of our country and bring different reforms in the system, time to time. Thus, broadly we classify the challenges into two categories, one at the school level and the other at the higher education level.

Challenges and Strategies

Demographic contour

According to the National Commission on Population, it is expected that the age profile of population of India will experience changes in the coming years. By 2016, approximately 50 percent of the total population will be in the age group of 15–25 years. It is projected that a vast population would enter the working age group in the next 15 years, leading to increase in productive activities and also savings rate as witnessed in Japan in the 1950s and China 1980s. In other words, there would be a tremendous rise in the number of employable work force in the job market which would demand commensurate investment in education. In the literature, Demographic

Dividend refers to population “lump” in the working age group of 15–60 which can be described as a major advantage for pushing the economic growth. It suggests that the major challenge before India is how this advantageous demographic profile can be harnessed to reflect in the macro-economic parameters of the country.

Expenditure & Education

In terms of expenditure incurred on education, particularly on higher education, during the year 2010–11, the government spent around Rs.15, 440 crore which is about 85 per cent of the revised budget estimates for the year. The recent 66th round of NSSO survey reveals that between 1999 and 2009, spending on education in general jumped by 378 per cent in rural areas and 345 percent in urban areas of the country. The survey further reveals that spending on children’s education underlines sharp increase – 63 per cent for rural and 73 per cent for urban families. However, if we measure the expenses on education as a percentage to GDP, India lags behind some developed/ developing nations (Table 1). We recognize that the gap in investments in education in India can perhaps be filled by private sector playing a crucial role.

Student - Teacher Ratio

Another challenge for improving the Indian education system is to improve the studentteacher ratio. In India, this ratio is very high as compared to certain comparable countries in the world. For example, while in developed countries this ratio stands at 11.4, in case of India, it is as high as 22.0. It is even low in CIS (10.9), Western Asia (15.3), and Latin America (16.6) (Annex 3). This brings the necessity to recruit quality teachers and strengthen the teachers required to handle classes. I also feel that like in developed countries where students are given part-time teaching assignments, we can also explore such possibilities in technical/higher education to handle lower level classes. It is also expected to help the students in meeting their education expenses partially.

Infrastructure facilities

One of the factors why the capacity utilization is low in upcoming/new institutions/colleges (both in private and public sectors) is their inability to provide necessary physical infrastructure to run the institutions. The infrastructure facilities desirable to rank the institutions of better quality include real estate, state of the art class rooms, library, hostels, furniture, sports facilities, transport, commercial buildings, etc. We need to ensure apolitical private sector participation in the establishment of colleges for providing quality physical infrastructure.

Language Barrier

A country like India which has so many different regional languages, educating children especially at the junior level becomes a challenge. English being the international language and estimated 80% of online content is in English, a large portion of the educational software produced in the world market is in English. For developing country like India where English language proficiency is not so high,

especially outside metropolitan areas, language becomes a serious barrier in maximizing the education benefits.

Public Private Partnership Model

The Government is making efforts to improve the education system in terms of various parameters like GER, quality, investments, infrastructure, etc. But we need to recognize the constraints for the Government to make a big turnaround with huge investments in education. I believe that private sector has started playing a distinctive role in improving the education system in India. In this context, it is useful to explore the possibility of public private partnership (PPP) model in education. This is not only going to reduce the burden of the Government in incurring high cost of providing basic infrastructure facilities but also lead to construction of state of the art buildings, labs, libraries, hostels etc. Besides, the collaborative efforts between universities/colleges and corporates would help in organizing joint research and development, students getting exposure to industrial activities in terms of internships, corporate training during vacations and issuing of certificates by corporates for attending internship/training etc. and, thus, facilitating in image building and branding of institutions and making the students more jobworthy.

Role of Financial Institute

The RBI is involved in formulating progressive and proactive policy guidelines for lending to education by the banking system. The RBI, in view of the importance of education and the need to bring more students under the category of “education loans”, has classified such loans and advances granted to individuals for educational purposes up to Rs. 10 lakh for studies in India and Rs. 20 lakh for studies abroad, under “priority sector”.

With a view to facilitate banks, the Indian Banks’ Association has brought out a model scheme for educational loan in the year 2001 which was again revised in January 2010 and got circulated to all member banks for implementation. This would facilitate economically weaker sections of the society to avail educational loans from scheduled banks with modified easier norms. In recent years, there has been a remarkable spurt in the disbursement of educational loans by commercial banks. The educational loans outstanding amounted to Rs.27,709 crore as at end March 2009 which increased to up to Rs.42,808 crore as at end-March 2011.

Table: Educational loan of scheduled commercial banks Particulars Mar-09 Mar-10 Mar-11

Particulars March 2009 March 2010 March 2011

Amounting Outstanding (Rs. in crore) 27709.50 36359.70 42808.10

No. of Accounts (in lakhs) 16.3 19.7 22.8

- We have nominated a nodal officer at the Central office of the RBI for the purpose of all educational loan issues/grievances.
- Apart from policy formulation, as an institution also, RBI undertakes activities to educate students relating to central banking, banking and financial system.

Illustratively, to educate young scholars, a scheme has been introduced in which every year RBI selects a good number of scholars from different region of the country. In addition, RBI has set up research and training institution for banking technology.

To make education affordable

Education should be made affordable so that it reaches all deserving students. Education should not come prohibitively expensive so that no deserving candidate is denied admission just for the fact that he or she does not possess the necessary financial resources.

Recommendations on Regulatory Reforms

Creating of an independent body for regulating higher education and simplification of rules

- The Government is in the process of creating a single independent body to regulate various aspects of higher education. The same should be done at the earliest. However, due care needs to be ensured that it get adequate independence and autonomy.
- Processes should be set out to ensure that the new regulator operates in a transparent manner. Promote institutional autonomy at Indian HEIs
- Current regulatory framework should be changed to provide sufficient internal autonomy to universities and higher education institutions.
- Procedures should be framed for appointments at key levels, which should happen in a transparent manner. Bring about greater transparency and disclosure in the system
- There exists limited transparency in the performance of higher education institutions.

Encourage entry of high-quality foreign universities

- The Government is in the process of allowing foreign universities into India. The proposed legislation in this regard should be enacted at the earliest.

Vocational Education & Training

In India, only 7% of the country's labour force works in the organised sector and hence

Vocational Education and Training (VET) is an important element of the nation's education initiative. There is an urgent need to redefine the critical elements of imparting vocational education to make them flexible, contemporary, relevant, inclusive and creative. Also the existing Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs) and Industrial Training Centres (ITCs) are widely seen facing problems, such as poor quality trainers, lack of flexibility and outdated infrastructure. The Government needs to take rapid steps, to strengthen the structure of these institutes.

Women's Education

Women have a much lower literacy rate than men. Far fewer girls are enrolled in the

schools, and many of them drop out. According to a 1998 report by U.S. Department of Commerce, the chief barrier to female education in India are inadequate school facilities (such as sanitary facilities), shortage of female teachers and gender bias in curriculum (majority of the female characters being depicted as weak and helpless). A survey that was conducted in India showed results which support the fact that infant mortality rate was inversely related to female literacy rate and educational level. The survey also suggests a correlation between education and economic growth

Conclusion

For a country like India, which is seventh largest in the world in terms of size and the second most populated country on this planet, education for the masses is a massive task. A healthy mind comes in a healthy body. Government should prioritize their strategies and should make sure that nobody should be deprived of the basic needs like food & shelter. Educational reform is a cultural, political, financial & administrative challenge. Together, we all should try to play a vital role in improving the education system so that every child gets world class education at an affordable cost and should be able success in every endeavour of his or her life.

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