

Private Schooling, English and New Education Policy

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ABSTRACT: There is a fervent hope that the educational policy on the anvil would address the problem of quality deficit in our primary education sector. The country is, however, engaged in a bitter debate as to whether to allow the market mechanism and privatization to rule the roost or make government schools more effective. The RTE Act, 2002 has ensured significant improvement in the Gross Enrolment Ratio which has benefitted even children Below Poverty Line. However the drop out percentage remains at an alarming level and there is a perception that private schooling would offer better employment opportunity in view their inherent strength in infrastructure, quality of teachers and subjects like English. The paper brings out the expenditure trend and the allocational inadequacy in the education sector and makes a comparison of the quality of public and private schooling in subjects like English. It outlines the genesis of the downward trend in our employability potential in high skill jobs. The Make-In-India campaign to be potent, has to improve the Total Factor Productivity (TFP) of the students as has been the case in US, Europe and Emerging Market Economies (EMEs) and calls for abdication of the present ideological slugfest.

KEYWORDS: EME, BPL, RTE, Make-in-India, GER, TFP

I. INTRODUCTION

There is a distinct buzz about PM Modi's new campaign for **Make-in-India** with the objective to increase our share of manufacturing significantly from the current level of 15% of GDP to 25%. There is also increasing realization that the quality of education would be the key for the enormous opportunity for high skill jobs both within the country and globally. The service sector has become the sunshine sector with information technology being at the vanguard of our thriving export. The promise of the HRD minister to bring in a new educational policy this year after a gap of nearly three decades gives an opportunity to look at our primary education policy and specifically English as a subject. India is having a head start over China because of our quality of English in the IT sector. However recent years have witnessed severe dent in the quality of our government school education.

This paper attempt to examine

- (a) The education policy, expenditure trends, literacy & primary education
- (b) The qualitative difference between public and private schooling and
- (c) The way forward in terms of policy options to bring in better quality content to our primary education in order to harness the opportunities that globalization offers.

THE EDUCATION POLICY, EXPENDITURE TRENDS, LITERACY & PRIMARY EDUCATION

Before independence the literacy of India was at a very low ebb. The following table brings out the allocation, literacy percentage and share of primary education in it since the beginning of the first plan.

Table-1- Expenditure Trends, Literacy and Share of Primary Education

Year	Expenditure (Crore)	Literacy %	Share of Primary Education
1950-1951	11.44	16.6	56
1960-1961	34.44	24	35
1973-1974	125.0	30	50
2014-2015	82771	67	66

Source: Narullah & Naik & Budget Documents

It would be seen from the above that there has been a significant increase in literacy percentage compared to the first five year plan. Further the share of primary education has considerably increased due to the introduction RTE Act 2002. The RTE Act, 2002 has been watershed legislation in India as it has ensured near universal enrolment even in rural areas. The justice Bhagawati has been the strongest supporter of Right To Education. In the landmark judgment (Francis Coralie Mulin Vs. Administrator, Union Territory of Delhi (1981)) wherein he gave an expanded meaning to right to life (Article 21) by including Right To Education.

In (JP Unnikrishnan Vs. State of Andhra Pradesh JT 1993(1) SC 474) the court clearly averred “Education up to the age of 14 years to be fundamental right...It would be therefore incumbent upon the State to provide facilities and opportunity as enjoined under Article 39(e) and (f) of the Constitution and to prevent exploitation of their childhood due to indigence and vagary”. Therefore the landmark RTE Act, 2002, though late in coming, has helped in massive enrolment of children for basic education as would be evident from the following tables.

Table-2 brings out the improvement in the literacy percentage for rural-urban, SC and ST.

Table-2 : Literacy Rates: Trends

Literacy	1981	1991	2001	2011
All India (Rural)	36.01	44.69	58.74	68.91
All India (Urban)	67.23	73.08	79.92	84.98
Schedule Caste	21.38	37.41	54.69	56.49
Schedule Tribe	16.35	29.60	47.10	49.52

Source: India Public Policy Report 2014

It would be seen from the above that there has been significant improvement in the literacy rate during the last decade. However the SC, ST communities are still lagging behind compare to other communities. While universal enrolment has received wide encomiums, inadequate allocation to the education sector in general and to primary education in particular has been a disconcerting feature as would be evident from the following table.

Table-3 : Allocation to School Education (Rs. Crore)

Major Programmes	2012-2013	2013-2014 (BE)	2013-2014 (RE)	% Change of RE (13-14) over (12-13)	2014-2015 (BE)	% Change over BE (13-14)
Total	45631	52701	50136	+9.8%	55115	+4.6%
(a) Elementary Education	35929	37150	35668	-0.8%	42696	+15%
1. Sarva Sikshya Abhiyan (SSA)	9842	8079	8079	-18%	9294	+14.9%
2. National Programme for Mid day meals in Schools	4135	3918	3886	-6%	4418	+13%
(b) Secondary Education	9241	10027	9335	+1%	6160	-39%

Source: India Budget: Demand No-59, 14-15, MHRD

It would be seen from the above that (a) overall increase in allocation to primary education and secondary education is only 5% (b) there is a drastic reduction of (39%) in allocation for secondary education (c) endemic short fall in actual spending (5%) during 2013-14 compared to budget estimates. However the various studies on achievement of primary schools by India Human Development Survey, 2004-05, ASER Survey, 2011, PROBE Revisited, 2006, CORD-NEG Village studies, 2010-11, WIPRO-EI Quality Education Study 2011 reveal the following disquieting picture. ASER Survey, 2014, PROBE Revisited, 2006, CORD-NEG Village studies, 2010-11, WIPRO-EI Quality Education Study 2011 bring out the following concern areas in primary education namely, only half of all children aged 8-11 years enrolled in a government school are able to read a simple paragraph with three sentences. Less than half (43 %) of these children are able to subtract a two-digit number from another two-digit number. In classes 5 to 8 only half of the children can use a calendar. Less than half (45%) are able to divide 20 by 5. One third are unable to add with carry over. **Most distressingly, reading and maths skills of class 4 pupils even in India’s top schools are below the international average.**

THE QUALITATIVE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SCHOOLING :The growing popularity of private schools, post RTE Act, has led to concerns regarding quality of public schooling and possibility of further economic and social stratification. The mandate to reserve upto 25% of the seats in private schools for children with disadvantaged background is testimony to such an impression. In this backdrop it would be useful to look at various studies conducted to **make an assessment of the quality of private schooling vs. public schooling and to what extent to educational vouchers to poor family would improve their choice of schooling for their children.** : PRATHAN (2006) brought out that in public schools 6.6% children were able to read level-I text in the first grade while only 8.3% was from second grade students who could read upto level-2 text. Disconcertingly enough only 53% of student’s upto 5 level grade would read level-1 text.

Teacher absenteeism was observed in most public schools. Muralidharan & Kremer (2006) brought out that 28% of rural children opted for private school which has characterized by higher attendance, less absenteeism of teachers. Prof. DD Karopady in his perceptive article (2014) has brought out the findings of Andhra Pradesh school choice research where a sample of 10000 students was taken to study (a) how private school children perform compare to public schools and (b) what is the impact on learning outcomes of students when they move from government to private schools in different subjects. Specifically in the context of English as a subject the findings are as under

Table-4 : Year-end Learning Achievement Test Results -(English, mean %)

	English		
	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
Groups 1+2 (children in government schools)	43.8	12.6	18.5
Group 3 (children who shifted to private schools)	47.3***	13.5	19.3
Group 4 (children in private schools to begin with)	67.8***	25.0***	27.8***

Source- Significance levels: ** 5%, *** 1%.

Source- Significance of Group 4 is with respect to other two groups while significance of Group 3 is with respect to Groups 1+2

It would be seen from the above that there is significantly improvement in English when student shift to private school, however the marked improvement tapers of in the fourth and fifth year. It is possible that while the basic quality of English teaching in private school is better than that of the public school at the higher level the lack of quality of teachers is an area of concern. English education was brought in by Lord Macaulay during the British rule through his famous Minute on Indian Education of February 1835. Macaulay called for an educational system to create a class of anglicized Indians who would serve as cultural intermediaries between the British and the Indians, and brought to an end a lively debate on the appropriate language for education and administration. This was the genesis of many Indians joining the British administration in the clerical cadre. However the benefit of higher civil service was available only to the rich and elite of the society who could afford foreign education.

English retained its primacy till 1955 as a subject. However after the reorganization of states in 1956 on linguistic lines, regional language and chauvinism associated with it reared its head in the Indian society. The universities were set up in the metropolitan cities like Calcutta, Madras and Mumbai in 1856. These cities were the prime beneficiaries of English education and employment of coveted position under the British rule. Post independence English suffered as a subject because of the importance attached to regional language. Even subjects like science and maths were taught in the vernacular language in the public schools. In the aftermath of liberalization there has been a tendency to dilute the quality of English in government schools compared to private school which has offered an unfair advantage to students passing out of English speaking schools into coveted position of higher echelons of employment. The recent agitation regarding inclusion of English in the IAS examination is a testimony to the dichotomy which exists between government and private schools. Ironically, the creative aspect of English also has taken a huge beating with **Business English** i.e. how to use English for commercial correspondence gaining ascendancy in a mercantile ethos.

II. CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Primary education is a vital cog in the economic advancement of a nation and provides the wherewithal for high skill jobs. English education has become an inescapable ingredient to succeed in a globalized environment. USA, Europe and the Emerging Market Economies have networked very closely because of the seamless communication which English language provides. India can ill afford the existing quality dichotomy between private and public schooling in matters of infrastructure and quality of teaching. Various studies have clearly revealed that there is a constant craving amongst the population in the disadvantaged section to move up the social ladder by providing that children the benefit of private schooling and better English education. It has the twin advantage of social inclusion and higher carrier aggrandizement. **The ideological stand of large scale privatization through educational voucher is certainly not the way forward. The architecture of government schooling has to be addressed with handsome allocation towards basic infrastructure, quality teachers with reasonable pay packages instead of the present practice to engage them on poorly paid contractual basis.** The private schools also cannot be allowed to exploit the system on the pretext of better infrastructure and delivery mechanism.

The teachers need to be exposed to periodic training and must be made accountable for ramping up the quality of the students. **Adam Smith**, the high priest of market economics, had observed that “Private pursuit of self interest would lead as if by an invisible hand to the well being of all”. In the aftermath of the global financial crisis 2007 **Prof. Joseph Stiglitz, the nobel laureate, as a riposte had observed “What is germane to the debate is not the invisible hand of the market but the visible compassionate hand of the government” which ensures proper synergy between the public and private sector entities in their pursuit towards quality primary education.** The Make in India campaign to, be potent, has to improve the Total Factor Productivity of the students must emulate the experience of countries like US, Europe and Emerging Market Economies (EMEs) in their thrust towards quality education. **The new education policy on the anvil would hopefully transcend the present ideological bickering.**

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