Challenges of Education in Bihar

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Abstract—*Education is considered globally as one of the important instruments for social change. It attaches more significance for the developing nations. Moreover, child centric quality education has still been concerns of intellectuals, policy makers and social activists across the world in general and backward regions like India in particular. This paper is an attempt to underline the issues related to quality education in Bihar, one of the most backward states of India. This exercise is intended to deal with status of free and compulsory quality education, its underlying challenges, gaps in terms of hard and soft infrastructure and desired imperatives.*

INTRODUCTION

It has been realized globally that literacy is one of the important instruments for social change. Literacy in general parlance is being considered as one of the empowering tools for knowing the world through reading, writing and comprehension. In order to attach importance to literacy, the United Nation Education, Social and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), resolved on November 17, 1965 to mark September 8 as International Literacy Day to underline the significance of literacy. Later in Thailand Conference on Education for All (EFA) in 1990, global community resolved for meeting basic learning need beyond literacy (UNESCO, 1990). Gradually, literacy assumed multi-dimensions dealing with problems of lives and society. Global Monitoring Report 2006 focused on Literacy for Life (UNESCO, 2006).

Quality of education has been the concerns of intellectuals, policy makers and social activists across the world. The question arises as to what is quality and what we want to achieve through quality education. Is it an instrument for providing skills, employment and income for eradication of poverty through functional literacy? Is it an instrument of creating a human being as a subject or as an object? Is it an instrument for creating an egalitarian society? There are certain presumptions, i.e., education is one of the most powerful instruments for development and poverty eradication and school education is the

foundation of a society. Literacy and education are generally not the same–dimensions of functional and lively education through certification. Family is the best school for social lives, as Aristotle said. Education is for emancipation and not merely sets of skills for livelihoods; it is an instrument of social change. Many experiments with education have been done.

FREE AND COMPULSORY EDUCATION

In the modern world the debate on free and compulsory elementary education of the children at their school going ages (below 14 years of age) can be traced back about one and a half century of the history of human development. The issue was first raised in Great Britain in the year 1870 with 'Foster Education Act' by which the state assumed responsibility for elementary education and in 1880 the school attendance up to the age of ten was made compulsory. Not until 1918 was secondary education clearly defined as state's responsibility. Out of about 198 countries in the world about 100 countries have democratic form of government. With the Right to Education Act coming into force, India has also joined the league of over 130 countries which have legal guarantees to provide free and compulsory education to children.

It was also cited in a 2005 World Bank survey, which stated that only 13 countries impart primary education totally free of cost. In majority of countries, some direct costs have been reported, though no tuition fees are charged. "In reality, free primary schooling still remains the exception rather than the rule," says the report. Chile tops the list of countries in providing free education for a period of 15 years to a child. It gives free and compulsory education to children in the age group of six to 21 years. The Latin American country, where elementary education was among the worst two decades ago, had implemented a special education program in 1990, which recorded a significant improvement among primary and upper primary students. There are seven countries such as Germany, Belgium, Italy and Norway that have provisions of free and compulsory education to children covering their entire schooling period. According to the UNESCO's 'Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2010', about 135 countries have constitutional provisions for free and non-discriminatory education for all.

Table 1: Intra-district Literacy Rates in Bihar

Literacy Level (%)		
50–60	**60–70**	**70–80**
East & West Champaran	Madhubani, Saran, Muzaffarpur	Siwan, Munger
Sheohar, Supaul,Araria	Gopalganj, Vaishali, Samastipur,	Patna, Bhojpur
Sitamarhi, Purnia, Kishanganj	Begusarai, Khagaria, Banka, Arwal	Buxur, Kaimur
Katihar, Saharsa, Madhepura,	Bhagalpur, Lakhisarai, Nalanda	Rohtas, and
and Darbhanga.	Sheikhpura, Gaya, Nawada	Aurangabad.
	Jamui, and Jehanabad	

Source: Census of India 2011

Table 2: Intra-district Male Literacy Rates in Bihar

Literacy Level (%)		
60–70	**70–80**	**80–90**
East & West Champaran	Madhubani, Supaul, Saran,	Siwan, Munger
Sheohar, Khagaria, Araria	Vaishali, Samastipur, Gaya	Patna, Bhojpur,
Sitamarhi,Purnia, Kishanganj	Begusarai, Bhagalpur, Jamui	Buxur, Kaimur,
Katihar, Saharsa,Madhepura	Lakhisarai, Nalanda, Nawada	Rohtas, Arwal
Darbhanga and Banka	Muzaffarpur, Sheikhpura,	and Aurangabad
	Gopalganj, and Jehanabad	

Source: Census of India 2011

There are more than 29 districts of Bihar, where male literacy rates are lower than national male literacy rates (Table 2). More than 13 districts are even below general national literacy level and only nine districts are either closer or above national average. Intra-district distribution deficit of female literacy is much alarming. Almost all districts are below national average rate of literacy (Table 3).

Table 3: Intra-district Male Literacy Rates in Bihar

Female Literacy Level (%)		
40–50	**50–60**	**60–70**
East & West Champaran	Jehanabad, Kaimur, Arwal	Siwan, Munger
Sheohar, Madhubani, Araria	Muzaffarpur, Gopalganj, Saran	Patna, Bhojpur
Sitamarhi, Kishanganj, Supaul	Vaishali, Samastipur, Buxur	Rohtas, and
Katihar, Saharsa, Purnia	Begusarai, Bhagalpur, Gaya	Aurangabad.
Madhepura, Banka, Jamui,	Lakhisarai, Sheikhpura, Nalanda	
and Darbhanga	Nawada, and Khagaria.	

Source: Census of India 2011

Quality Gaps

In order to ensure quality education, provisions were made under Right to Education (RTE), which requires compliance of full-time schools teaching, minimum number of hours each year, infrastructural facilities and learning materials in school, school development plan and school management committee (SMC), trained and full time teachers, child centric education (CCE) that implies individual teaching customized to a child's needs and multi level learning, no corporal punishment or no detention, no failure implying a stress free environment of learning, remedial teaching to take care of weaker students or latecomers to the educational stream, curriculum to be determined by academic authority, etc. Moreover, quality environment in schools has many aspects to be addressed *inter alia* availability of quality teachers, maintaining quality time on tasks, quality of lesson planning and teaching learning methods (TLM), availability of class rooms, attractive learning environment, extra curriculum activities for personality development, teacher parents interactions, etc. Let us take a few of the indicators mentioned above to understand the quality gaps in school education.

Teachers Gaps

There was indirect moratorium on appointment in every sector during 1990s in the name of reforms. Thereafter, fluid recruitment procedures in the name of decentralization were adopted to fill up the gaps of teachers through contractual arrangements at very low remuneration, even below the

minimum wage for unskilled labour. Later corrective initiatives, including STET based recruitment procedures were adopted and situation was marginally improved. But, many positions are still vacant and recruitment is yet to be done.

Dropout

Despite many initiatives taken up by the government of Bihar to address the dropouts such as bicycle, dress and stipend for students, creating infrastructure, i.e., building, toilets, and drinking water facilities, etc., dropout still persists (GoB, 2016). However, dropout rates at different levels of schooling have declined over time significantly.

Performance Gaps

Teachers' appointment and their training alone do not ensure quality environment. A study of 529 class observation (186 standard II, 253 standard IV and 90 of standard VI to observe classroom transactions) for which 15,069 students and 326 teachers were also covered, this study suggests that teachers' presence were 67 per cent after half an hour of opening of school and 65 per cent before half an hour of closure. This study also suggests that quality of time spent in the classroom is another concern. Only 14 per cent time spent was student centric on feedback, 60.9 per cent teacher centric, 16.9 per cent on instruction and remaining on management and off class activities.

Findings of a study based on schools, teachers, students, classrooms, and community observation, suggest that improvement in transactions in terms of teaching skills, dealing with students, teaching learning methods (TLM), child centered approach, hand writing, punctuality of time, storytelling, extra curricular activities such as learning by playing, singing, parent teachers meeting, home visit, community interaction, education tour, etc., have made significant improvements in school environment. However, elderly teachers generally did not change much. Lack of trained teachers in the schools has been still a serious problem. Teachers training through distance mode have also not been much effective. Moreover, teachers' training through distance mode might have served the purpose to give affidavit before the court of law but it has a little impact on quality delivery.

Infrastructural Gaps

In order to facilitate quality education, availability of proper infrastructure, such as, classrooms, furniture, library, computer and science laboratory, drinking water, toilets, etc., are necessary conditions. Because of inadequate classroom and teachers multi grade classes prevails. Classes were also conducted on verandah and open space for want of classrooms. In some cases, classrooms

were converted into storerooms for MDM or TLM. ASER report suggests that RTE-CTR improved from 48.2 in 2010 to 60.3 in 2014.

Timely quality printing and availability of text books with quality paper is a serious concern. If library would have been maintained, gaps in timely availability of text books would have been managed to some extent. ASER report suggests improvement in availability of library books from 52.9 in 2010 to 76.3 in 2014. However, it is yet to reach to 23.7 per cent schools. Another study suggests that library facility varied from 23 per cent to 75 per cent in Secondary School and Science Laboratory Evaluation of Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan reveals that 40 to 80 per cent schools did not have science laboratory. Computer was available in 6.9 per cent schools in 2010, which was declined to 5.7 per cent (ASER, 2014).

ASER Report 2016 also suggests that the drinking water was available to 78.7 schools in 2010, which further improved to 89.5 per cent in 2016. Usable toilet facility has improved from 33.6 per cent to 70.6 per cent in corresponding period. However, usable toilets for girls have improved slowly from 18.1% to 60.8%. In case of Secondary School, 65 per cent have toilet facility and 60 per cent schools have separate toilet facility for girls.

Besides the abovementioned important gaps, few other gaps were found which were equally grey areas in maintaining quality environment. For example, norms of school uniforms were also not being followed in case of 20 per cent schools. Parents were generally concerned for non-teaching matters like MDM, Scholarship, Bicycle, uniforms, etc. MDM served on the day of visit was in 57.2 per cent schools in 2010, which was improved to 69.2 per cent.

CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY IMPERATIVES

Above analysis brings fact home that there are apparent indications of improvements in hard and soft infrastructures of schools, enrollments, retention, class transactions, etc., but still there is a huge gap and long way to go to achieve goal of universal quality education system in Bihar. In view of the above analysis regarding teachers' availability, ability, performance, training, availability of text books, library, science and computer laboratory, with quality concerns of hard and soft infrastructure ambience and students skills to read and write and exposure to language and mathematics, Government Schools need to be prioritized in terms of providing quality teachers, their regular face to face training, off and on campus activities, innovative teaching learning environment, etc.

Quantitative and qualitative gaps of hard and soft infrastructure need to be addressed on priority basis along with equity and transparency. Science and Computer Laboratory and Library need proper attention. Administrative reorientation is necessary. Social awareness and vigilance may be helpful. In order to ensure equity, state has to play proactive role, as privatization is not a proper and sustainable solution in a poor state like Bihar, where intraregional variation in income is enormous.

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