

# Rural Education: Emerging Issues, Challenges and Future Perspectives

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## Abstract

A plethora of government initiatives to provide access to primary education may be underway, but issues of equity, quality and access remain areas of concern – particularly in rural schools. The last two decades have seen the emergence of a number of education-specific support institutions, such as the District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) and Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) State Institutes of Educational Management and Training (SIEMAT), District Institutes of Education and Training (DIET), Block Resource Centres (BRC), Cluster Resource Centers (CRC), and, in rural areas, Village Education Committees (VEC). A highly qualified, experienced, and competent teacher could probably be an effective educator with fewer resources than an untrained, poorly educated, and unexperienced teacher (DFID, 2001).

### Major Problems Faced by Rural Education

1. Teacher Compensation
2. School Employees
3. School Buildings
4. Technology
5. Funding

### Measures to Overcome Challenges

1. Solving the problem of Funding and Teacher Compensation
2. Solving the problem of school buildings
3. Promoting Technology
4. Solving the problems of Funding
5. Community participation
6. Innovative practices

The GoI, MHRD, are currently making use of unit costs for each level of education to prepare strategies and allocations for the Eleventh Five Year Plan. The focus of planning for the elementary education sector is on closing the gaps of the SSA norms.

## Introduction

A plethora of government initiatives to provide access to primary education may be underway, but issues of equity, quality and access remain areas of concern – particularly in rural schools. Children in rural areas continue to be deprived of equality education owing to factors like lack of competent and committed teachers, lack of textbooks or teaching-learning materials, and so on. In view of such concerns, the recently constituted Rural Education Cell, department of educational surveys and data processing, NCERT, organized a national seminar on 'school education in rural India' at its Delhi headquarters. The seminar provided a platform to policy analysts, administrators, researchers and practitioners to analyse the current scenario in rural education identify problems and come up with recommendations to improve the situation.

### Brief Overview of the Education System in India

Under the Constitution of India, education is a concurrent subject, with a sharing of responsibilities (including legislation) between the Centre (Ministry of Human Resource Development) and States (Departments of Education), Management of schooling has been traditionally controlled by the mainstream state and district administrations. The last two decades have seen the emergence of a number of education-specific support institutions, such as the District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) and Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) State Implementation Societies, State Councils of Educational Research and Training (SCERT), State Institutes of Educational Management and Training (SIEMAT), District Institutes of Education and Training (DIET), Block Resource Centres (BRC), Cluster Resource Centres (CRC), and, in rural areas, Village Education Committees (VEC).

**Infrastructure Needs for Providing Effective Rural Education**

Education infrastructure broadly includes teachers, teachers' guides to the curriculum and syllabus, non-consumable learning materials (such as curriculum materials for students, textbooks, visual aids, and equipment), consumable learning materials (such as chalk, paper, pencils, exercise books), school buildings, including water facilities, latrines and school furniture.

A highly qualified, experienced, and competent teacher could probably be an effective educator with fewer resources than an untrained, poorly educated, and unexperienced teacher (DFID, 2001). To be effective, teachers must be competent and knowledgeable about the subjects that they teach. But they, be must also love learning and be able to pass on skills and knowledge to their students.

Furniture, in India, is not provided to primary schools as a matter of policy and it seems to have wide acceptance among teachers, students, and parents. However, in many developing countries furniture is used and is often badly designed, badly made and unmaintained, and of the wrong size. Good furniture will assist the learning process but poor furniture and especially, the wrong size furniture can actually be a barrier to learning.

**Comparing the Roles of the Public and Private Sectors in Rural Education**

The size of the private sector is greatly underestimated in official data owing to the fact that DISE and other sources of school-based data and reporting include only the recognized schools. Household survey data give us a somewhat more accurate picture of the private sector's contribution, and we have seen how the survey of Out-of-School Children last year (2005) estimates that the private sector's (recognized) share of elementary education enrolments was over 15 per cent. While this study does not break the private schooling data down into rural and urban shares, from other sources we can assert that in rural areas at least 90 per cent of the elementary schooling takes place in government or government-aided institutions. Although this is the general picture there are some regional variations (for instance, it appears that there are no private elementary schools in Gujarat but in Uttar Pradesh and Tamil Nadu approximately 30 per cent of the elementary schools are private).

A large proportion of secondary schools in countryside are financed from the public treasury, both federal and state. It is also evident that a significant proportion of rural students, 304. India Infrastructure Report 2007 particularly, post-elementary learners are seeking the services of the private sector. At the post elementary levels of education there is a lot of untapped potential within the private sector. The recognition of the potential of the private sector combined with a growing demand for post-elementary education is leading policy makers to ask questions about the feasibility of increasing the volume and diversity of public-private-partnerships as a cost effective way of meeting this demand. Public Private Partnerships (PPP) are collaborative efforts between

private and public sectors, with clearly identified partnership structures, shared objectives, and specified performance indicators for delivery of a set of education services in a stipulated time period. The private education sector consists of for-profit and not-for-profit education institutions. The private partners involved in a PPP initiative may include these for-profit and not-for-profit institutions as well as corporate institutions, PRIs, NGOs, community-based organizations and even individuals who are interested in contributing to the creation and operationalization of education services in an area.

**Issues Affecting the Costs and Financing of Rural Education Infrastructure**

Let us start this discussion of the costs and financing of rural education infrastructure by reminding ourselves of the enrolments at each level of education in the rural areas. As discussed already, these statistics provide only a partial picture. Even setting aside questions about the accuracy of these figures, they do not, for instance, tell us how many students actually attend classes each day and give no indication of educational outcome. Tomasevski (2003) makes clear, 'the right to education operates as a multiplier'. It enhances all other human rights when guaranteed and forcecloses the enjoyment of most, if not all, when denied. Exposing abuse of power, manifested in denials or abuses of education, is the first necessary step towards opposing it. It is the essence of human rights'. While it is feasible for the government to meet the costs of elementary education for all, especially within the expanded resource envelope for education of 6 per cent of GDP, does the country have the economic and human capacities to even contemplate approaching enrolling 100 per cent of all children in secondary schooling as well? To say nothing of the costs of enrolling up to 50 per cent of young people in higher education, public expenditure on education in India is currently 3.99 per cent of GDP (against the often stated goal of 6 per cent of GDP) and public expenditure as a percentage of the total of the government budget is 14 per cent (Paul et al. 2006). Comparisons with public expenditures on education in selected developing countries show that India's expenditure on education is actually relatively higher than several countries in the region that have better enrolments at all levels.

**Challenges for Rural Education**

1. **Teacher Compensation:** Teachers in rural schools and small town schools have smaller incomes. They are less likely to receive health insurance. Full-time teachers in rural schools receive an average annual salary \$33,298, less than their counterparts in central city schools (\$37,173) and in urban fringe schools (\$40,842). (Must be indicate in the form of Rupees)
2. **School Employees:** Teachers of rural schools and small town schools spend more time being with students at schools and outside school hours. They have fewer students in departments and in self-contained classroom. On average, rural school teachers are required to be at school

## Anthology : The Research

slightly more hours (32.4) per week than their peers in central city schools (31.7) and in urban fringe schools (31.6).

3. **School Buildings:** Three out of 10 rural and small town schools have inadequate buildings. One in two schools have at least one inadequate building feature. Approximately one-half have unsatisfactory environmental conditions. About 4.6 million students are attending schools in inadequate buildings. Thirty per cent of schools in rural areas report at least one inadequate building, compared with 38 per cent of central city schools and 29 per cent of urban fringe schools.
4. **Technology:** Rural and small town schools report lower rates of Internet access and of using telecommunications to access information, keep records, and communicate with parents. Rural schools (71%) reported lower rates of using advanced telecommunications (including but not limited to the Internet) to access information than urban fringe schools (81%). Seventy-two percent of city schools reported using advanced telecommunications to access information.

**Funding:** The amount of total public school funding was approximately \$232.6 billion of the approximately \$22 billion in school funds from federal, 45.8 percent went to schools in central cities, 30.8 percent to urban fringe schools, and 23.4 percent to rural and small town schools.

### Measures to Overcome Challenges

1. **Solving the problem of Funding and Teacher Compensation:** Every community should be allowed to vote to tax itself to provide programs beyond a state-defined "adequate" education. One percent of the state's education budget should be earmarked for innovation and performance incentives. One percent of the state's education budget (and an additional 2 percent of local education dollars) should be targeted for ongoing training and professional development.
2. **Solving the problem of School Buildings:** Provide sufficient funds to ensure school facilities are maintained and in "compliance with all local, state and federal mandates. Provide funding to meet the \$17 billion estimated shortfall in school construction and renovation.
3. **Promoting Technology:** Private endowments from private and public businesses. Creative fund raising by the school district.
4. **Solving the Problems of Funding:** Centralize school finance so that the state, rather than local districts, has the primary responsibility for funding schools. Base school funding on a explicit assessment of the actual costs of educating a child. If the base cost of an adequate education grows with inflation, the combination of state and local revenues for

education should be permitted to increase proportionately and in a manner that does not impact any one class of property tax disproportionately.

5. **Community participation:** Recognizing community participation as one of the effective strategies to improve access and quality in education, Kashyapi Awasthi, lecturer from M S University of Baroda, Gujarat, cites an example: "A rural school of Surat owns a LCD projector through community funding and children of 9-10 years of age can use it effectively for teaching-learning process." Similarly, she adds, "There is a government school in Gujarat with 70 herbal plants that involves students in activity-based learning like planting seeds, encouraging concept learning like the germination process, and so on. It turned out to be such a successful venture that four private schools in the vicinity had to close down, with students from the private schools moving to the government school." It is the devotion of individuals, innovative practices employed, the joint efforts of the school and community that works wonders, she added.
6. **Innovative practices:** Participatory videos can best be used to empower underprivileged students from rural areas, feels Vedavati Ravindra Jogi, an educational professional from Pune. Breaking away from producing educational videos for children, she believes that innovation and creativity of children should instead be tapped to enable maximum learning. Thus, she conducted a study on class VIII and IX students where students were imparted lessons in script writing, video-shooting and editing, using various formats. Today, her students are creative individuals producing video clips on concepts like force, pressure, covalent bonds, and so on.

### Rishi Valley Rural Education Project

More than twenty years ago this unit was set up to provide free basic education, nutrition and health care for children from two or three local villages. Over the past eight years, under the guidance of two dynamic young co-directors, the Rural Education Center has been reaching out to a wider base of disadvantaged children: at first by establishing a network of "Satellite Schools" in villages scattered throughout the surrounding countryside, and then by evolving a comprehensive education program based on its experience within those schools. More recently a vocational training facility has been set up where young adults can acquire locally employable skills in typing, carpentry and tailoring. This facility was sponsored by a capital grant from ICICI (Industrial Credit and Investment Corporation of India).

### Conclusion

Successful school finance reform must target efficiency and productivity in the current education system if Ohioans want higher quality

public education that is both thorough and efficient. Ohio citizens are going to have to educate themselves and take a more active role in political issues that affect school funding reform. The Gol, MHRD, are currently making use of unit costs for each level of education to prepare strategies and allocations for the Eleventh Five Year Plan. The focus of planning for the elementary education sector is on closing the gaps of the SSA norms. On the basis of these calculations, the government estimates that at the same level of continuing expenditures of state governments on elementary education (remember that the state governments meet 90 per cent of the recurrent costs of elementary education) the investments required under SSA to close the gaps in provision amount to Rs. 98,000 crore for the ten years from 2000 to 2010. It is anticipated that the majority of these resources will be made available through the auspices of the education cess referred to earlier that has been successfully introduced with Rs. 63,000 crore coming from the Gol and Rs. 35,000 crore devolving on the state governments. The last 10 per cent or so of the financing may be found from external sources- the government's development partners, the UK's Department for International Development (DFID), the European Commission (EC) and the World Bank (WB) are currently preparing further tranches of support to SSA

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