

The Indian Education System Understanding the Indian Education System: A Special Reference to the Pitfalls and Solutions

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Abstract: *“Education is that which liberates” - An ancient proverb. According to Mahatma Gandhi, this liberation not only means spiritual liberation, but it means freedom from all manners of servitude. Mahatma Gandhi emphasized that persistent questioning and curiosity are the first pre-requisites for any education system. A strong education system is the cornerstone of any country's growth and prosperity. Over the last decade, India has made great strides in strengthening its primary education system. Since the conditions or surroundings under which one is exposed to education are not constant, the education process itself cannot be rigid. While discussing about education system in India, instead of focusing on how the current system can be improved with small changes at the bottom, we discuss about the fallbacks of the entire system and a top-down transformation of the education system by taking a hint from this quote of Albert Einstein – “We cannot solve problems by the same kind of thinking we used when we created them”.*

Keyword: India Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU), Right to Education Act, CBSE, CISCE, NCERT (National Council of Educational Research and Training)

1. Introduction

India today is the second largest higher education network in the world. Universities in India are set up by the Central or State Governments by means of legislation, while colleges are established by the State Governments or private bodies / trusts. All colleges are affiliated to some university.

2. The Different Types of Universities are

2.1. Central or State Universities

While the former are funded directly by the Ministry of Human Resource Development, the latter are set up and funded by the various state governments.

2.2. Deemed Universities

They enjoy the same academic status and privileges as a university. Examples are the Deccan College of Post Graduate and Research Institute, Pune; Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai; Indian Institute of Sciences, Bangalore; etc.

2.3. Institutions of National Importance

These are university-level institutions that are established or designated by Acts of Parliament and funded by the Central Government. These include the Indian Institutes of Technology, Indian Institutes of Management and the All India Institute of Medical Sciences, etc. Most universities are 'affiliating universities', which prescribe to the affiliated colleges the admission criteria and courses of study, hold examinations and award degrees. University departments impart postgraduate education and conduct and promote

research in a variety of disciplines. Undergraduate and, to some extent, postgraduate instruction is imparted by the colleges affiliated to a particular university.

3. Classification of Colleges

Colleges in India come under four different categories. This categorization is done on the basis of the kind of courses offered by them (Professional / Vocational) / their ownership status (Private / Government) or their relationship with the university (Affiliated / University owned).

3.1. University Colleges

These colleges are managed by the university itself and situated mostly in the university campus.

3.2. Government Colleges

The government colleges are few, only about 15-20 percent of the total. They are managed by State governments. As in case of other colleges, the university to which these colleges are affiliated, conducts their examination, lays down the courses of studies and awards the degrees.

3.3. Professional Colleges

The professional colleges are mostly in the disciplines of medicine, engineering and management. There are few for other disciplines too. They are sponsored and managed either by the government or by private initiative.

3.4. Privately Managed Colleges

About 70% of the colleges are founded by the privately owned trusts or societies. But these institutes are also

governed by the rules and regulations of the university they are affiliated to. Though initially started up as a private initiative, the state government also funds these colleges, as shows in following figure (Figure 1.1).

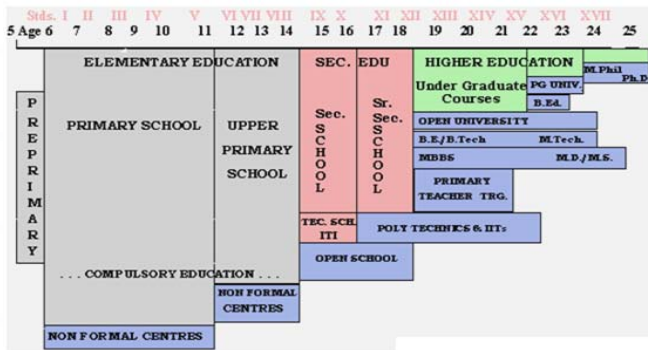


Figure 1.1: Age Distribution for Education

4. Courses offered at Higher Education Level

Indian Universities offer various courses in the following disciplines.

- Engineering and Technology
- Computer Sciences, Information Technology, Biotechnology and Bio-informatics.
- Medical, Dental, Nursing, Pharmacy and Paramedical.
- Agriculture / Veterinary Sciences, Dairy Technology and Fisheries.
- Arts & Fine Arts, Humanities, Social Sciences, Commerce, Science and Management.
- Hotel Management & Catering Technology, Travel and Tourism.
- Fashion Design & Technology.

The academic programs are offered at Vocational Diploma, Undergraduate, Postgraduate and Doctoral levels.

4.1. Distance Education

In India, there are 66 distance education institutions functioning in 60 universities besides, 11 open universities offering distance education programs. India Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU), New Delhi is one of the mega open universities in the world and caters to around 1 million students around the world.

4.2. Vocational Education

Vocational Education at Certificate level are offered by 1500 vocational institutions in the country in the areas of agriculture, business, commerce, health and Para-medical, home science and humanities in addition to engineering trades.

5. Courses and Degrees

5.1. Undergraduate Courses

Undergraduate courses, in general, are of three years leading to Bachelor degrees. The universities and higher education institutes award Bachelor's degree in Arts, Science, Commerce, etc. However, undergraduate courses leading to a first degree in professional subjects like Engineering, Medicine, Dentistry and Pharmacy are of a longer duration ranging from four to five and a half years. Most of the engineering courses are for duration of four years, while the medical courses are for duration of about five and a half years.

5.2. Postgraduate Courses

Postgraduate Courses in Arts, Science, Engineering and Medicine are usually for two years ending with the award of a Master's degree. In some specialized fields for instance, for a Bachelor of Education (B. Ed) degree, the possession of a Bachelor's degree in any discipline is required before admission can be obtained. Some universities and higher institutes offer a diploma or a certificate course of shorter duration courses in disciplines like Engineering, Agricultural Sciences and Computer Technology. However the duration of these courses varies from university to university.

5.3. Doctoral Courses

Doctoral courses like M Phil and PhD are available only at the university colleges. These courses involve research work under a chosen/allotted guide, leading to thesis submission and viva-voce. Successful completion of PhD course designates the title of 'Doctor' to the individual.

6. Expenditure on 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 per cent 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.

Table 1: Expenditure on Education

Country	Spending on Education as a % of GDP	Country	Spending on Education as a % of GDP
Switzerland	5.8	South Africa	5.3
U.S.	5.7	Thailand	5.2
France	5.6	Chile	4.2
U.K.	5.3	Brazil	4.2
Malaysia	8.1	India	4.1
Mexico	5.3	Russia	3.8

Note: Government education expenditure as a percentage of GDP (2000-2002). Source: United Nations Human Development Program

7. The School System in India

Details of how the school system works in India depicted in the following diagram (Figure 1.2) including the type of education available.

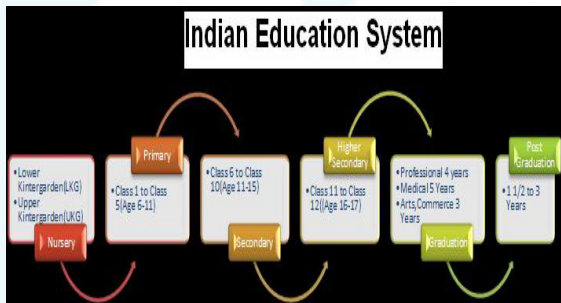


Figure 1.2: Indian Education System

According to the 2009 Right to Education Act, schooling is free and compulsory for all children from the ages of 6 to 14. However, improvements are slow being implemented and disadvantaged groups may still not have adequate access to education. A high value is placed on education, as it ensures a stable future. All parents want their children to attend the best private English schools, but places are limited. The admission process is therefore highly competitive. Most Indian schools have a strong focus on academic subjects, with little scope for creativity and few or no extra-curricular activities. Traditional schooling methods tend to emphasize rote learning and memorization, rather than encouraging independent or creative thinking. There is a strong focus on examinations from an early age. This makes the atmosphere at Indian schools competitive.

Many expats prefer to send their children to international schools. Others choose a more progressive Indian school that is less traditional in its teaching style.

8. Current Educational Problems in India

8.1. Inadequate, Improper distribution of Funds or Lack of Fund

Funds are the major reasons of the Education problem in India. If funds are available, they are not being used effectively. At times, the lack of funds hampers education

and many times, the funds are just inadequate to solve the issue. According to a study, 30% of the total educational funds are allocated towards higher education leaving the primary education in lurch. The situation is worse in rural areas where funding is major problem as it fuels other problems like shortage of staff, lack of interest and motivation amongst teachers, insensitive attitude of the education department, lack of proper infrastructure and others. Lack of funds further creates a lack of books and learning materials.



Figure 1.3: Education Expenditure

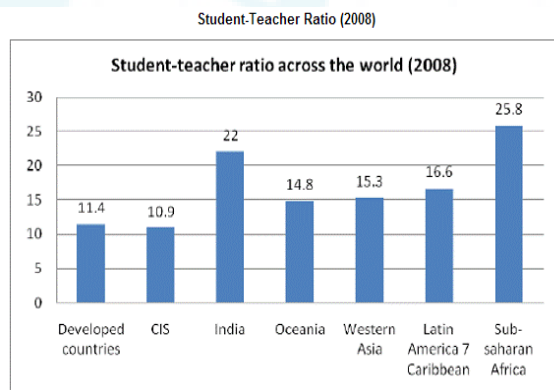
8.2. Ever Increasing Population

India is the second most populous country in the world. The population of India in 2011 is about 1.21 billion and it is still increasing and by the time you have finished listening this line, it will have increased more than what's shown. And why, one minute equals to about 51 births in India (2011). India represents almost 17.31% of the world's population, which means 1 out of 6 people in this world live in India. With the population growth rate at 1.58%, India is predicted to have more than 1.53 billion people by the end of 2030. India's Sex Ratio (2011) is 940 females per 1,000 males. In a country where the sex ratio favors females, it automatically translates into more number of illiterates. More than 50% of India's current population is below the age of 25. The individual population of some of its states is equal to the total population of many countries. Illiteracy of large population supports further illiteracy and poverty itself is a factor which encourages illiteracy.

8.3. Demand far exceeds the Supply

A classic case is that of shortage of teachers. The Student-Teacher Ratio is not balanced. Some of the rural schools have faculty which is not qualified enough which further degrades the quality of education. For example - if a classroom has 1 teacher and 50 students, the ratio is 1:50. This ratio is improper, for a single teacher to educate 50 students collectively is ineffective because it burdens the teacher and the every student will not get equal attention. It only defeats the objective of a school. The reason behind shortage of teachers is that a job Indian Education System is

road filled with bumps and depressions. Teaching field is itself challenging and if more challenges are thrown in front of the struggling teachers, they will not only fret and fume; they will advise others to abstain from this field. The pay scales are low in many regions which discourages even the most motivated. Why would anyone go for a career like this? Only, the desperate ones or those whose main objective is to earn money while the objective of providing quality education takes a back seat. Financial factor, lack or absence of incentives and opportunities keeps even the efficient Indian educator away from this field. Top up these with poor or inadequate facilities at the school level breaks the spirit of the educators, making them selfish and restricting their creativity and talent. Also noteworthy is the inadequate funding by the government, which is only enough to provide basic education at the primary level. A large number of teachers refuse to teach in rural areas and those that do are usually under qualified. Many teachers lack enthusiasm due to their inadequate salary. Another obstacle faced by the schools is that obtaining more teachers because of state guidelines that approve of high student-teacher ratio. Lack of books and learning materials seem to be a widespread problem.



Source: 'Higher Education in India', UGC Report, 2008; UNESCO Institute for Statistics 2010; EY Analysis

Figure 1.4: Student-Teacher Ratio

8.4. Faulty Education Policies

Earlier, it was the British education policy which served the British Empire; today the education policy favors those who are rich and affluent. The majority of the Indian population is poverty stricken. Government Schools for these have a poor management and poor quality of education. Much of the quality education is provided by private schools affiliated to CBSE and CISCE whose curriculum is advanced and in conformity with the worldwide education system. Not all are able to afford these schools and are deprived of quality education. Education policies are also misused by Politicians who try to mould these to achieve their political motives. A glaring example is that of the BJP's influence to mould the syllabus of the schools. It was in 2000/01, that NCERT (National Council of Educational Research and Training) issued a National Curriculum Framework for school education. Under this framework all foreign elements including those of the Brits and moguls were removed. Textbooks were revised and these presented

a distorted history. The revision presented an outlook of India as a Hindu nation painted with Religious and regional tones. There were protest against this Hindu-centric education and by 2004; the old books replaced the faulty books. But it didn't hamper BJP and RSS's in promoting about 13,000 institutions (RSS schools) which teach that Hinduism is the source of all human wisdom. It has been cited in many news items that BJP dominated states are using the funds meant for government schools to run RSS schools.

8.5. Poverty and High Fees

Studies have shown that during 2004-2005, there was 58% drop-out rate amongst the students of classes - I to VIII. The Dropout rate for classes' I-X was 62-64% for girls and 60% for boys. These rates are very high. The origin of these rates largely lies in Poverty. When earning money and taking care of family becomes a primary issue in one's life, education stands a little or no chance of pursuance. Education for such is a luxury and it becomes useless when they see that even the educated are having tough time finding a job. Poverty struck people pass on a negative attitude towards education which continues on with every new generation. Plus, those who start earning money see it as the only motive of life and even after they were educated they would still be looking of work, so why not work now? When the student has cleared 10+2, high college fees become a hurdle for a majority. Let's not forget the entrance exams which not only require entrance fees but hefty coaching fee in this competitive world.

8.6. Approach of Educators and Higher Authorities

When good results matter more than how they are achieved, it becomes clear that education is considered a mere formality and just a qualification. Result driven schools make it easy for students to pass the exams through various unfair means. Assistance during examinations, revealing answers to acquire minimum pass percentage for weak students, acceptance of bribes to favor certain students and other practices make the education system a hollow one. Add, to the fact that many teachers have acquired the post through unfair means. For them it is money and results whereas it should have been education, results and then money. Higher authorities too, take things casually as long as their pockets keep getting full. If acquiring employment and money are the objectives of a teacher, they cannot go beyond these motives, leave alone the development of education.

8.7. Non-involvement of Citizens

Indian citizens rarely raise their voice against issues and if they do, the motivation doesn't last long. Unity becomes an issue when there are so many disparities amongst the Indian populace. These too are the effects of illiteracy. Uneducated people or less educated people have a low self esteem as they don't have enough knowledge. They cannot raise their voices on things which they themselves aren't confident

about. Mass protests are more politically motivated than people motivated. Education authorities themselves don't encourage participation of parents or common people whilst making and implementing education policies. Individual efforts are snubbed and mass participation is not guided properly.

8.8. Selfish and Ineffective Supervisory Bodies

If everyone else in the education department is serving his/her own selfish motive how can the Supervisory bodies be far? Selfishness itself propagates a chain of selfishness and corruption breeds corruption. This plague operates and propagates from higher to lower or lower to higher level. If the motives mentioned, exist at the teaching level, they can spread to administration level and vice versa. What emerge are curriculums as mentioned in Faulty Education Policies. What also emerges are other malpractices like inadequate supervision, obsolete education methods, misuse of funds, misuse of food items meant for children, old methods of evaluation and so on. A distinct practice came forth, when the AICTE (All India Council of Technical Education) approved certain undeserving private engineering colleges purportedly set up by politicians. Where as they rejected internationally acclaimed education providers to set up their institute.

8.9. Political and Bureaucratic Involvement-

Majority of the Politician and Bureaucrats have age which makes them senior citizens. Some of them are not educated, some are partially or have received ineffective education, and some have reached this far because of their affluence and not ability. Thus, we have illiterate politicians handling education department, orthodox bureaucrats who are resistant to new ideas and experimentation. Education is Business for the Politicians and Manipulation Tool for bureaucrats. Seats are reserved for the likes of these, leaving deserving ones biting the dust. Selfish motives make them blind to achieve the more important nation's motive. Power and control are great weapons and if those controlling it are selfish and corrupt, there is slim chance that they will be dethroned in short span of time.

8.10. Indifferent attitude of Rural Population-

About 72.2% of the population lives in some 638,000 villages and the rest 27.8% in about 5,480 towns and urban agglomerations. Majority of the residents of these places are illiterate and severe gender, regional, and caste disparities exist in their societies. And even when a graduation degree doesn't guarantee employment then the anti education attitude gets solidified. A common sarcastic comment amongst the rural is popular Are you going to become a DC (deputy commissioner) by studying? Children living in rural areas receive a level of education which is very poor, the outcome is then obvious. A large percent of dropouts are female children. They are forced by their parents to perform chores and tend the family at home. The lifestyle of villagers is largely dominated by culture and tradition whose outlook

towards education is not favorable even for the boys. Traditional forms of occupational skills receive a higher reputation as it brings income which is vital for survival. With other traditions, illiteracy also becomes a tradition.

The causes for the problems of education system in India are multifaceted and they themselves manifest more problems. It is a vicious cycle where some factors encourage another factors or are interdependent. This makes them even more lethal than they already are. Does this mean that there is no solution to these problems? The answer is No! The answer is there but it is not just the answers but what the answers represent and the way they will be most effective by being multidimensional and self propagating just like the problems.

9. Some Points about Indian Education System

- Our education system has developed many loopholes. From school onwards children are bound to get into the rat race of percentage game. His percentage defines his abilities while his hobbies are neglected just for the sake of winning this murky race.
- One of the gravest defects of our educational system today is that there is no provision in it for keeping the adolescent usefully or rather properly engaged during the hours when he is not at school or busy in his studies, at home.
- There should be change in the syllabus also those students can prepare themselves for the coming problems in their real life. What we are taught in colleges is far apart what companies demand.
- Our Education system should reform immediately. Every student in India is produce as a bookworm.
- Students are not taught to respect his culture, language also most of him unaware of Indian Ways of life.
- Education in India should come into public sector so that students from poor background can have quality education. There must be one system throughout the nation that allows students to think creatively, with more practical knowledge. Reservations must be avoided, to encourage the real talent.
- Yes we have got a right, right to education which offers free education but still millions do not go to school because they are better at work earning their bread as our education system doesn't ensures them a better life.
- A country where every Indian kneels before Goddess Durga, Lakshmi or Saraswati can't respect a girl because our education systems teach those differences but not how to bridge them. On the whole our education system needs serious changes.

10. Solving Current Educational Problems in India

- Population Control through various campaigns, awards and other incentives and increments to those who set an example in favor of population control.

- Teachers need to be professionally trained, adequately paid and well-motivated.
- India's entire education system should be redesigned to favor employment, nullify the poverty aspect and improve the quality of education on every level, especially the primary level.
- Frequent curricular revisions, to remove and/or edit obsolete chapters and bring quality in education.
- Accountability of Higher Authorities needs to be sensitized and effectively implemented through law and special courts which can provide speedy decisions. An independent regulatory authority can be established to remove discrepancies in the first place.
- Aggressive Awareness Campaigns in Rural Areas to negate the negative attitude of the rural population.
- Minimum Wages to Unemployed Educated Candidates.
- Education Portfolio should be given to Education Experts.
- The state university system should be expanded even more to provide educational opportunities to the rural people. Private sectors, contributions from philanthropists and industry should be encouraged.
- An alternate examination process in the form of internal assessment can be set up, where students are evaluated by their teachers.
- Elimination of corruption in bureaucracy and politics.
- Inviting private funds from the rich, clubs, NGO's, subscriptions from the public, etc.
- The alumni union of a school/college can make voluntary economic contribution to their institutions happily.
- New openings of private schools and private investment (domestic and foreign or both) in education would provide everything the schools need.
- The Central and State governments should subsidize the education of the economical backward only.
- The education of the economical backward can further be cheapened/ made more inexpensive by means of cross subsidy i.e. the rich would pay a little extra fee in the form of additional economic contribution to the education for which they pay regular fees. Paying such extra amount would not make the rich poor; it would be amount to the educational cess which the Indian government charges for the growth and development of education.
- Free of charge, voluntary guidance from experts belongings to various fields can be a knowledge investment in schools.
- Funds can also be raised by selling the school's /college's intellectual property like highly innovative team projects to interested business/industrial establishments

11. Conclusion

We can see that there is lot of scope for the present education system to improve. In depth analysis can reveal better ways and methods for improvement. With better and informed action from government and society the current system of education can surely be made more excellent and inclusive with much wider expanse. First of all, the content of our syllabus, both in school level as well as college level should get updated with the changing world so that we

people don't stay back dated. Secondly, innovation (the thing we lack) should always be encouraged and given a place in the first row so that students can fully express themselves to their potential. Thirdly, we should be emphasized more on English language from the early stage of study in an efficient manner so students don't face any kinds of communication problems (the most youth face today) as there will be globalization in near future. In case of technical courses, we should be given access to more on practical knowledge rather than theoretical.

India's private-schooled, English-speaking urban elite may attract global attention, but they are in the minority. The vast majority of Indian children attend government-run primary schools in rural areas. In 2008-2009, rural India accounted for more than 88% of India's primary-school students, of whom over 87% were enrolled in government-run schools. This is where we see some of the nation's toughest challenges.

To sum up, we need to recognize that the knowledge, skills and productivity of our growing young and dynamic work force forms the backbone of our economy. To reap the benefits of such a young work force, we need to implement the reforms in the education system and also bring forth new factors of production, namely knowledge, skills and technology which have the ability to unleash the productive frontiers of the economy in the most efficient and dynamic way. Besides, taking a leaf from the western hemisphere, India should try to become 'knowledge economy' to promote inclusive growth. I, therefore, would like underline three major areas to be focused to ensure that our education system is sustainable and meets global standards:

- Quality of Education – In terms of infrastructure, teachers, accreditation, etc.
- Affordability of Education – Ensuring poor and deserving students are not denied education.
- Ethics in Education – Avoiding over-commercialization of education system.

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