

Educational Challenges in a Democratic India

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Increasing Demand for Quality

- While school enrollment has been rapidly rising, employment growth in the formal sector has been sluggish at best. Whereas 73% of the college graduates in 1983 held a white collar job, only 43% of the college graduates in 2000 did so (Desai & Das 2004)
- With a rise in educated unemployment and underemployment, there is increasing attention to quality, albeit sometimes it is measured only superficially through such markers as English skills (Desai and Noon, forthcoming)

Poor Performance of Government Schools:

- Some studies find as much as 25% absenteeism among teachers in unannounced visits to schools (Nazrul et al., 2006) , in our work we found about 12% of the teachers were not present on the day of the school visit.
- Physical punishment runs rampant, 29% of the children aged 8-11 were beaten or pinched in the preceding month by teachers while only 25% were praised in any way (Desai, Dubey, Vanneman and Banerji, Forthcoming)

Increasing Privatization of Education

- Private school enrollment in India has grown rapidly in the past decade. In 2005, about 58% of the urban and 24% of the rural children were in private schools. These numbers are far greater than the official statistics since the official statistics do not include unrecognized private schools (Desai et al., Forthcoming).
- On all measures, teacher absenteeism, physical punishment and praising and encouraging children, private schools are somewhat better than governments schools, although this difference is not very large.
- Private schools are far more likely to teach English in early standards.
- Private tuitions are also soaring, nearly 21% children receive private tutoring
- While children in private schools perform somewhat better than in government schools, these differences are narrow or nonexistent in states with better government schools such as Himachal Pradesh.
- Most of the private school benefits occur for poor children and in states with poor quality education.

Beyond Reservations: Concerns about Equity

- Social inequality in education has received greatest attention in the context of reservations. But people pay little attention to the fact that most of these inequalities emerge in primary school.
- Tremendous differences in children's skill level by parental social status (Desai, Dubey and Adams, Forthcoming)

Social Group	Does not read	Letter	Word	Paragraph	Story
Other Forward Castes	4.37	8.49	15.46	25.1	46.57
Other Backward Castes	10.53	12.92	20.09	21.52	34.95
Scheduled Caste/Dalit	12.64	17.26	23.02	19.78	27.29
Scheduled Tribe/Adivasi	13.15	15.32	26.25	23.16	22.12
Muslim	14	16.75	24.26	20.75	24.24
Christian, Sikh, Jain	2.36	5.16	13.24	20.76	58.48
Total	10.31	13.59	20.71	21.81	33.6

- These differences persist even when we control for parental education and income..
- Muslims are particularly disadvantaged which is surprising considering the fact that they are overwhelmingly urban.
- In our qualitative work we have seen clear instances of indifference as well as heard stories of discrimination from students. This occurs on the basic of caste and religion as well as social class.