

### 36% Rural Youth Can't Name India's Capital – Why & What to Do

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#### ABSTRACT

*Raising the quality of education in rural schools is essential, and a nationwide dialogue is necessary for charting the way ahead. When we talk about education in India, we can't just talk about how education is in urban cities of India, without going deep into rural education that constitutes almost 90% of the schools being located in rural areas. Recent studies have shown how the face of education in rural parts of the country is struggling and failing to receive basic quality education. We cannot but agree that, it is education that leads to the road to betterment of a community and the nation at large. And when we think about bring in a reformation in education, we have to point out what all prevents the education system in India to develop what remedies can uplift rural education.*

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This indeed is shocking to know the status of education in rural India. The findings of ASER regarding rural education are pathetic. In its report released on 15<sup>th</sup> January, 2019 Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) reveals that only 22% students of Std V know arithmetic division and that 14% in the age group of 14-18 failed to identify the map of India and 25% of this age group still cannot read basic texts fluently in their own language. The Hindu dated 16.1.2018 quoting ASER Report 2017 says that 36% of those surveyed did not know that Delhi is the capital of India and that despite being part of the formal education system, they are unable to read or understand written instructions. This indicates that the situation is the same year after year. These findings are more or less in line with those of the National Council of Educational Research and Training's National Achievement Survey, which is carried out once in three years, and of many State Learning Achievement Surveys.

Thus, one of the biggest concerns of educators in India is making the present generation learners future-ready. India is relatively young as a nation with around 28 million

youth population being added every year. More than 50 per cent of its population is below the age of 25 and more than 65 per cent are aged below 35. In 2020, the average age of an Indian is expected to be 29 years, while it will be 37 for China and 48 for Japan. However, India's high youth population won't be of help to the economy if universal education is not achieved all over India.

The main problem India now faces is that all the pedagogical innovations are fit to improve the quality of urban education while the rural learners and their education remain largely neglected. With 65 per cent of the population residing in rural India, education there truly deserves much more attention, especially when it is plagued with so many problems.

It should be remembered that if education system is deteriorated it leads to devastation of society personally. Talent is being wasted due to poverty, deprivation and lack of education. Education is a basic and fundamental right of every person and should have priority accordingly.

What ails education in rural India? It is not that the children of our cities and the children of our villages should be taught different things. The curricula must obviously be of the same standard. But it would be wise to recognize that the different contexts have fostered different inherent skills and abilities. Their initial upbringing would have also emphasized different skills, so they start from a different qualitative baseline.

Not only are the students, but also the education environment varied. Many rural schools have less robust buildings, problems in access with seasonal variations, and less access to a range of knowledge centres even if they have great teachers.

Many of the current problems in our rural schools are well known. Most have inadequate infrastructure – solid walls and a roof that does not leak are considered an achievement. Most do not have toilets or reliable electricity. Teaching equipment is limited to a rudimentary blackboard and chalk, and textbooks do not always reach the students on time. Over a third of our schools are single teacher schools, many of them in rural areas. This means that if the teacher is ill or absent, school is closed. It also means that not only is each classroom a multi-ability classroom, each classroom has students who are supposed to study in different grades/standards with different textbooks.

The greatest challenge for rural schools is to find ways to encourage children who are genuinely able and interested in the pursuit of academics. Such children have to depend on the single (or a small number) teacher and hope that they are both competent and kind enough to invest time in nurturing them. At this stage it often becomes about personalities,

relationships, power structures in the village and about possible exchange of value rather than the school being a system where such students get their answers. Rural infrastructure suffers the effects of isolation too. Dearth of teachers, teacher absenteeism and poor quality of teachers is another major hurdle in the process.

To admit frankly, as far as the teaching community is concerned some of the following issues are also responsible for this tragic situation:

Most of the schools in rural areas are taught by unqualified teachers. The school managements appoint ad hoc teachers, instead of permanent ones, who are poorly paid as compared to the huge remuneration of a full-time Trained Graduate Teacher.

Moreover, promising career prospects, which is quite a motivation booster, is almost nil for the non-permanent teachers. This leads to dissatisfaction, eventually resulting in a dearth of teachers because they move away to more permanent jobs.

Lack of accountability of teachers and school authorities has raised the rate of absenteeism. School Development and Management Committees comprising parents and members of the local community; have been entrusted with the responsibility of overseeing teachers and their duties. However, research suggests that the committee has hardly seen success.

Moreover, non-teaching duties like election invigilation often keep teachers away from schools. Furthermore, teachers often have to report for duty far away from their home. With an inadequate transport system in rural India, the distance only adds to their woes and often results in absenteeism.

Several states have exempted candidates from Teachers' Eligibility Test as only 20 per cent of the aspirants clear it. This wrong move, in an attempt to quickly fix the issue of dearth of teachers, has deteriorated the quality of education in the states even further. However, quality of teachers is a major concern not only in these states, but across the entire country.

There are many private teacher-training institutes in India, but the quality of the training they provide is unsatisfactory. Continuous professional development is a motivator for teachers, and enough attention is needed in this regard.

It is important to realize that the problems which hinder the provision of education are not just due to issues of management by government but some of them are deeply rooted in the social and cultural orientation of the people. Overcoming the latter is difficult and would require a change in attitude of the people, until then universal primary education is difficult to achieve.

Another major factor that hinder enrolment rates of girls include poverty, cultural constraints, illiteracy of parents and parental concerns about safety and mobility of their daughters. Society's emphasis on girl's modesty, protection and early marriages may limit family's willingness to send them to school.

The economic cost is higher in private schools, but these are located in richer settlements only. The paradox is that private schools are better but not everywhere and government schools ensure equitable access but do not provide quality education.

Sufficient attention has not been paid to the technical and vocational education. The number of technical and vocational training institutes is not sufficient and many are deprived of infrastructure, teachers and tools for training. The population of a state is one of the main elements of its national power. It can become an asset once it is skilled. Unskilled population means more jobless people in the country, which affects the national development negatively. Therefore, technical education needs priority handling by the government.

Most villages have poor connectivity from one place to another and that is often one of the main reason why, despite efforts by local governing bodies to build schools, often go in vain. Children, most of the times have to walk miles to reach these government funded schools and this often demotivates them to attend school on a regular basis.

People belonging to remote rural areas have meagre incomes, which at times is too less to sustain a family of maybe four or five. Most likely, children from these families won't be sent to schools, instead would be asked to assist the earning member of the family to add up some extra income. Further, as teachers in rural educational centres in villages are paid poorly, often leading to lack of attention by teachers, ultimately forcing the students to suffer.

Law and order situation, natural disasters, budgetary constraints, lack of access, poor quality, equity, and governance have also contributed in less enrolments.

### **Remedies:**

Many remedies such as surprise school inspections, teacher-training courses etc. have to be attempted to salvage the rural education scenario. Effectiveness of digital aids in battling the challenges plaguing our education system should be tested.

A mere supply side view of pumping more resources in the education infrastructure would not automatically lead to improvement in enrolment and students' learning outcomes.

Qualified teachers must be recruited on merit and teachers' attendance and performance must be monitored.

For this to happen, mere technological solutions such as having biometrics would not be sufficient unless communities are actively involved through genuine participation in school management committees. At the moment, most school management committees are dominated by those who do not have any stake in schools. The irony is that this includes local influential community that don't even send their children to village schools. A policy shift is urgently needed.

NGO's and the media should be encouraged and supported to create awareness of education in the rural areas. The lack of motivation and deprivation is also a major cause of the low level of education. Awareness schemes need to be launched, which can partly be done by encouraging different levels of competitions between different regions.

A commission should be formed to sack or relocate incompetent teachers who have been appointed politically or by corruption. It will provide opportunities to reappoint, by transparent means, a new batch of qualified teachers.

The syllabus needs to be amended and changed and simplified according to the current need of the society. It is a well known fact that there are many subjects which are of no use to many people who choose to go into different areas.

### **Conclusion:**

The reforms required in the education system cannot be done by the government alone, public-private participation and a mix of formal as well as non-formal education can pull out majority of country's population from illiteracy. Similarly, to make the youth of the country an asset, attention should also be paid to vocational and technical training also.

These are some of the few prominent crises that are holding back rural education to match up with the education system in urban educational centres. Education imparted in rural centres lack in quality and it's high time, proper attention is paid to these centres and create a platform where students from rural areas can get proper education, the right encouragement to pursue further studies and jobs. Proper availability of basic facilities like clean toilets, drinking water, adequate classroom facilities, and timely motivational programs for teachers etc should be there.

The teachers should also be concerned by the imperative requirement to update knowledge and skills. Their professional lives should be so arranged as to accommodate the opportunity, or even the obligation, for them to become more proficient in their art and to benefit from periods of experience in various spheres of economic, social and cultural life. The right reformation can definitely bring about a positive change towards the development of rural education in India.

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