HEADING THE WRONG WAY

Education landscape in India
Public education is an indispensable part of any state system that operates on the principle of 'equity'. There is no alternative to the same. Regrettably, with weakening 'public', 'private education' has developed a strong foothold in India. With the magnitude of inequality so severe that post Covid the top 10% of the riches amass 77% of the total national wealth (Oxfam, 2023), it is unimaginable for the majority of population to afford and hence access private education. The seeping-in privatization is widening the inequity in the society. The state that seems to be more accepting of the private is slowly receding from its prime responsibility of quality service delivery of education to all.

This brief highlights this widening gap by looking at some of the crucial indicators. It has to be noted that these indicators are the enablers which make the delivery of quality education possible. Multiple theories prove that there is a positive correlation between these indicators and the learning outcomes of the students. One can refer to the recently published ASER report to observe the trends around learning outcomes of students in these states. There is a heavy investment required both, material and human to deliver quality education. This brief presents the status of some of the most crucial indicators for quality education in laymen terms.

ROHIT NEMA
Since 2015, it has been observed that the government schools have significantly gone down in numbers, while the private schools have increased to a large extent (Fig 1).

18 states/UTs reported the drop in the number of Govt. Schools while increase in Pvt. Equally concerning are the 7 states, including Delhi and Rajasthan, which observe the shrinkage in both, government and private schools. Hence bringing down the overall education delivery capacity. Even though, the situation is abysmal, some of the states proved to be a ray of hope in the same period (Fig 2).
In comparison to 2019-20 (pre-covid year) with 2021-22 (post-covid year), the drop in the number of government schools has been observed to be as grave as -12% in some states. Some of the states which showed a positive shift are only in the range of 0-4% (Fig 3). Majority of the states/UTs are at least dropped by 4% in government school numbers. The ‘All India’ drop is government schools founded to be -1.06% which is around 12000 schools while the private as -1.77%, resulting in overall drop of -1.2%. This shows that we are observing a decline in overall education capacity, with both the sectors failing in compensating for the other during this period.

What is more alarming is the fact that while the overall schools’ have gone down significantly, the enrolment in government schools has gone up massively in the post-covid period. Some of the states observe the increase in enrolment to be as high as 22% (Fig 4). The government schools in ‘All India’ observe an increase of 7.5% in enrolment which is around 1.17 crores. This poses a question especially after covid where we are seeing a trend reversal in enrolments from private to government, what is the rationale for closing down & consolidation of the government schools? What is happening to Pupil to teacher ratio (PTR)? How reduction in the overall number classrooms helping the increased enrolment?
Around the same time (pre vs post-covid), barring Ladakh and Meghalaya, all states/UTs observed a drop in enrolment in private schools (Fig 5). The ‘All India’ drop is seen to be -10.7%. While acknowledging the closure of many private schools during covid, however still being in-proportionate to enrolment drop, this highlights the inequality factor in the diverse population of India and reiterates unaffordability of private education for masses. There is no alternative to public education for majority of India.

Teacher Quality and Adequacy
The deficit teachers are more than 50% in some of the states

In 33 states/UTs a major drop has been seen in enrolment in Pvt. Schools

Fig 5: %Change in Enrolment in Pvt. Schools from 2019-20 to 2021-22

Fig 6: %Deficit Teachers across all grades in Govt. Schools 2021-22
It has to be noted that it is not just the closing down of the government schools that is becoming a phenomenon, alongside, the other old problems of poor PTR, untrained and unqualified teachers, inadequate provisioning etc., are equally getting affected. The **deficit teachers** are calculated as the **difference of the total requirement of teachers** (dependent on enrolment) in a school and the **total number of working teachers**. There are **27 states/UTs** in India which observe the **deficit** in number of teachers in government schools in the year 2021-22 (Fig 6). The 'All India' figure presents a huge deficit of around **28% in government schools** during the same period. The teachers include subject teachers, head-teachers, and part-time teachers. In the states like Bihar and Jharkhand, the deficit is **almost double** the number of working teachers in the states. Forget quality education, how are we ensuring basic education then? Despite the murkiness, there are **9 states/UTs** (NL, SK, LD, AN, MZ, MN, AR, KL) which happened to become inspiring examples of maintaining the required teachers' proportion to the extent that they **observe surplus teachers** in 2021-22. This shows their preparedness for growing enrollment in the public school system. Other states can learn from the practices of these high performing states.

If one traces this negligence from 2015-16, one will observe that the situation has worsened. There is a steep drop observed in the **total number of government teachers in 6 years** (Fig 7). The figures have been calculated by **subtracting the total number of government teachers** in each state in **2015-16 from** those in **2021-22**. Sates are not filling the vacancies, even the reassessment of the sanctioned posts is not being carried out diligently. RTE has laid down norms for the requirement of teachers based on the enrolment numbers in the elementary schools. There are guidelines by NCERT and SSA for the Pupil to Teacher ratios across secondary classes. However, they are being ignored. This is resulting into classes without any teachers. The brunt of which is being felt by the children.

**India observes 86968 lesser teachers in govt schools in 2021-22 than 2015-16**
UDISE+ reports the **unqualified teachers** as the ones who have **not received** any **professional qualification** as diploma certificate, or Bachelor of Elementary Education (B.El.Ed.), or Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.), or Master of Education (M.Ed), or any other professional qualification. This is an important marker in understanding that the teacher who is teaching the students has basic minimum qualification or not. Ideally, no unqualified teacher should teach the students. Despite the fact, both the government and the private schools have reported unqualified teachers in the year 2021-22 (Table 1). It should be observed that **private schools in 12 states** have reported **more than 30%** unqualified teachers. The 'All India' figures for the **government schools** lies in the range of **1-10%** and that of **private ones** in the range **11-20%**. In other words, the **private schools** have almost **double** the number of **unqualified teachers than the government schools**. Both the deficit teachers and the unqualified teachers make the schools non-compliant as per the RTE norms. Then, how are these schools being regulated by the state? Are there no repercussions to not adhering to the norms? Are parents aware of these numbers?

12 States report more than 30% of unqualified teachers teaching in Pvt. Schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ranges</th>
<th>Government States</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Private States</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11-20%</td>
<td>LA, MN, SK</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>OD, PB, RJ, TG, UT, IN*</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-30%</td>
<td>AS, NL, TR</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>CG, JH, MP, UP</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-40%</td>
<td>MG</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>AR, BR, LA, MN, MZ, TR, WB</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41-50%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>JK, SK</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51-60%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>AS, MG, NL</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No unqualified</td>
<td>AN, DL</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>AN, DL</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: %Unqualified Teachers in Govt. vs Pvt. Schools 2021-22
The Dilapidating Infrastructure

The RTE infrastructure norms lay down certain guidelines for what facilities should be there in a school. In Fig 8, such parameters have been considered to check how many government schools are compliant. The 8 parameters include - school building, separate room for headmaster, separate girls' and boys' toilets, availability of functional drinking water facilities, availability of library, availability of playground, boundary wall, and adequate number of classrooms. The numbers found to be unnerving. There isn’t a single state in India that has more than 40% RTE compliant government schools. There are around 11 states which report the compliance in the range 1-5% only. Around 95% of the government schools are non-compliant on RTE infrastructure norms in these states, with 'All India' figure finding itself in the range of 10-15%. Where should the poor go? The private education is unaffordable and the government one is getting inadequate on so many parameters.

![Fig 8: %Infrastructure wise RTE Compliant Schools 2021-22](image)

This has lot to do with poor provisioning of funds for the public education. The 6% of the GDP allotment to education is still an unrealized dream. Rather the numbers have been hovering around 3% since many years now. Even with the highest budget allocation ever in budget 2023 for education, the share in GDP remained unmoved at 2.9%. The poorer states need the maximum support and funding from central share. However, without unlearning the usual allocation habits, the picture is not going to change much.
The Gaps that Covid-19 Highlights

The impact of covid on education has been devastating. It exposed the limitations in the system. Even though the cases have gone down, and the world has much better measures to counter it, the learnt practices are required to be practiced even now. The digital divide was a prominent limitation that we all have observed, especially in the rural spaces. Around **23 states/UTs** in India have **less than 40%** of the government schools with internet access and at least a single desktop/laptop/tablet available (Table 2). The ‘**All India**’ numbers are in the range of only **0-20%**. Even in the basic infrastructural facility like **handwash**, we still stand in the range of **60-80%** in ‘**All India**’. These figures warn us how ugly the things can again turn out in case there is another outbreak of virus. We are still nowhere close to prepared to provide barrier free continuous education to our children.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Range</th>
<th>Computer Facilities</th>
<th>Tot</th>
<th>Handwash Facilities</th>
<th>Tot</th>
<th>Internet Availability</th>
<th>Tot</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-20%</td>
<td>AR,AS, BR, JK, MP, MN, MG, MZ, OD, TG, UP, WB, IN*</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>AR, AS, BR, KA, MP, MN, MG, MZ, OD, TG, TR, UP, UT, WB, IN*</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-40%</td>
<td>AP, CG, HP, JH, KA, LA, NL, RJ, TN, TR, UT</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>AR, MG</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>AN, CG, HR, HP, JK, JH, MH, SK, TN</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-60%</td>
<td>AN, GA</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>NL</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>AP, DN, GA, LA, NL, PB, RJ</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60-80%</td>
<td>MH</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>LA, MZ, IN*</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: %Number of Govt. Schools having at least 1 computer, Handwash Facilities, and Internet Availability in 2021-22
Time to Act

It is imperative to work on seven fronts -

1. Re-evaluate the policy on school consolidation. Expansion of government schools must ensure equitable access to public schools for all children at the elementary level.
2. Central to the project of universalisation with quality is the recruitment of well-trained and quality teachers in government and private schools.
3. Ensure time bound implementation for RTE compliance for all schools.
4. Along with RTE implementation it is needed to restore trust by improving school administration making government schools properly functional. Without this effort to better manage government schools the improvements will not bear fruit
5. Ensure regulation of private schools.
6. Invest in digital infrastructure creation in line with the public aims of education.
7. And to ensure all the above points, allocation on education needs to be increased manifold. Recent research estimates the gap between the required allocation and actual expenditure for elementary education alone is above 1.4% of GDP. The gaps are distributed unequally across states (Fig. 9).

States like Bihar need almost 10% of additional spending on education to achieve full RTE implementation

![Graph showing additional requirement as % GSDP 2015-16](image)

*Source: Bose S, Ghosh P, Sardana A, p.97, 2020*
Dadar & Nagar Haveli and Daman & Diu has not been considered as it has been merged into a single Union Territory only after July 2019.

The fall in the number of schools in case of Madhya Pradesh includes the school consolidation that has been happening since 2019 under CM RISE programme.

The states/UTs LA, NL, MG, PY, AN, GA, AR, CH, SK, MZ, and MN are not shown in the graph to improve legibility.

All the government schools mentioned in the graphs in this brief include the government aided schools as well.

The government schools do not include the schools managed by central government - Central School, Ministry of Labour, Jawahar Navodaya Vidhyalaya, Sainik School, Railway School, Central Tibetan School.

The entire micro data has been taken from UDISE+ website.

The number of deficit teachers have been calculated through the difference of Required teacher and Actual teachers in any state. For this, RTE norms for elementary schools have been followed. For secondary CBSE guidelines have been followed. For pre-primary, NCERT guidelines have been followed.

The data files for different tables can be accessed here - https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1SW7AiJ0sjlEwBMRR4omCB1aYi32f?usp=sharing

References


*Disclaimer: The views presented in this brief are of the author alone. Rohit Nema is a final year master's student of Public Policy and Governance at Azim Premji University, Bengaluru. He is working as a research intern under the mentorship of Sukanya Bose.