

Education of the Girl Child Present Status and Steps for Promotion

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Education is a basic human right. It is essential for developing human resources. It is a means of fighting poverty at all stages and in different contexts. Professor Amartya Sen, the Nobel laureate says "the economies that have been most successful in the recent development of world trade, namely Japan, Taiwan, Singapore and now China, have all been very oriented towards basic education. Unfortunately in India, education is still a neglected and underappreciated value." Therefore, at all the levels of education, primary education or basic education is a must. This is because it develops among individuals necessary knowledge and skills to earn their livelihood and meet their basic needs. It is an indispensable passport to life. Since independence in 1947, India has been making incessant efforts to achieve Education For All (EFA). Endeavours to attain EFA gained

impetus after the international community gathered for first time in Jomtein in 1990 and adopted a resolution to achieve Education For All by 2000. The World Education Forum, Dakar Senegal which met in April 2000 committed that the international community must ensure universal access to quality basic education. It is to be achieved and sustained by 2015. India is a party to the Dakar Convention. India has launched programmes such as District Primary Education Project (DPEP) and *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan* (SSA) to achieve the goal. Enormous human and material resources are being invested to achieve education for all. All these endeavours have not taken us to achieve our EFA goal. Table 1 manifests the net enrolment ratio at the primary level.

Table 1 reveals that net enrolment ratio has increased from 84.53 per cent in 2005-2006 to 95.92 per cent in

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Table 1
Net Enrolment Ratio at Primary Level

Sl. No.	Year	Net Enrolment Ratio
1.	2005-2006	84.53
2.	2006-2007	92.75
3.	2007-2008	95.92

2007-2008. This is an appreciable improvement over the years. But it still reflects that about 4 per cent children at the age of +6 are not able to enrol themselves in Class 1. They are therefore, out of school. To achieve universal primary education by 2015, all children at the age +6 should be enrolled in school by 2009.

In the light of the present scenario, it is being realised that the country may not achieve Education For All (EFA) by 2015. There are many roadblocks on the way to achieve EFA. One of these is education of the girl child which is lagging behind and impedes endeavours to achieve EFA.

Participation of Girls

(a) Girls' Enrolment

Table 2 presents data regarding participation of girls in school both at the primary and upper primary level of education from 2003-2004 to 2006-2007.

Table 2 reveals that girls' share in enrolment has improved over the years both at the primary and upper primary level. At the primary level, it has improved from 47.47 per cent in 2003-2004 to 48.09 per cent in 2006-2007.

Table 2
Percentage of Girls' Enrolment at Primary and Upper Primary level

Year	Classes I to V	Classes VI to VIII
2003-2004	47.47	45.02
2004-2005	47.52	45.32
2005-2006	47.79	45.80
2006-2007	48.09	46.51

Similarly at the upper primary level, it has improved from 45.02 per cent to 46.51 per cent during the same period. The table further reveals that girls' share in enrolment is lower than boys both at primary and upper primary level.

"It is further observed that except in Bihar, Chandigarh and Punjab, in all other states the share of girls' enrolment at the primary level has been above 46 per cent. In Bihar, it is 45.89 per cent, Chandigarh 44.58 per cent and Punjab 45.94 per cent. The highest level of girls' enrolment at primary level is noticed in case of Meghalaya (50.44 per cent) followed by Manipur (49.84 per cent), Kerala (49.46 per cent) and West Bengal (49.3 per cent). A few other states also reported above 49 per cent girls' enrolment in primary classes (Mehta 2008). Table 2 portrays the picture that without bringing all the girls under the education system, the goal of UPE cannot be achieved.

(b) Gender Parity Index (GPI)

Gender parity index (GPI) also reflects girls' participation Table 3 presents GPI at primary and upper primary level.

Table 3 reveals that there is consistent improvement in GPI both at the primary and upper primary level. At the primary level, it improved from

Table 3

Gender Parity Index (GPI) at Primary and Upper Primary Level

Year	Classes I to V	Classes VI to VIII
2003-2004	0.90	0.82
2004-2005	0.91	0.83
2005-2006	0.92	0.84
2006-2007	0.93	0.87

0.90 in 2003-2004 to 0.93 in 2006-2007. At the upper primary level, it improved from 0.82 in 2003-2004 to 0.87 in 2006-2007. This reflects that the GPI is higher at the primary level than at the upper primary level. The comprehensive survey conducted by Social Research Institute of Indian Market Research Bureau in 2009 reveals that transition rate from primary to upper primary is 81.1 per cent. This situation has serious implication for attaining Universal Elementary Education (UEE).

"Further the analysis of state specific GPI in primary enrolment indicates that the index remained above 0.95 in 14 states. Meghalaya has the highest GPI of above 1. In rest of the states, GPI is low. For instance, it is 0.85 in Bihar, 0.80 in Chandigarh, 0.85 in Punjab, 0.88 in Gujarat, 0.86 in Jammu and Kashmir and 0.88 in Rajasthan. The goal of

UPE in these states is not likely to be realised unless all remaining girls are brought under the education system." (Mehta, 2008)

In India gender disparities are declining over the years. But they remain to be pervasive. This is not only in India, but it is in other countries too. 'Worldwide only 118 (63 per cent) countries out of 188 had achieved gender parity at the primary level by 2005.' (UNESCO 2007)

Apparent Survival Rate

Apparent survival rate reflects the efficiency of the education system. It provides useful information about retaining capacity of the system. Table 4 manifests survival rate at the All India level.

Table 4 reveals that apparent survival rate has improved over the years. It is true both for boys and girls. At the All India level, it has improved from 63 per cent in 2003-2004 to 73 per cent in 2006-2007. During the same period, it has improved from 65 per cent to 73 per cent in respect of boys and from 62 per cent to 72 per cent in respect of girls.

"States in the Southern region such as Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka have a high apparent survival rate. In Karnataka it is 96 per cent compared to only 54 per cent in Madhya Pradesh and Bihar, 36 per cent in Arunachal Pradesh and 38 per cent in Jharkhand. Unless, all the states attain a high survival rate, the goal of UPE cannot be achieved". (Mehta, 2008).

Table 4
Apparent Survival Rate

Year	Grade-I		Grade-II		Grade-III		Grade-IV		Grade-V		Total
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	
2003-04	100	100	84	84	76	76	69	75	65	62	63
2004-05	100	100	83	84	80	81	73	80	68	66	67
2005-06	100	100	84	84	79	79	74	81	71	68	70
2006-07	100	100	86	87	81	81	76	81	73	72	73

Factors Contributing to Low Girls Participation at Primary and Upper Primary Level of Education

Mentioned below are a few main factors which contribute to low girls' participation in schools.

- Gender disparities in primary education stem first and foremost from disparities in enrolment in the first grade.
- Under-nutrition and malnutrition affect one in four children in developing countries including India. This situation has a direct impact on education, making children vulnerable to illness, less likely to enrol in school and more likely to dropout. Girls are more sufferers than boys in his regard.
- There are about 8 lakh primary schools in the country. Of these, 4.5 lakh schools are without common toilets {Mukul, 2009}. Inadequate sanitation in schools disproportionately affects girls. Young girls particularly after puberty are less likely to attend classes, if the school lacks suitable hygienic facilities. One study reveals that half of the girls in sub-Saharan

Africa drop out of primary school due to poor water and sanitation facilities.

- Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programmes improve children's health, nutrition, well being and cognitive development. Cognitive neuroscience shows that early childhood is a critical period for the acquisition of cognitive skills. ECCE programmes offset disadvantage and inequality and lead to better achievement in primary school. Facilities for pre-primary education are very limited in India. In certain areas, they are even non-existent. Educational expansion does not mean reduced inequality. Children particularly girls from ethnic and religious minorities are typically the last to benefit from school creation and expansion.
- Inadequate facilities in schools such as rooms for instruction, drinking water, etc. are responsible for low enrollment and high dropout rate. There are about 1.5 lakh schools without building and 1.6 lakh without facilities of drinking water.

Schools without building have insecure environment for students particularly girls. Inadequate facilities referred to above deter parents particularly of girls to enrol their wards into schools.

- There are about 1.1 lakh single teacher schools. Paucity of teachers deter parents to enrol their wards in schools. This is because they believe that learning hardly takes place in a school where there is only one teacher against five classes. If this teacher happens to be male teacher, this further deters parents of girls to enroll them in that schools.
- "So far as primary schools are concerned, more than one out of three teachers is a female {40.89 per cent}. However, in the states of Arunachal Pradesh {34.72 per cent}, Bihar {28.41 per cent}, Chhattisgarh {29.72 per cent}, Jharkhand {26.80 per cent}, Madhya Pradesh {30.00 per cent}, Rajasthan {28.93 per cent}, Uttar Pradesh {38.80 per cent}, and West Bengal {27.87 per cent}, female teachers are in minority. On the other hand, in states like Kerala, {75.98 per cent}, and Tamil Nadu {76.72 per cent}, majority of primary school teachers are female. Despite significant improvement in the availability of female teachers in schools over the years that impart elementary education, still 28.26 per cent schools that impart elementary education did not have any female teachers in 2006-2007" (Mehta,

2008). This affects adversely girls' enrolment and retention in schools.

- Many poor and illiterate parents do not have positive attitude towards the education of their daughters. As such, they do not enrol them in schools.
- Poverty propels many parents to send their children including girls for child labour to supplement the income of their family.

Promotion of Girls' Participation

The following are a few suggestions to promote gender equality in education particularly at the primary and upper primary level.

1. Need for Safe and Supportive School Environment for Girls

Over the years, physical and psychological violence by teachers in schools has declined substantially. However, there may be some schools where children both boys and girls are still exposed to physical and psychological violence, and sexual violence and harassment. Corporal punishment is used to discipline students and to penalise them for unsatisfactory performance. Boys often experience physical violence, girls are more subjected to sexual violence and sexual harassment particularly at the upper primary stage;

Violence in schools seriously affects pupils' physical and mental health and the development of social and cognitive skills often resulting in poor academic achievement. Sexual harassment of girls often results in their low self-

esteem, poor levels of participation in learning activities and dropout. Therefore, teachers need to create safe and gender supportive environment in their schools/classrooms. They should not say anything to girls which may damage their self-esteem.

The physical environment of schools is as important as school safety for girls' participation especially after the onset of puberty. The lack of sanitation facilities adversely affects students' attendance in schools and it may even lead to their drop out from school. Improving the school environment by specifically addressing girls' needs helps to increase the demand for education among girls.

2. Need for Higher Percentage of Female Teachers and their Unbiased Teacher-Pupil Dynamics

Countries with higher percentage of female teachers have higher gender parity level in primary school participation. The availability of female teachers plays a significant role in ensuring that all girls have an access to and participate in school as well as in achieving gender parity in primary education. So there is a need to have higher percentage of female teachers in primary education;

Teacher attitudes and perceptions reveal harmful biases. Many teachers claim that they treat boys and girls equally, but in practice their behaviour in the classroom reflects subtle biases. Boys generally have more challenging interactions with teachers, dominate

classroom activities and receive more attention than girls. However, in some classes, teachers may favour girls;

Teacher expectations are different from boys and girls. Some teachers particularly in the rural areas have low expectations from female students and often give more attention to boys even ignoring girls in the classroom. The low frequency and quality of teacher interactions with girls affects quality of opportunity, which is likely to diminish a girl's sense of self-esteem and self-reliance; and

Teachers need to be provided experiences and training to avoid gender biased discrimination in their interaction with students and their expectation from students. Such training is relatively rare.

3. Need for Learning Content that Promote Real Gender Equality

Content analysis of textbooks points to gender bias against girls and women regardless of the level of education, subject matter, country or region. Girls and women are systematically under-represented in textbooks and still shown in highly stereotyped roles. This is even in those countries which have achieved gender parity in primary education. For instance, Social Studies textbooks in China portray 100 per cent scientists as male and 100 per cent teachers as female. Further 75 per cent service personnel are female. In India, more than half the illustrations in the average primary school English, Hindi, Mathematics, Science and Social Studies textbooks depict only males,

and only 6% show just females (F.B. Ahmed, 2006). Most textbooks largely or wholly ignore the changes in women's position in society in recent decades (Blumberg, 2007). There is a need to depict in textbooks women in roles they have taken over the years. These women would serve as role models for girls. This would check drop out rate among them.

- The state governments should launch specific schemes like 'Ladli Scheme' launched by the Delhi Government. Under this scheme, girls who complete senior secondary education are given a sum of Rupees one lakh by Delhi Government.
- More Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas need to be opened. This is because they are contributing immensely to the education of girl child;
- The number of out of school children (OOS) in the age group 6-

11 has come down dramatically from 1.34 crore in 2005 to 80.4 lakhs in 2009 as a result of endeavours being made under SSA. Many of these out of school children including girls are child labourers. Flexible schooling, non-formal equivalency courses and transition and bridge courses need to be launched to meet the learning needs of OOS children particularly girls;

- Pre-service and in-service teachers need to be provided intensive training to render classroom climate an enjoyable learning experience. This would improve pupils' learning outcomes and reduce their drop out rate; and
- Mass media need to be used to sensitise parents/guardians and community members about the significance of education of the girl child.

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