



Bridging The Education Divide: Addressing Socio-Economic, Infrastructural, And Pedagogical Barriers In India

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Abstract:

Education in India is enshrined as a fundamental right under Article 21-A of the Constitution, yet the quality and accessibility of education remain uneven, particularly in three-tier cities. These cities face unique challenges, including poverty, inadequate infrastructure, underqualified teachers, and low parental awareness, which impede their potential to serve as educational hubs. While India's literacy rate stands at approximately 76.32% (2022), true educational literacy, encompassing comprehension and practical application, remains limited. This article examines these systemic issues, using recent data and case studies to illustrate the urgency of addressing these gaps. Recommendations include increasing GDP allocation for education, expanding vocational training through the NEP 2020, and fostering community engagement to reshape societal perceptions of education. Bridging these gaps is crucial to unlocking India's socio-economic potential and achieving global competitiveness.

Key Words: Education in India, Tier III cities, socio-economic challenges, digital divide, child labor, inadequate infrastructure, underqualified teachers, educational reforms, poverty and education, community partnerships

Introduction

Education is the cornerstone of socio-economic development, empowering individuals and communities to thrive. Article 21-A of the Indian Constitution enshrines the right to education as a fundamental right,

mandating free and compulsory education for children.¹ Complementing this, Article 46 underscores the importance of promoting the educational and economic interests of weaker sections of society, particularly Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.² Additionally, the 11th Fundamental Duty obligates parents and guardians to ensure educational opportunities for children aged 6 to 14.³

Despite strong legal provisions, disparities in education quality and access persist, particularly in Tier III cities. According to the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), these cities have populations between 20,000 and 49,999. Many of these settlements, categorized as Nagar Panchayats or Notified Area Councils (NACs), are in transition from rural to urban status.⁴ Often overshadowed by their metropolitan counterparts, these cities face unique challenges due to smaller populations, limited economic resources, and less developed infrastructure. Yet, they hold immense potential to become foundational hubs for advanced studies. By addressing these challenges promptly and effectively, we can unlock transformative opportunities and pave the way for sustainable progress.

Objectives

This article aims to explore the challenges and disparities in India's educational system, focusing on -tier-three cities, and propose actionable solutions to bridge the gap in access, quality, and infrastructure. It seeks to highlight how poverty, inadequate infrastructure, underqualified teachers, and socio-economic factors undermine the constitutional mandate of free and compulsory education under Article 21-A, with a particular focus on the potential of smaller cities to become educational hubs.

Research Methodology

The research adopts a qualitative approach, synthesising data from government reports, surveys, and academic studies. Key areas analysed include socio-economic challenges, parental involvement, pedagogical issues, and infrastructural deficiencies. Case studies and recent examples of systemic failures are integrated to provide real-world context. The analysis draws comparisons with global benchmarks and recommendations from policy frameworks like the New Education Policy (NEP) 2020.

Discussions- Socio-Economic Challenges

Poverty and Its Impact on Education

One of the most significant challenges facing school education in India is poverty. Despite substantial progress in reducing multidimensional poverty — from 29.17% in 2013-14 to 11.28% in 2022-23 (a reduction of 17.89 percentage points) — the issue remains far from resolved. It's important to note that this progress

¹ Government of India. *The Constitution of India*, Article 21, Part III, Fundamental Rights. Amended by *The Constitution (Eighty-Sixth Amendment) Act, 2002*.

² Government of India. *The Constitution of India*, Article 46, Part IV, Directive Principles of State Policy

³ Government of India. *The Constitution of India*, Eleventh Fundamental Duty, Part IV(A), Fundamental Duties.

⁴ [Government of India. *The Constitution \(Seventy-Fourth Amendment\) Act, 1992*. New Delhi: Ministry of Law and Justice, 1992](#)

heavily relies on the existing social security net. Any reduction or removal of these safety nets could quickly push families back into poverty, especially in the event of a sudden crisis or financial setback. With 112.8 million people still living below the poverty line, the risks remain high, and the impact on education is profound and ongoing.⁵

Economic Struggles and Barriers to Education

Many families, due to poverty, struggle to meet basic needs, which directly impacts their ability to prioritize education. Children from economically disadvantaged backgrounds often face significant barriers, such as the inability to afford school fees, uniforms, books, and other necessary educational materials. A recent study sheds light on the reality of schooling costs in India. According to ET Online research, the overall expenditure for sending a child to a private school from age 3 to age 17 is a staggering Rs 30 lakh.⁶

Child Labour: A Critical Issue

Child labour remains a serious issue in India, with economic pressures often forcing children to work, reducing their school attendance and performance. According to the Kailash Satyarthi Foundation and census projections, India will have 7.8 million child labourers in 2023, with a male-to-female ratio of 57% and 43%, respectively.⁷ The issue is particularly acute in states like Madhya Pradesh and Bihar. A disturbing case in Raisen, Madhya Pradesh, gained widespread attention when the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) rescued 39 child labourers from a liquor factory, finding burn marks on the children's hands from exposure to chemicals.⁸ Cases like this are all too common in Northern India, highlighting the negligence compromising and killing the future of these children.

Nutritional Deficiencies and Cognitive Development

Poor nutrition also plays a significant role in hindering cognitive development and learning capabilities. In India, 35% of children under the age of five suffer from malnutrition. The states of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh have the highest number of malnourished children, followed by Jharkhand and Madhya Pradesh. In Madhya Pradesh, 42% of children under five are malnourished, while in Bihar the figure is even higher at 48.3%. In contrast, states like Kerala, Goa, Tamil Nadu, and Mizoram report better nutritional outcomes.⁹

Digital Divide and Internet Connectivity

Infrastructure and internet connectivity like Lack of computers, internet connectivity, and other digital learning tools. The internet penetration rate in India rose over 52 percent in 2024, from about 14 percent in

⁵ Press Information Bureau (PIB). "Press Release." January 15, 2024. <https://pib.gov.in>.

⁶ *The Economic Times*. "The Cost of Raising a Child in India: School Costs ₹30 Lakh, College a Crore." Accessed February 3, 2025. <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com>.

⁷ *British Safety Council India*. "Child Labour in India: A Persistent Problem." <https://britsafe.in>.

⁸ *India Today*. "39 Children Disappear After Being Rescued from Madhya Pradesh Liquor Factory - MP News." Accessed February 3, 2025.

⁹ *Daily Rounds*. "National Nutrition Month 2020: An Analysis of India's Nutritional Status." Accessed February 3, 2025

2014. Although these figures seem relatively low, it meant that more than half of the population of 1.4 billion people had internet access that year.¹⁰ now the point is most of the developed countries already attended 100 telecommunications even shifting 5G or 6G spectrum we are struggling to reach 100 telecom penetration in the country. In this case objective to witness ad-tech revolution in the education sector would be difficult.

Investment Gaps and the Need for Increased Spending

The problems and issues discussed require intensive investment, not only in terms of money but also in cultural habits. India currently spends 4.6% of its GDP on education, lagging behind countries like France (5.2%), the UK, and the USA (both at 5.4%).¹¹ To meet its developmental goals, India must increase its education expenditure to the recommended 6% of GDP, as outlined by the Kothari Commission in 1966¹² and reaffirmed by the New Education Policy 2020.¹³ This additional investment is essential to address gaps in educational access, quality, and infrastructure. Meeting this target would enable the country to better support its growing youth population, drive innovation, and enhance its global competitiveness. A focused push toward this goal is vital for India's future.

Parental Education and Involvement

India, as a relatively newly independent country, has only seen a few generations pass since its independence. Due to this, many parents, especially in non-metropolitan areas, have had limited or no access to quality education themselves. This lack of educational exposure has resulted in a limited understanding of the true importance of education and its potential career opportunities. The country has never achieved a 100% literacy rate, and even today, the quality of education remains a significant concern. While the literacy rate—simply defined as the ability to read and write in one language—stands at approximately 76.32% (as of 2022)¹⁴, the rate of true educational literacy, which involves a comprehensive understanding of the value and breadth of education, is likely much lower.

Many parents are not well-informed about diverse career paths due to their own limited educational backgrounds. This lack of awareness restricts their involvement in their children's educational choices and inhibits the aspirations and opportunities available to them. For example, a recent survey revealed that 93% of Indian students aged 14 to 21 are aware of only seven career options, despite there being over 250 different job types available in India.¹⁵ This narrow understanding is partly rooted in a societal perception that undervalues various professions and attaches dignity to only a few traditional career paths.

¹⁰ Statista. "India: Internet Penetration Rate 2024." Accessed February 3, 2025. <https://www.statista.com>.

¹¹ World Bank. "Government Expenditure on Education, Total (% of GDP) - India." Accessed February 3, 2025. <https://data.worldbank.org>.

¹² Kothari, D. S. *Report of the Education Commission 1964-66: Education and National Development*. New Delhi: Government of India, 1966.

¹³ Government of India. *National Education Policy, 2020*.

¹⁴ Statista. "India: Literacy Rate 1981-2022." Accessed 19 November, 2024. <https://www.statista.com>.

¹⁵ India Today. "93% Indian Students Aware of Just Seven Career Options: What Are Parents Doing Wrong?" Accessed October 19, 2024.

To address this issue, community engagement is crucial for reshaping perceptions about diverse professions and promoting the idea that every job holds dignity. The Indian government's strategy through the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, which emphasizes vocational education, is a welcome step towards expanding awareness and opportunities beyond conventional career choices.¹⁶

Pedagogical Challenges

Data from a parliament response indicates that there are more than 1.17 lakh single-teacher schools across the country, which is around 9% of the total the number of the schools in India. Rationalization of schools in India should have resulted in the reduction of number of single-teacher schools. The same cannot be analysed as data on such schools is not available for all the years.¹⁷ India needs 11.16 lakh additional teachers to meet the current shortfall.¹⁸

Underqualified Teachers are one of the important issues. Teachers may lack the necessary qualifications and training to deliver effective education. Sometime even administration compromises on these necessary attributes. Because they don't want to face financial burden, assign more work to teachers in less salaries. In India unemployment is a concerning issue. In June 2024, it is recorded at 9.2%.¹⁹ This is reflected in low salaries of teachers, which further compromising educational standards.

Overcrowded classrooms can prevent teachers from providing individual attention to students. The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act, 2009, in its Schedule lays down the Pupil Teacher Ratio (PTR) for both primary and upper primary schools. At the primary level the PTR should be 30:1, and at the upper primary level it should be 35:1. The Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA) framework stipulates that the PTR at secondary level should be 30:1.²⁰

The high dropout rate of school students—despite the best efforts of the government- shows a concerning trend. As per the Unified Digital Information on School Education (UDISE) plus data 2021-22, there are about 265 million students enrolled in schools across India, but estimates suggest more than 3.5 million students have dropped out after class 10 in the academic year 2021-22.²¹

Further Widespread cheating in school exams highlights systemic issues, including poor monitoring and a culture of malpractice. This compromises educational integrity, perpetuates inequality, and undermines the

¹⁶ Government of India. *National Education Policy, 2020*

¹⁷ *State of the Education Report for India-2021. The Indian Express*, October 6, 2021.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, *State of the education report for India 2021*.

¹⁹ Press Information Bureau, Government of India, Ministry of Human Resource Development. "Press Release." February 9, 2017.

²⁰ Press Information Bureau Government of India Ministry of Human Resource Development, 9 Feb, 2017

²¹ *India Today*. "Understanding India's Dropout Problem." Accessed Oct. 10, 2024. <https://www.indiatoday.in>.

credibility of academic qualifications.²² Another similar case occurred in Madhya Pradesh, where allegations of organized cheating and question paper leaks before exams were reported.²³

Actions and Considerations

Addressing the interconnected challenges of poverty and education in India requires the implementation of several proven measures. Strengthening social security nets like the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) and the Public Distribution System (PDS) has provided critical support during crises, as demonstrated during the COVID-19 pandemic. Expanding programs such as PM Poshan (formerly the Mid-Day Meal Scheme) has significantly improved child nutrition and school attendance²⁴, following the successful model of Tamil Nadu's Noon Meal Scheme.

Subsidized education initiatives, including the Right to Education (RTE) Act and state-level programs like Madhya Pradesh's Mukhyamantri Medhavi Vidyarthi Yojana, have reduced schooling expenses for economically weaker families. Addressing child labor through strict enforcement of the Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act and rehabilitation campaigns like *Bachpan Bachao Andolan* has been instrumental in rescuing children from exploitative conditions while ensuring they receive government benefits. Infrastructure enhancements, inspired by Kerala's KITE initiative²⁵ and Himachal Pradesh's Har Ghar Pathshala program,²⁶ have helped bridge the digital divide, ensuring equitable access to education.

To tackle the issue of single-teacher schools, rationalization and targeted teacher recruitment, as implemented in Rajasthan's Shiksha Sambal Project, can reduce disparities. Programs like Karnataka's Nali-Kali effectively consolidate resources while empowering the education of girl children.²⁷ Improving teacher salaries and training, inspired by Singapore's competitive education model²⁸ and Uttar Pradesh's Prerna Project (Real-Time Learning and Experiential Focus)²⁹, ensures teacher retention and quality education.

Overcrowded classrooms require infrastructure expansion, such as Delhi's classroom-building initiatives, complemented by technology integration as seen in Kenya's Digital Learning Program. To combat high dropout rates, schemes like Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya and Brazil's Bolsa Família aim to break the

²² *India Today*. "Bihar Board Exam 2024: BSEB Expels Over 40 Class 12 Students on Day 1 of Inter Exams." Accessed February 3, 2024. <https://www.indiatoday.in/education-today/news/story/bihar-board-exam-2024-bseb-expels-over-40-class-12-students-day-1-of-inter-exams-2497071-2024-02-03>.

²³ *CNBC TV18*. "Police Arrests 4 Accused in Madhya Pradesh Board Class 10 and 12 Question Paper Leak Case." Accessed February 3, 2025. <https://www.cnbctv18.com/india/police-arrests-4-accused-in-madhya-pradesh-board-class-10-and-12-question-paper-leak-case-16210641.htm>.

²⁴ Shailja Singh and Gupta, Gupta, "Impact of Mid Day Meal on Enrollment, Attendance and Retention of Primary School Children," *International Journal of Science and Research (IJSR)* ISSN (Online): 2319-7064.

²⁵ Kerala Infrastructure and Technology for Education (KITE). "KITE." Accessed Oct. 10, 2024. <https://kite.kerala.gov.in/KITE/>.

²⁶ Samagra Shiksha Himachal Pradesh. "Samagra Shiksha." Accessed September 3, 2024. <http://www.samagrashiksha.hp.gov.in/content/77>.

²⁷ The Hindu. "How Project Nanhi Kali Is Helping Girls Empower Themselves." *The Hindu*, October 2, 2022. <https://www.thehindu.com/education/how-project-nanhi-kali-is-helping-girls-empower-themselves/article66056469.ece>.

²⁸ Zongyi Deng and S. Gopinathan, "PISA and High-Performing Education Systems: Explaining Singapore's Education Success," *Comparative Education* 52, no. 4 (2016): 449–72, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26156736>.

²⁹ Government of India. "Prerna." Accessed November 30, 2024. <https://prerna.education.gov.in/#:~:text=Overview%3A%20Prerna%20is%20a%20transformative%20one%20week%20experiential,designed%20to%20empower%20the%20youth%20of%20the%20country..>

cycle of poverty by addressing interconnected challenges in education, health, and economic stability. South Korea's AI surveillance systems could also enhance accountability by detecting unusual behavior and ensuring safety in schools.

Holistic development, exemplified by Finland's education model (free education from primary to higher levels), coupled with public-private partnerships like the Akanksha Foundation³⁰, can drive sustainable progress in India's education sector. Replicating these models and solutions across India, tailored to local requirements, is essential.

Finally, increasing education expenditure to 6% of GDP, as recommended by the Kothari Commission, is critical for improving access, quality, and innovation. This alignment with global standards offers a sustainable path to educational equity in India.

The equitable delivery of quality education in India remains hindered by systemic challenges, despite constitutional provisions and various government initiatives. These challenges are particularly pronounced in three-tier cities, where poverty, insufficient infrastructure, and inadequate teacher training create formidable barriers to educational advancement. The problem is further exacerbated by parental illiteracy and limited career awareness, which restrict children's aspirations and opportunities. To address these pressing issues, urgent and targeted interventions are necessary. These include increasing public investment in education to 6% of GDP, as recommended by the Kothari Commission and NEP 2020, expanding access to both digital and physical infrastructure, particularly in rural and semi-urban areas, and implementing robust teacher training programs alongside fair compensation to attract and retain qualified educators. Additionally, strengthening community engagement to enhance parental involvement and awareness of diverse career paths is critical for creating an environment conducive to holistic educational development. By addressing these challenges, three-tier cities can transform into foundational hubs for advanced learning, bridging the rural-urban divide in education.

Conclusion:

India's education system holds immense potential to drive socio-economic progress, but systemic disparities must be addressed to realize this vision. Three-tier cities, often overlooked, can play a pivotal role in this transformation if provided with the necessary resources and infrastructure. Strengthening social security nets, enhancing teacher quality, and increasing public investment in education are critical steps toward achieving this goal. Moreover, fostering a culture that values education across all socio-economic strata is essential for sustainable progress. By prioritizing these measures, India can ensure equitable education for all, laying the foundation for a prosperous and inclusive future.

³⁰ The Akanksha Foundation. "The Akanksha Foundation." Accessed December 24, 2024. <https://www.akanksha.org/>.

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