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AN ANALYSIS UPON VARIOUS POLICIES TO ENHANCE FUNDAMENTAL ABILITIES OF LOW SCORING STUDENTS IN SECONDARY EDUCATION SCHOOLS IN INDIA

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An Analysis upon Various Policies to Enhance Fundamental Abilities of Low Scoring Students in Secondary Education Schools in India

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Abstract – Secondary education's contribution to economic growth, demonstrated high social benefits (particularly for girls), and support of democratic citizenship reinforce the need for increased public support at this level, particularly in light of the very large inequalities in access to secondary education, by income, gender, social group and geography.

The challenge is to dramatically improve access, equity and quality of secondary education simultaneously. Government has an important role to play in improving equity of secondary education. The bulk of the growth in secondary education over the last ten years has been financed by households for private schooling, such that the typical secondary school student is male, urban and middle class. Whether because of poverty, credit constraints, lack of information about perceived benefits of schooling, cultural norms or other factors, access to secondary education by girls and by children from scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, rural and poor households is significantly lower than state and national averages. Indicators of internal efficiency and quality of learning among these groups are also well below average. Targeted, supply- and demand side programs for these groups are called for.

The recently launched centrally sponsored scheme for secondary education, Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA), offers a strategic opportunity to improve access and equity; enhance quality, accountability and ability to measure learning outcomes; and promote standardization of curriculum and examinations across states. In addition, India's recent decision to participate in international assessments of student achievement is an extremely positive sign. Over time, such participation will provide an important objective baseline of students' cognitive skills and a future measure of success of the country's investments in elementary and secondary education.

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INTRODUCTION

Since Independence India has invested huge resources into the expansion and improvement of education in the country, in an effort to extend access from the elites to the masses. The first priority for the country has been the struggle to achieve Education for All at the elementary level, and rightly so; great strides have been made in this area over the past twenty years (and particularly over the last five years). The second priority has been to develop an elite higher education system, part of which is competitive at the global level, although much remains to be done at this level to improve access and quality. High-caliber graduates from the Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) and Management (IIMs) have succeeded in generating jobs, economic growth and new knowledge, and enabled India's integration into the global knowledge economy.

Now attention needs to shift to secondary education, to respond to rapidly increasing household and labor market demand for graduates with higher levels of knowledge and skills. Studies in other countries have repeatedly showed that expansion of secondary education is critical for sustained inclusive growth and poverty reduction. This study provides the institutional context which affects access to, and quality of, secondary education, and establishes the rationale for public funding and, under certain conditions, public provision, of secondary education.

Critical federal programs can help lower-skilled students access secondary and post-secondary education, but important policy choices that support their success and completion can be made at the state and local levels. State-level innovations can include: instructional strategies that provide a strong foundation in occupational skills; acceleration strategies that help students progress further and

more quickly in education and training programs in a shorter period of time.

In most states the first ten years of schooling are expected to provide general education without differentiation into arts, science, and vocational streams. Elementary education aims to develop literacy and numeracy, acquaintance with the social and physical environment, creative expression, and healthy living. Secondary education aims to develop the intellectual, social, and moral qualities essential for democratic citizenship, and to prepare young people for entry into the world of work or for continuation of academic pursuits (Secondary Education Commission Report, 1952; Report of Education Commission, 1964-66).

SECONDARY SCHOOLING RESULTS IN WITHIN YOUR ECONOMICAL IMPROVEMENT

In India, technological innovations, openness to world trade, and rapid economic growth have fuelled the demand for skilled workers. Recent analysis confirms that most of the employment growth over the past ten years has taken place in skilled services (information technology, financial services, telecommunications, tourism and retail) and skill intensive manufacturing, all of which require, at a minimum, a secondary education degree. Meanwhile, employment declined in low-skilled occupations, and stagnated in agriculture as agricultural value-added growth decelerated sharply in the second half of the 1990s. Even in rural areas, job prospects are better for the more qualified. Further, there is a rising overseas demand for highly skilled and semiskilled workers from India, most notably in the USA, UK, Southeast Asia, and the Gulf states.

However, employer surveys increasingly indicate that shortages of skilled workers constitute constraints to new private sector investment and growth. The Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) conducted a survey of Indian industry in July 2007, whose results clearly showed that “the shortage of skilled and semi-skilled… workers has emerged as a critical factor impacting the competitiveness of Indian industry”. The skills shortages appear when trying to expand production (fill new vacancies), upgrade existing employees to more technology-intensive production processes, or replace loss of employees to higher paying employers. Shortages were reported across many segments of industry, including oil and gas, biotechnology, food processing, IT, aviation, health care, construction, automotive, mining, textiles, plastics, finance, insurance, chemicals and pharmaceuticals. From industry’s perspective, a more skilled workforce (meaning workers with at least secondary education) is critical for increasing technical absorption, reducing rejection levels and enhancing the quality of products for both domestic and international markets.

LOW-SCORING STUDENTS : FINANCIAL OUTCOME

Educational attainment is one of the most important factors determining an individual’s well-being and that of their children. Moreover, since a parent’s level of education is a major factor in determining whether a child achieves academic success, the children of low-skilled students are also likely to bear the burden of their parents’ low educational attainment.8 An individual’s level of education also has remarkably stark consequences for health and longevity.

In the current fiscal crisis, there is also evidence that low levels of educational attainment may slow the nation’s economic recovery. Economists report that the increased demand for skilled workers combined with the dearth of workers with a postsecondary education may be a cause of lower productivity and high unemployment.

CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS: CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND

Children with special needs are another vulnerable group for whom educational attainment rates remain the lowest compared with all others. Disability legislation commits GoI to free schooling for CWSN to age 18, which includes secondary education, but this is simply not happening: virtually no children with disabilities attain secondary education. At the elementary level, SSA has a clear “zero rejection” policy, such that provisions must be made to offer education to all CWSN in environments which are best suited to their individual learning needs; the same policy does not exist at the secondary level. Achieving equitable access to secondary education, much less universal secondary education will require pro-active efforts on the government’s part on behalf of CWSN.

STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

Recent research on education quality and economic growth presents strong evidence that cognitive skills, as opposed to mere school enrollment or years of schooling completed, are powerfully related to individual earnings, income distribution, and economic growth. Indeed, there is credible evidence that this is a causal relationship, and that educational quality, measured by tests of cognitive skills, is much more important for economic growth than education quantity (years of schooling). Once quality has been established, keeping children in school longer pays off. But if quality is low, simply increasing years of schooling does not appear to be worthwhile.

This research clearly establishes the justification analysis of the quality of secondary education, and reinforces the importance of undertaking urgent measures to improve it. Given India’s curriculum, how do its students perform in comparison to those in other countries? India has not participated in any international studies to answer this question, so

another approach was used to calibrate the standard in two selected states. A survey of secondary schools in Rajasthan and Orissa administered in 2005 applied selected items from two separate mathematics tests in the Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) to 9th and 11th graders, respectively.

The sample contained 144 schools in Rajasthan and 109 schools in Orissa, stratified by rural and urban areas and by school types (government, private aided, and unaided). A total of 6,274 students in Grade 9 and 1,372 students in Grade 11 in these states were tested (see Wu, Goldschmidt, Boscardin, and Sankar, 2005 for details of the study).

Analysis of the case studies shows that roughly half of the variance in students' achievement is attributable to differences between schools. Put simply, school matters. This is a very positive sign, as it offers hope for public policy to improve learning outcomes by improving school related factors. Holding student and school characteristics constant, teacher characteristics (educational qualifications, expectations, perceived need for additional training) are influential determinants of outcomes. In addition, several teacher and school characteristics are significantly related to the gender gap in performance: girls taught by female mathematics teachers scored slightly higher than boys in the same classroom (Wu, Goldschmidt, Boscardin and Sankar, 2008). So-called "opportunities to learn" are another key determinant of educational outcomes: they arise from clear introduction to new concepts, effective teaching and use of questions to probe responses, and feedback on homework and examination. Private tutoring matters less to outcomes than might be expected. To improve students' achievement in secondary education, the case studies point to the importance of strengthening teachers' content knowledge and pedagogical skills through better teacher education and professional development.

A prerequisite for a reliable accountability system is the ability to generate indicators of student and school performance, which can measure either how students are performing at any point in time (e.g. on year-end examinations), or how their achievements are improving or deteriorating over time. Unfortunately, India lacks any national student achievement assessment capacity at the secondary level. The best way to measure the value added attained in a school or education system would be to track student progress over time while simultaneously accounting for students' initial achievement.

CONCLUSION

This research has attempted to present key trends in indicators of secondary education access and equity, and to highlight critical constraints which hinder their improvement. The overall picture which emerges is that the steady (if slow) historical expansion of secondary education is poised to accelerate over the next decade.

As the economy recovers, the vast and growing pool of students will need a greater foundation in secondary education. States can significantly improve the secondary education success of lower-skilled individuals by transforming the way education are delivered, drawing on strategies shown to succeed across multiple sites. States that develop a comprehensive plan addressing the unique needs of lower-level learners are likely to find that investing in these oft-overlooked students will reap rewards in the form of greater competitiveness, economic returns to the state, and higher quality of life.

A recent global study on secondary education (World Bank, 2005a) led to conclusions which are perfectly applicable to India today. India needs to develop "a mass secondary education that (a) is responsive to the country's socioeconomic needs and capabilities, (b) can respond effectively to increased and diversified demand by expanding access to secondary education, (c) is able to retain enrolled students in secondary education, and (d) helps students graduate with the knowledge, skills, attitudes and experiences needed to exercise their choices beyond secondary education."

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