

Secondary education in West Bengal: Prospects and Challenges

Tarak Nath Bhunia

Assistant Professor, Y.S. Palpara Mahavidyalaya, West Bengal, India

Abstract

Secondary education serves as a link between the elementary and higher education, and plays a very important role in this respect. This stage of education serves to move on higher secondary stage as well as to provide generic competencies that cut across various domains of knowledge as well as skills. It is upper primary and secondary level of education that is now in the focus. Over time, secondary schooling facilities improved to a significant level but still there are a few areas of concern like Schooling facilities to a large number of habitations were not available. Universalisation of Secondary Education gives opportunity, to move towards equity. The concept of 'common school' will be encouraged. If these values are to be established in the system, all types of schools, including unaided private schools will also contribute towards Universalisation of Secondary Education by ensuring adequate enrolments for the children from under privileged society and the children Below Poverty Line families. This paper also study Total Enrolment in the place of rural and urban areas, boys and girls Enrolment, GPI, GER, NER, Dropout rate among some years and some different issues for Enrolment of secondary education in West Bengal.

Keywords: secondary education, challenges issues, ensuring adequate enrolments

1. Introduction

While attributing the size of Indian population to be one of the major problems of the country's developmental prospects, observers generally tend to overlook the structure of our population which, with a huge membership of young people, has all the potential of reversing the challenge of so called population growth. That about a third of our population belongs to the age group of 0-14 is certainly an asset for the country, for, it is this population that is going to take up the task of the country's enhancement to the future. However as, to how much this task could be accomplished, depends much on the country's readiness to empower this population with educational achievements. The country has of late shown some major commitments towards universal elementary education, particularly through the enactment of the Children's Right to Free and Compulsory Education, and it would certainly have impact on this population readying for acquiring secondary education. They are not mere common citizens of the country; they bear the load of expectations on their shoulders to drive the nation towards a better place to live in. Hence and here, arises a crucially important question: "Is this population provided with required opportunities to doing so?" In other words, "What is the status of delivery of secondary education in the country?"

Answer to this question is central not only to the development of secondary education alone, but also to the delivery of elementary education, as the actual opportunity of future progress has overarching impact on the status of elementary education. Studies suggest that actual prospect of further achievement of education-from primary to upper primary and upper primary to secondary-has a clear motivational impact on the parents and children towards acquiring school education. This context adds urgency to making a serious inquiry into the delivery of secondary education in the country, and this report is an attempt to come to term with this demand. While practical constraints confine

the geographical boundaries of the report to one of the states of India, that is West Bengal, the findings are expected to contribute substantially to the body of knowledge on educational delivery in the country. Also the comparisons made with other states would offer some commonalities across the states and, thus, the suggestions emerged here should have some general applicability for the country as a whole. In doing so, this report while looking at the various recommendations made by different commissions and the Rashtriya Madhyamik Siksha Abhiyan (RMSA) and other secondary literature pertaining to the delivery of secondary education, it also makes a thorough examination of the details related to access, enrolment, teaching-learning and results of the secondary students in various board examinations and the structures of administration. Before proceeding to the details of the outcomes of the exercise involved in the inquiry, we would briefly present here a review of existing notions pertaining to the role of secondary education. Diverse as they are it is important to keep the views in account in order to develop a clearer understanding of the issue as they form the theoretical basis of and guiding principles for public policies concerning the delivery of secondary education.

2. Some Different Issues of secondary education in West Bengal

- The Central Advisory Board for Education (CABE) observed that those who work with their hands and produce significant wealth are denied access to formal education, while those who have access to formal education not only denigrate productive manual work but also lack the necessary skills for the same
- Contrary to the expectations, participation of youths in vocational courses in the country is found to be poor; sadly, girls lag far behind in this respect both quantitatively as well as qualitatively.

- Secondary education has not received much attention from the policy makers. It is only recently, following the wide expansion of elementary education resulting in a higher demand for secondary education, that expenditure on the secondary education has started increasing at a higher rate
- Though 80 percent of secondary students pursue free education against 48 percent in the country, expenditure in private tuition in general in West Bengal is very high, that make the average per capita expenditure in secondary education in the state 44 percent higher than the national average.
- Overall participation in secondary education has increased in recent years though a huge amount of enrolment is wasted during the transition from standard 5 to 6 and from standard 9 to 10, with better proportion of girls participating in such examination. The overall results have also improved during the same period.
- Participation in elementary education has increased manifold in recent years, resulting to higher enrolment in secondary level; the situation therefore demands extra infrastructural inputs and resources.
- A comparison with 2nd with current data shows significant expansion of opportunities of secondary education as reflected in higher enrolment: while gross enrolment in class 1 has increased by 36% overtime, enrolment in class 10 has increased by 103% during the same period.
- Lower ratio of upper primary schools to that of primary schools is another concern, as a large portion of students of upper primary level dropout due to non-availability of schools and of facilities therein. The rural areas of the state lack upper primary as well as secondary schools in a far greater extent compared to the urban areas.
- Both district-wise PTR and SCR are directly related to average district-wise enrolment – the higher the enrolment is the higher the SCR and PTR are. The correlation coefficient of district-wise average enrolment with average PTR is 0.824428 and that with SCR is 0.801422
- The average PTR in secondary section is 35.2, marginally above the RMSA recommendation, though the inter-district variation is very high. Darjiling with 19.7 has lowest PTR, and neighbouring district of Jalpaiguri has highest PTR of 65.9. Average PTR in rural secondary sections is 38.5 while the same in urban secondary sections is 26.9
- While share of female teacher in secondary level is 35.4 percent in the state, their deployment remain highly skewed. Rural secondary schools have on average 29.2 percent female teachers against 51.4 percent in urban secondary schools. The Scheme of Boarding and Hostel Facilities for Girl students of secondary and Higher Secondary schools provides for financial assistance to voluntary organizations for running hostels for girl students of secondary and higher secondary schools. Preference is given to organizations having hostels in Educationally Backward Districts, particularly those which are predominantly inhabited by SCs and STs and educationally backward minorities.
- The Scheme of Integrated Education for Disabled Children aims to integrate children and youth with moderate disabilities in the normal school system. The Scheme provides 100% financial assistance to State/UT governments and NGOs under various components for the education of children suffering from mild to moderate disabilities in normal schools. The components include allowances for books and stationary, uniform, transport, and escort, readers for blind children, equipment etc., and salary of teachers recruited for teaching the disabled children.
- The Scheme of Information and Communication Technology (ICT@ schools) was launched by merging the erstwhile schemes of Educational Technology and Computer Literacy and Studies in schools, which works as a window of opportunity to the learners in the schools of west Bengal to bridge the digital divide.
- Quality Improvement in Schools is a centrally sponsored scheme and is an amalgamation of the schemes of improvement in science education, Mathematics Olympiads, Environmental Orientation, Promotion of Yoga and Population education and has a new component of Educational Libraries. Under this scheme, State governments and registered societies are given grants for the specified activities under each of the erstwhile programme.
- In order to provide for diversification of educational opportunities so as to enhance individual employability, reduce the mismatch between demand and supply of skilled manpower and provide an alternative for those pursuing higher education, the centrally sponsored scheme of Vocationalisation of secondary education was launched in 1988. It was revised in 1992-93 and now provides for financial assistance to the States to set up an administrative structure, conduct area-specific vocational surveys, prepare curricula, textbooks, workbooks, curriculum guides, training manuals, teachers training programmer than those in the rural secondary school.
- There is evidence of serious lack of specialized teachers for science subjects. In absence of qualified teachers, general teachers are conducting science classes
- Only 821 (8.5%) secondary schools have ICT laboratory in them as against 3943 (40.7%) schools approved for the same by the year 2010-11, implying that only around 21 percent of plan has materialized
- There are locational (Rural/Urban) disadvantage associated with the availability of Science Laboratories, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Laboratory, Computer Aided Learning (CAL) Laboratory, Libraries and other amenities. Availability of such facilities varied according to various managements of schools.
- Most of schools which have such facilities are schools with higher secondary section
- Only 15.9 percent of secondary schools have at least one functional computer
- Much is yet to be done to make the schools compliant with even the most pragmatic recommendations related to basic amenities like water, electricity, toilets, playground, Head Teachers room, availability of hostel etc.

- Status of facilities like laboratories, libraries, classrooms etc. is insufficient; facilities related to co-curricular activities and availability of hostels is much poor than expected. While maintenance of various laboratory equipment's, building etc. is associated with recurring expenditure, in absence of grants for such recurring expenditure, available facilities are depleting.
- Two percent of total secondary schools have electricity but not functional, 23.3 percent of the schools with pucca boundary wall reported the same to be broken. Similar situation is persisting in case of toilets as around 20 percent of toilets are non-functional.
- Though it is evident that special care has been taken to distribute larger portion of grants under the RMSA in educationally backward regions of the state, there remained much disparity in this regard
- Though state budget expenditure on education in general and on secondary education in particular has increased in years, non-plan expenditure in the state is much higher compared to other states.
- Non-plan expenditure on important heads like Direction, Inspection, Administration and even Teachers Training has declined in consecutive budgets.

3. Different Enrolment Issues in Secondary Education in West Bengal

The preceding decade has seen substantial advancement in access to elementary education in West Bengal, through establishment of new schools, improvement in infrastructural provisions – be it classrooms or other amenities under the Sarva Siksha Abhiyan – though the long pending issues of equity in terms of quality as well as quantity of such provisions persists till today; both enrolment and attendance has also increased as various incentives are provided to the socially backward section of society and particularly to the

girls, the transition and retention rates also improved due to no detention policy in the primary section in the state. There are of course doubts prevailing regarding the whole process to ensure access itself as the process is plagued by its input focussed and not outcome oriented approach. Nevertheless, as a result of huge effort to universalise elementary education and its success, large section of the young children are becoming eligible for secondary education, the secondary school system appears to be unprepared for. The ever growing pressure on the secondary education system in the country has been recognised in various recent reports by private institutions as well as the government commissions. The focus on elementary education policy and investment in the last five years, leading to higher enrolment rates and the automatic promotion under the Continuous Comprehensive Evaluation (CCE) scheme, have added pressure to an already stressed secondary education system. The demand for secondary education is also growing in view of the high returns from secondary education, which are even more than returns from higher education. The growing number of children in the elementary school system is bringing pressure to bear on the need for further education. Apart from the fact, that more and more children are becoming eligible for secondary education due to wide participation of children in the elementary education, there are greater opportunities for such children for higher education, once they pass through the secondary level.

Table 1 shows the total enrolment including primary with upper primary, secondary and higher secondary in different key data. The value of total enrolment gradually increases from 2012-13 to 2015-16. The value of total enrolment in the year of 2015-16 is 4396046. And Table 1 also shows the enrolment in school areas and rural and urban areas.

Table 1

Key Data	Total Value (Pri with U.P & Sec and Hr. Sec)			
	2015-16	2014-15	2013-14	2012-13
Total School	10194	10027	9913	9773
Schools: Rural Areas	7409	7277	7204	7062
Schools: Urban Areas	2784	2749	2708	2710
Total Enrolment	4396046	4227717	4069276	3894017
Enrolment: Rural Areas	3357819	3233429	3098729	2920607
Enrolment: Urban Areas	1038227	994288	970547	971969

Source: www.udise.in

Table No. 2 shows the different aspect of enrolment in secondary education such as year wise boys and girls enrolment, Gender Parity Index(GPI), Gross Enrolment ratio(GER),Net Enrolment Ratio (NER) and also percentage

of Drop Out rate also. Total highest Enrolment in the year of 2015-16 including boys and girls of secondary education is 2759187.

Table 2

Year	Enrolment in Secondary Education						
	Boys	Girls	Total	GPI	GER	NER	Drop Out
2010-11	1076690	1129729	2206419	1.05	63.26	40.28	-----
2012-13	1144103	1270635	2414738	1.11	64.44	40.46	-----
2013-14	1187576	1346616	2534192	1.13	74.82	41.66	17.30
2014-15	1218120	1412770	2630890	1.16	-----	-----	16.61
2015-16	1267837	1491350	2759187	1.18	-----	-----	17.80

Source: www.udise.in

4. Conclusion

Since free and compulsory education to all children up to the age fourteen is the Constitutional commitment in India, all efforts in the past were focused on achieving the goal of universal elementary education. It is upper primary and secondary level of education that is now in the focus. Over time, secondary schooling facilities improved to a significant level but still there are a few areas of concern like Schooling facilities to a large number of habitations were not available. Government schools had lower percentage of buildings than the schools under the private managements. So far as the investment on education is considered, secondary education has never been the priority area of investment. In order to meet the challenge of Universalisation of Secondary Education, there is a need for a paradigm shift in the conceptual design of secondary education. The guiding principles in this regard are; Universal Access, Equality and Social Justice, Relevance and Development and Curricular and Structural Aspects. Universalisation of Secondary Education gives opportunity, to move towards equity. The concept of common school will be encouraged. If these values are to be established in the system, all types of schools, including unaided private schools will also contribute towards Universalisation of Secondary Education by ensuring adequate enrolments for the children from under privileged society and the children Below Poverty Line families.

5. References

1. Abbasi P. Elementary School Facilities in India and Iran, Edutracks, 2004.
2. Carlson S. Secondary Education in India: Universalizing Opportunity. Washington, DC: Human Development Unit, South Asia Region, World Bank, 2009.
3. Central Advisory Board of Education Universalisation of Secondary Education'. Report of the Central Advisory Board of Education Committee, 2005.
4. Clarke, Prema. Teaching and Learning: The culture of pedagogy. New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2001.
5. Clarke, Prema and Fuller, Bruce. Life in the Indian classroom: The influence of culture and caste. Indian Educational Review, 1997; 32(2):47-68.
6. Duraisamy P. Subramanian TP, The relative effectiveness of public and private higher secondary schools in an urban centre in India. Journal of Educational Planning and Administration, 1999; 13(1):37-52.
7. Godo, Yoshihasa. Accumulation of education in modern economic growth: A comparative study between Korea, Japan and USA. Paper presented at the HDNED, 2002.
8. Hemchand TK. Problems of Educational Administration. 2008.
9. Khanna SD, Saxena VK, Lamba TP, Murthy V. Current Problems of Indian Education. 2003.
10. Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD). Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan. Department of School Education.
11. Mukhopadhyay, Sudesh and Anil Kumar K. 2001. Quality profiles of secondary schools. New Delhi: National Institute for Educational Planning and Administration.

12. National University for Education Planning and Administration. Focus Secondary Education. Report of the National Conference, February, New Delhi, 2001.