

QUALITY OF SECONDARY EDUCATION

According to the Annual Status of Education Report released in 2017, approximately 25 percent of the children surveyed between ages 14-18 were unable to read basic text fluently in their own language. Further, the school dropout rate is highest at the secondary level at 17.06 percent according to 2014-15 data.

Secondary school students face a variety of challenges, including 1) the inability to manage the curriculum due to previous learning gaps and 2) increased pressure of board exams.

STUDENT-FACING CHALLENGES

LEARNING GAPS FROM ELEMENTARY EDUCATION

Many of the students at the secondary level lag behind on elementary-level competencies. For example, the 2017 ASER report found that only 43 percent of the children surveyed at the secondary level were able to perform basic arithmetic operations such as division. This presents a huge learning gap that is only intensified when advanced curriculums are introduced in secondary school in preparation for the board exams. Students are left behind from day one, and don't have the opportunity for one-on-one instruction to catch up, and just fall further and further behind.

HIGH STAKES ASSOCIATED WITH BOARD EXAMINATIONS

Board examination results continue to be the metric of success in secondary education in India given that performance on these exams determines higher education and career choices for most students. However, the exams themselves are tailored towards rote-based learning and do not correlate with the competency-based learning of the elementary grades.

As a welcome shift, India has recently announced its participation in PISA 2021. Measuring ourselves against global benchmarks is a great first step towards reforming our education systems. However, the testing approaches of these exams are very different from the board exams in India and tend to have a heavier emphasis on conceptual learning. While state and central government board examination systems themselves must undergo reform, they continue to remain the yardstick of success in the short term. Until that changes, teaching pedagogies will need to balance conceptual learning with board exam success.

SCHOOL-FACING CHALLENGES

In addition, schools themselves are faced with several issues that affect the quality of the education they provide, such as 1) a shortage of skilled teachers, 2) lack of IT infrastructure, and 3) an absence of life skills training for students in this age range.

TEACHER AVAILABILITY AND COMPETENCY

According to findings from the All India Survey of Higher Education (AISHE) released in July of 2019, substantial teacher posts remained vacant: 21.6 percent of sanctioned posts for grades IX and X and 26.5 percent of posts for grades XI and XII. Filling these teacher vacancies across the country has been particularly difficult due to the subject specialisations required at the secondary level. Further, improving quality and building expertise among 'in-service' teachers is also a major challenge in secondary schools. The institutional structures needed in schools to help teachers are sorely lacking and there is very little coordination across primary, secondary, and teacher education programmes.

POOR IT INFRASTRUCTURE

Computer aided learning could be a useful teacher tool, given low teacher competency and availability. The secondary schools are not equipped with adequate IT infrastructure, namely adequate number of computers, projectors, power backups and internet connectivity. Available EdTech solutions are usually in English language and are not designed for students coming from low income backgrounds.

ABSENCE OF LIFE SKILLS TRAINING

Adolescent kids need support with life skills in various areas. However, our school system does not provide any support for school teachers to fill these gaps. Teachers struggle with dealing with these issues in their classrooms, further leading to poor academic performance.