

Right to Education Act and Public-Private Partnership

PANKAJ S JAIN, RAVINDRA H DHOLAKIA

The authors of "Feasibility of Implementation of Right to Education Act" (EPW, 20 June 2009) respond to the critique of their argument by Padma M Sarangapani (EPW, 24 October 2009) and Vimala Ramachandran (EPW, 11 July 2009).

Two comments on our article ("Feasibility of Implementation of Right to Education Act", EPW, 20 June 2009) by Padma M Sarangapani (EPW, 24 October 2009) and Vimala Ramachandran (11 July 2009) make similar points. Some other scholars, responding directly to us, supported our arguments and provided additional evidences from their field experience.

None of the critiques has questioned the basic validity of our conclusion that not even an allocation of 6% of the gross domestic product (GDP) as education budget would be able to provide universal school education coverage through government schools. This is due to the high cost component of teachers' salaries. Further, both we and our critics agree that the goal of universal school coverage is much too important to be given up. Therefore, either a satisfactory school education system at an affordable cost has to be devised, or the budget for education has to go significantly beyond 6% of the GDP if the government school system is to be used as the main instrument of universal schooling. Our critics, thus, do not contest this central argument. In fact, both of them plead for an increase in public spending to whatever level is required to ensure universal primary education through government schools with teachers getting salaries according to the Sixth Pay Commission scales.

Although both Ramachandran and Sarangapani have not calculated the proportion of the GDP that the government would require to spend if their suggestion is followed, the data and method given in our article calculates it to 22 to 23% of the GDP! In 2006-07, on the other hand, the total budget as percentage of GDP on all sectors together for combined budgets of central and state governments was 27%. Thus, if we accept their recommendation, keeping the percentage

allocation of GDP on all other sectors constant, we would be required to have a budget of 44 to 45% of the GDP. Therefore, either we must have a fiscal deficit of 22% of the GDP or increase the tax revenues by more than double. We consider this to be non-feasible.

Low Teacher Salaries

The key point of disagreement, however, lies in the recommendation that we have proposed as the feasible solution, viz, the involvement of non-government schools with teachers being paid low salaries.

Sarangapani supports reliance on the government school system with teachers being paid high regular scale salaries, as the only instrumentality of universal school education. According to her, if this entails allocating more than 6% of the GDP towards education, so be it. She opposes even the partial involvement of private schools, in the public-private partnership (PPP) mode, as the instrument of government policy for ensuring universal school education of the minimal desired quality.

She does this by contesting our evidence that low cost privately managed schools can provide education of at least comparable, or better, quality and can become a part of national policy for ensuring universal school coverage within a budgetary allocation of 6% of the GDP. This is the worldwide norm and recommended by various official committees and education activists. Her refutation of our supportive evidences needs careful scrutiny.

Of the three illustrative examples in support of our suggestion, the first, Gyan Shala, invites Sarangapani's rejection on grounds of being non-formal. But this programme's curriculum follows the state/national norms, and, in fact, is more advanced. It has been assessed by reputed and credible agencies like Educational Initiative (EI) and Poverty Action Lab research unit of MIT, US, (Linden 2008) to show that the children perform far better, by a margin of 50-100%, compared to their counterparts in government city schools on mathematics and language competencies. And this despite the fact that the programme, at present, costs less than one-tenth of the

Pankaj S Jain (pjain2002@yahoo.com) is at Gyan Shala, Ahmedabad and Ravindra H Dholakia (rdholakia@iimahd.ernet.in) is with the Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad.

Table 1: Infrastructure and Manpower Availability in Primary Schools in Rural Areas

	Ownership	Rajasthan	Andhra Pradesh	Karnataka	Tamil Nadu
Infrastructure					
1 No of classrooms per school	Government	3	4	5	4
	Private	4	9	9	7
2 Schools without toilets (% of total)	Government	11	31	22	25
	Private	10	0	8	0
3 Desks or benches per school	Government	4	13	19	13
	Private	2	50	69	26
4 Chairs per school	Government	8	7	12	6
	Private	8	13	32	16
5 Blackboards per school	Government	9	5	6	7
	Private	9	9	10	10
Manpower					
6 Teachers per school	Government	3	4		4
	Private	6	9	12	7
7 Qualified teachers per school	Government	3	4	7	4
	Private	2	7	11	7
8 Teachers staying in the same village per school	Government	2	1	1	1
	Private	4	5	7	3

Source: Bajpai, Dholakia and Sachs (2006, 2008a and 2008b).

cost incurred by government schools in the same city. The programme has been visited by many colleagues of Sarangapani, who too, like her, do not support non-formal education in principle, but would still testify that learning processes and environment and development opportunities in Gyan Shala are in no way worse than those in government schools. Sarangapani acknowledges that Gyan Shala probably delivers good education, even with non-formal teachers.

Sarangapani is very harsh on the conclusion of Tooley et al (2007) cited by us. She says that this paper should not be taken as a credible evidence of the performance of privately managed schools. We have carefully gone through Tooley et al's (2007) study, and find that its main conclusion, i e, low cost private schools covered in the study lead to better learning outcomes than comparable government schools, is valid. Research in social sciences rarely provides "uncontestable universal proof" of the type feasible in pure sciences, so Sarangapani can point to some of its limitations, but the methodology and evidence used by Tooley et al, no doubt, stand the test of quality social science research. Their paper has been published in *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, a refereed and reputed journal, and was earlier included in England's National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) survey published in the *Oxford Review of Education*.

Sarangapani disregards our reference to studies by Bajpai, Dholakia and Sachs (2005, 2006, 2008a and b), that rely on very large samples from rural areas in states like Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. These studies too provide evidence of private schools delivering comparable or better education than that imparted by government schools at a significantly lower cost. They also found multiple classes sitting simultaneously in one classroom in most of the rural government schools but very rarely saw this in any private or non-government schools in all the states they visited. Private schools were also found to be better on counts like number of qualified teachers, teachers residing in the same village, provision of toilets, benches, blackboards, chairs and classrooms. The infrastructure certainly shapes the quality of education imparted (Table 1).

Private vs Government

There, indeed, exists highly credible and considerable evidence that private schools in India are capable of providing

education of better quality than that given by most government schools and at a fraction of the cost accruing to the latter. Where the quality of education in private schools is low, the costs are also found to be as low as Rs 50-150 per month, thus explaining the poor quality. Most private schools, whose cost/fees exceed Rs 300 per month which is less than half of the government school cost, would definitely outdo government schools in terms of quality. On the other hand, it is interesting to note that Sarangapani provides absolutely no evidence to show that government schools are capable of providing or are providing the required quality of education that would justify the claim that they can be the only instrument of policy to meet national educational goals.

We, like Sarangapani, recognise that the measurable learning attainments in the curriculum subjects do not fully capture the totality of learning experience or lack of it that takes place in a school environment. Therefore, policymakers do need to take into account the hard-to-measure aspects like "development opportunities, and equality" in consideration, but there is not even an indicative evidence to make a case in favour of government schools on such aspects.

Sarangapani, and others, are troubled by the suggestion that teachers should be paid salaries lower than that recommended by the Sixth Pay Commission. They disregard the fact that the officially recommended level of schoolteacher salary in India is almost 400% higher than in most countries that have succeeded in achieving universal schooling, including most western countries and China, where schoolteacher salary ranges 1.2 to 2 times the nation's per capita GDP. The Sixth Pay Commission, on the other hand, has pegged it at around seven times India's per capita income (Jain 2009) (see Table 2 for details). Of course the government cannot

Table 2: Per Capita GDP and Primary Teacher Salaries in Selected Countries

	US	UK	Canada	India	Hong Kong	Singapore	Philippines
Per capita GDP#	39,883	35,485 (0.49910)	30,586 (1.0593)	640 (40.73)	23,684 (7.817)	25,191 (1.153)	1,036 (46.441)
Annual teacher salary@	US\$ 40,000 (1.1)	British £ 35,000 (<1.0)	Canada \$ 45,000 (1.53)	Rs 1,85,000 (7.0)	HK \$ 1,92,000 (1.05)	S\$ 39,000 (1.34)	Peso 96,000 (2.0)

The per capita annual GDP is given in US\$. The number in parenthesis is value of US\$ in local currency (Source: *World Development Report 2006*, UNDP).

@ The teacher salary is given in local currencies. The number in parenthesis is the multiple by which primary teacher salary exceeds per capita GDP (Source: Authors' study).

pay its teachers less than what it pays its employees in the other similar ranking cadres. But if it wishes to meet its obligation of universal provision of schooling, then the only way out is to combine government schools with PPP schools that cost much lower.

It may be natural for the teachers' unions to seek more than 6% of GDP as the education budget in order to ensure that teachers are better paid, but the argument that it will help in better educating children, is not tenable. As various studies have shown, a majority of the government-run schools do not deserve to be the exclusive instrument of universal school education for India's children. A combination of government schools and private schools, held accountable under the PPP mode, is a superior alternative.

We are not making a case for the voucher scheme wherein government funds education in private schools. We are arguing

for the involvement of privately managed schools in the PPP mode, where they are held accountable for the results as per socially approved criterion. Gyan Shala's agreements with the Gujarat and Bihar governments are examples of this, with provision of project outcome assessment by the government-appointed independent assessing organisations. Tooley et al's study and the studies by Bajpai, Dholakia and Sachs are cited in our article to indicate that, besides Gyan Shala, there are numerous private school organisations that are technically capable of doing that.

REFERENCES

- Bajpai, Nirupam, R H Dholakia and D Sachs Jaffery (2005): "Scaling Up Primary Education Services in Rural India", CGSD, Working Paper No 28, The Earth Institute (New York: Columbia University).
- (2006): "Scaling Up Primary Education Services in Rural Rajasthan", CGSD, Working Paper No 31, The Earth Institute (New York: Columbia University).

- (2008a): "Scaling Up Primary Education Services in Rural India, Case Studies of Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka", CGSD, Working Paper No 28, The Earth Institute (New York: Columbia University).
- (2008b): "Scaling Up Primary Education Services in Rural Tamil Nadu: Public Investment Requirements and Reforms", CGSD, Working Paper No 28, The Earth Institute (New York: Columbia University).

Jain, Pankaj (2009): "Education Budget Allocation and National Education Goals: Implications for Teacher Salary Level", A Paper presented at the International Conference of Indian Academy of Social Sciences, held at Homi Bhabha Centre of Science Education, Mumbai in December 2009, to be published in the forthcoming conference proceedings.

Linden, L Leigh (2008): "Complement or Substitute? The Effect of Technology on Student Achievement in India", World Bank, Infodiv Working Paper No 17.

Tooley, James, Pauline Dixon, Yarim Shamsan and Ian Schagen (2009): "The Relative Quality and Cost-effectiveness of Private and Public Schools for Low-Income Families: A Case Study in a Developing Country", *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, Vol 20, 4, 1-28.

Tooley, James, Dixon, Pauline and S V Gomathi (2007): "Private Schools and the Millennium Development Goal of Universal Primary Education: A Census and Comparative Survey in Hyderabad, India", *Oxford Review of Education*, 33(5), 539-60.

Economic&PoliticalWEEKLY

SPECIAL ISSUE

INTER AND INTRA-STATE DISPARITIES

June 27, 2009

Implications of Regional Disparity for Finance Commission Devolutions

–Chirashree Das Gupta

Some Normatively Relevant Aspects of Inter-State and Intra-State Disparities

–Achin Chakraborty

Political Implications of Inter-State Disparity

–Prabhat Prasad Ghosh, Chirashree Das Gupta

Intra-State Economic Disparities: Karnataka and Maharashtra

–M H Suryanarayana

Intra-State Disparities in Gujarat, Haryana, Kerala, Orissa and Punjab

–Amaresh Dubey

Intra-State Disparity in Government Expenditure: An Analysis

–Govind Bhattacharya

An Investigation into the Inter-District Disparity in West Bengal, 1991-2005

–Ajitava Raychaudhuri, Sushil K R Haldar

Intra-Regional Disparities, Inequality and Poverty in Uttar Pradesh

–D M Diwakar

Intra-Regional Inequality and the Role of Public Policy: Lessons Learnt from Kerala

–Pinaki Chakraborty

For copies write to:

Circulation Manager,

Economic and Political Weekly,

320-321, A to Z Industrial Estate, Ganpatrao Kadam Marg,

Lower Parel, Mumbai 400 013.

email: circulation@epw.in