

Current Challenges of Indian Education System

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ABSTRACT

India's education system turns out millions of graduates each year, many skilled in IT and engineering. The first part of this paper provides a historical perspective on the development of the education system in India, highlighting the changing emphases within government policy.

Keyword: India, Education, Skill, Economic, System.

INTRODUCTION:

India's education system turns out millions of graduates each year, many skilled in IT and engineering. This manpower advantage underpins India's recent economic advances, but masks deep-seated problems within India's education system. While India's demographics are generally perceived to give it an edge over other countries' economies (India will have a youthful population when other countries have ageing populations), if this advantage is restricted to small, highly educated elite, the domestic political ramifications could be severe. Indian governments have seen education as a crucial development tool. The first part of this paper provides a historical perspective on the development of the education system in India, highlighting the changing emphases within government policy. Since Independence, the education policies of successive governments have built on the substantial legacies of the Nehruvian period, targeting the core themes of plurality and secularism, with a focus on excellence in higher education, and inclusiveness at all levels. In reaching these goals, the issue of funding has become problematic; governments have promised to increase state spending while realizing the economic potential of bringing in private-sector financial support.

The need for change: the National Policy on Education

- *Operation Blackboard (1987-8)*
- *Restructuring and Reorganization of Teacher Education (1987)*
- *Minimum Levels of Learning (1991)*
- *National Programme for Nutritional Support to Primary Education (1995)*
- *District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) (1993)*
- *Movement to Educate All (2000)*
- *Fundamental Right (2001)*

Challenge 1: Promote students self-determination and self-advocacy

Self-determination is a concept reflecting the belief that all individuals have the right to direct their own lives. Students who have self-determination skills are more likely to be successful in making the transition to adulthood, including employment and community independence.

Parents, educators, and researchers agree on the need to promote self-determination, self-advocacy, and student-centered planning. Self-determination, the combination of skills, knowledge, and beliefs that enable a person to engage in goal-directed, self-regulated, autonomous behavior, has become an important part of special education and related services provided to individuals with disabilities. Self-determination skills include self-advocacy, social skills, organizational skills, community and peer connection, communication, conflict resolution, career skill building, career development and computer/technological competency. Research has found that helping students acquire and exercise self-determination skills is a strategy that leads to more positive educational outcomes. A common element of many exemplary self-determination programs is the presence of an individual with a philosophy, and the accompanying motivation, to see self-determination practices implemented or enhanced in his or her school or district.

I would suggest that schools seeking to encourage self-determination and positive post-school outcomes for students with disabilities should

- ❖ Empower parents as partners in promoting self-determination and career development skills
- ❖ Increase students' awareness of their disability and needed accommodations

- ❖ Offer credit-bearing classes in self-determination and careers
- ❖ Teach and reinforce students' internal locus of control
- ❖ Develop self-advocacy skills and support student application of these skills
- ❖ infuse self-determination and career development skills in the general education curriculum
- ❖ Develop and implement work-based learning programs for all students.

Recommendations:

- Begin self-determination instruction early in the elementary grades.
- Intensify teaching of specific self-determination skills during high school.
- Support students' development and use of self-advocacy skills, and teach students to develop an internal locus of control.
- Make work-based learning, self-directed learning, and career exploration opportunities available to all students.
- Incorporate self-determination and career development skills in the general education curriculum.
- Promote and support student-centered and student-run IEP meetings.

Challenge 2: Ensure students have access to the general education curriculum

To prosper and gain the knowledge and skills needed for success in a variety of settings, students with disabilities must have more than mere access to school buildings and placement in the least restrictive environment; they must have access to educational curriculum and instruction designed to prepare them for life in the 21st century. This assumption was the basis that states must provide students with disabilities access to the general education curriculum, including the identification of performance goals and indicators for these students; definition of how access to the general curriculum is provided; participation in general or alternate assessments; and public reporting of assessment results. All of these requirements are embedded within a context of standards-based education, in which standards for what students should know and be able to do are defined at the state level, appropriate standards-based education is provided, and success in meeting expectations is measured through large-scale assessment systems.

Providing meaningful access to the general curriculum requires a multifaceted approach. Appropriate instructional accommodations constitute one piece of this picture. Other elements include the specification of curriculum domains, time allocation, and decisions about

what to include or exclude. The process of specifying the curriculum in a subject matter domain requires cataloging the various types of information included in the domain (facts, concepts, principles, and procedures) and setting priorities with respect to outcomes.

Allocation of time for instruction should be based on the priorities that have been established. Decisions about what to include or exclude in curriculum should allow for adequate breadth (or scope) of coverage, while maintaining enough depth to assure that students are learning the material.

Research indicates that a variety of instructional approaches can be used to increase access to the general curriculum and standards-based instruction. Approaches such as differentiated instruction, strategy instruction, textbook organization, and technology use are showing that access to the curriculum can be substantially improved, with positive outcomes for students with disabilities.

Recommendations Regarding Challenge:

Use universal design to make classrooms, curriculum, and assessments usable by the largest number of students possible without the need for additional accommodations or modifications.

- Provide appropriate instructional accommodations for students.
- Provide instructional modifications only when necessary.
- Clearly specify the subject matter domain (facts, concepts, principles, and procedures) and scope of the curriculum.
- Set priorities for outcomes, and allocate instructional time based on these priorities.
- Use instructional approaches that have been shown to promote positive outcomes for students with disabilities.

Challenge 3: Increase the school completion rates of students with disabilities

Dropping out of school is one of the most serious and pervasive problems facing special education programs nationally. The National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO) found that approximately 36% exited school by dropping out. The NSSO's data also revealed that risk factors such as ethnicity and family income are related to dropout rates, and that some groups of special education students are more apt to drop out than others. Of youth with disabilities who do not complete school, the highest proportions are students with learning disabilities (32%), and students with emotional/behavioral disabilities.

National data indicate that there has been some improvement in the overall graduation rate of students

with disabilities in India. Between the 1995-96 and 1999-2000 school years, the percentage of youth with disabilities graduating with regular diplomas, as reported by states, grew from 52.6% to 56.2%. During the same period, the percentage of students with disabilities reported as having dropped out of school declined from 34.1% to 29.4%. While these data are encouraging, the dropout rate for students with disabilities still remains twice that of students without disabilities.

Concern about the dropout problem is increasing because of state and local special education agencies' experiences with high-stakes accountability in the context of standards-based reform. State and local school districts have identified what students should know and be able to do, and have implemented assessments to ensure that students have attained the identified knowledge and skills. Large numbers of students, however, are not faring well on these assessments. For youth with disabilities, several factors beyond academic achievement affect their performance on these tests, including accurate identification of the disability, provision of needed accommodations, and educational supports that make learning possible regardless of disability-related factors. The provision of accommodations is of particular importance in helping to ensure students' success within state standards and reform initiatives.

Recommendations Regarding Challenge:

- Determine the incentives and methods needed to fully implement evidence-based models, practices, and strategies within state and local school district programs.
- Conduct research to demonstrate and validate new dropout prevention and intervention strategies that work with high-risk groups of students, such as students with emotional/behavioral disabilities, minority students, and students living in poverty.
- Investigate and share information about the impact of new accountability forces (e.g., high-stakes testing, more stringent graduation requirements, and varied diploma options) on the exit status and school completion of youth with disabilities.
- Develop methods and procedures to identify, document, and widely disseminate research-based information on best practices in dropout prevention and intervention.

Challenge 4: Make high school graduation decisions based on meaningful indicators of students' learning and skills and clarify the implications of different diploma options for students with disabilities

Currently, 27 states have opted to require that students pass state and/or local exit exams to receive a standard high school diploma. This practice has been increasing

since the mid-1990s. States may also require any combination of these. Diversity in graduation requirements is complicated further by an increasingly diverse set of possible diploma options. In addition to the standard high school diploma, options now include special education diplomas, certificates of completion, occupational diplomas, and others.

Many states have gone to great lengths to improve the proportion of students with disabilities passing state exit exams and meeting other requirements for graduation. Strategies have included grade-level retention, specialized tutoring and instruction during the school day and after school, and weekend or summer tutoring programs. While these may be viewed as appropriate interventions and strategies, there is little research evidence to suggest that this is the case. Persuasive evidence indicates, for example, that repeating a grade does not improve the overall achievement of students with disabilities.

The implications of state graduation requirements must be thoroughly understood, considering the potential negative outcomes students experience when they fail to meet state standards for graduation. The availability of alternative diploma options can have a considerable impact on graduation rates. However, the ramifications of receiving different types of diplomas need to be considered. A student who receives a non-standard diploma may find their access to postsecondary education or jobs is limited. However, it is important for parents and educators to know that if a student graduates from high school with a standard high school diploma, the student is no longer entitled to special education services unless a state or district has a policy about continued services under such circumstances. Most states do not have such policies.

Recommendations Regarding Challenge:

- Promote the use of alternate assessments, including authentic or performance-based assessments, portfolios, and other documentation, to support graduation decisions.
- Clarify the implications of state graduation requirements and the appropriate use of alternative diploma options for students with disabilities. Consider the potential impact of alternative diplomas on a student's future access to postsecondary education and employment opportunities. State and local education agencies should thoroughly discuss the meaning of these alternative diplomas with postsecondary education program representatives and employers.
- Clarify the implications of different diploma options for continued special education services. Special

education and general education teachers should carefully work with students and families to consider the ramifications of receiving a high school diploma. In some cases, it may be advisable to delay formal receipt of a standard high school diploma until the conditions (goals and objectives) of the student's IEP have been fully met.

Challenge 5: Ensure students access to and full participation in post-secondary education and employment

Young adults with disabilities continue to face significant difficulties in securing jobs, accessing postsecondary education, living independently, fully participating in their communities, and accessing necessary community services such as healthcare and transportation. It is well understood that preparation for the transition from high school to postsecondary education, employment, and independent living must begin early, or at least by age 14. It is at this age that students must engage in discussions regarding the types of course work students will need at a minimum to be able to enroll in post-secondary education programs, the types of learning options and experiences students will need to develop basic work skills for employment, and the skills needed for independent living.

The four areas of intervention which is focused upon the access, participation, and success of youth with disabilities in postsecondary education and subsequent employment:

- *The process and content of preparation received by students with disabilities in high school:* Findings indicate that students need to understand themselves and their disability in relation to needed services and supports, and be able to describe their needs and advocate for themselves in various post-school educational and employment settings.
- *The manner in which services and supports, including the use of technology, are made available and provided to students with disabilities in postsecondary programs:* Findings indicate the need for a minimal standard of postsecondary support provision and new models of support provision that are personally responsive, flexible, and individualized, as well as coordinated with instruction and integrated with the overall support needs of the student.
- *The coordination and management of educational supports and services with the many other services and supports required by most students with disabilities in postsecondary education:* Most students with disabilities have a range of health, human service, transportation, and fiscal needs beyond the educational supports typically provided in postsecondary programs. A

significant number of students with disabilities in postsecondary education require either assistance with case management or the skills, knowledge, and time to manage their own services and supports.

- *Transition or transfer of educational supports from postsecondary settings to subsequent employment settings:* Many students with disabilities completing postsecondary education have difficulty finding subsequent employment in the profession for which they have prepared. Few postsecondary institutions facilitate or provide assistance with the transfer of supports to the workplace.

Another pressing challenge is the Participation of youth with disabilities in state and local work force development initiatives, such as:

Establishment of local youth councils.

Opportunity Grants that promote employment and training.

- A. Comprehensive career development services based on individualized assessment & planning.
- B. Youth connections and access to the One-Stop career centre system.
- C. Performance accountability focused on employment.

Recommendations Regarding Challenge:

Ensure that prior to each student's graduation from high school, the student's IEP team identifies and engages the responsible agencies, resources, and accommodations required for the student to successfully achieve positive post school outcomes.

- Promote the value of preparation for and participation in postsecondary education. All agencies must recognize the value of postsecondary education and lifelong learning in securing, maintaining and advancing in employment.
- Identify the specific types and levels of accommodations and supports a student will need to participate in post school environments.
- Ensure that community service agencies participate systematically in the development of post school transition plans. Strategies to consider include formalizing agency responsibilities through interagency agreements or memorandums of understanding, and formalizing follow-up procedures and actions when agencies are unable to attend transition planning meetings.
- Provide information to parents on essential health and income maintenance programs. Information on the Supplemental Security Income SSI program, including information on basic program eligibility, benefit redeterminations for 18-year-olds, appeals processes, and use of SSI work incentives in promoting employment outcomes should be readily accessible to professionals,

parents, and students with disabilities. Special education personnel should play a major role in making such information available and assisting parents and students in accessing needed benefits.

- Promote collaborative employer engagement. Increased secondary and postsecondary work-based learning opportunities, and ultimately jobs, are predicated on available and willing employers. Vehicles are needed, such as intermediary linking entities, to convene and connect schools, service agencies and employers so as to maximize the important learning opportunities that workplaces represent. Given the multiple youth initiatives that typically exist in communities, it is expedient to engage employers through collaborative efforts that minimize the distinctions among categories of youth.
- Establish partnerships with workforce development entities. Participation of youth and young adults with disabilities, family members, and special education and rehabilitation professionals in and access to state and local workforce development initiatives should be promoted.

Challenge 6: Increase informed parent participation and involvement in education planning, life planning, and decision-making

Research has shown that parent participation and leadership in transition planning play an important role in assuring successful transitions for youth with disabilities. Much of the discussion in the research literature centers on the role of parents as participants in the development of their child's IEP. It requires that state and local education agencies notify parents and encourage their participation when the purpose of a planned meeting is the consideration of transition services. Beyond the IEP process, family training and family involvement in program design, planning, and implementation are significant factors leading to positive youth outcomes.

While existing policies have strongly encouraged the participation of parents, it is less clear how successful current strategies have been in creating meaningful and valued roles for parents. Family relationships and support can play a particularly influential role in the lives of youth from diverse cultural communities. Despite recognition of the importance of consumer and family involvement, families are resources that have been underutilized by transition and vocational rehabilitation professionals. Although parents and professionals are working to forge new relationships, there remains a need to build the level of trust and collaboration between them.

Family members also contribute to work readiness and employability in a number of ways, both directly and

indirectly, and in manners beyond those typically recognized. Family members act as systems advocates, role models, teachers, service coordinators, and job developers. They can play a significant role in finding employment for their adult children with disabilities and provide important job supports that can help these young adults to keep a job.

Recent surveys indicate families seek information on a variety of issues including: helping youth develop self advocacy skills; balancing standards-based academic instruction with functional life skills training; inclusive education practices at the secondary level; post-secondary options for young adults with developmental and cognitive disabilities; pre-employment experiences and employment options that lead to competitive employment; financial planning; resources available to youth through the workforce investment, vocational rehabilitation, Medicaid, and Social Security systems; better collaboration with community resources; housing options; and interacting with the juvenile justice system. The importance of establishing credibility and trust with culturally and racially diverse populations cannot be overemphasized; cultural responsiveness is essential to establishing such confidence. Tailoring training to the cultural traditions of families improves recruitment and outcome effectiveness.

Recommendations Regarding Challenge:

- Work to reduce the confusion and frustration experienced by parents and families by coordinating services and streamlining access to information and programs.
- Provide opportunities for parents to enhance their knowledge of policy issues and develop leadership skills. Establish strategies and methods to actively engage parents in discussions and decisions concerning school and post school options, both on behalf of individual students and at policy-making levels.
- Expand parent and family involvement and participation beyond the individual student level. Provide opportunities for parents to participate in developing policy and defining transition planning practices.
- Work with community organizations serving culturally and racially diverse populations to assure that programs and services meet the needs of all parents and families.
- Provide comprehensive parent/family training, including training to help parents and families understand the changing nature of their role and what they can do to foster self-determination and promote informed choice.

Challenge 7: Improve collaboration and systems linkages at all levels

Effective transition planning and service depend upon functional linkages among schools, rehabilitation services.

A. However several factors have stood as barriers to effective collaboration like

lack of shared knowledge and vision by students, parents, and school and agency staff around students' post school goals and the transition resources necessary to support student's needs and interests.

B. Lack of shared information across school and community agencies, and coordinated assessment and planning processes, to support integrated transition planning.

C. Lack of meaningful roles for students and parents in the transition decision-making process that respects students' emerging need for independence and self-determination and parents' continuing desire to encourage and support their children during the emancipation process that is part of becoming a productive, contributing young adult.

D. Lack of meaningful information on anticipated post school services needed by students and follow-up data on the actual post school outcomes and continuing support needs of students that can be used to guide improvement in systems collaboration and linkages.

E. Lack of effective practices for establishing and using state and local interagency teams as a means for capacity building in transition collaboration and systems linkages.

F. Lack of coordinated eligibility requirements and funding for agency services.

Collaborative approaches bring together community agencies to focus their collective expertise and combined resources to improve the quality of transition planning and services for youth with disabilities. This sharing of resources, knowledge, skills, and data requires planned and thoughtful collaboration among all participants. The President's Commission on Excellence in Special Education (2002) suggested connecting special education to outside services such as vocational rehabilitation as a way to improve post school outcomes for youth with disabilities. The commission also found that, currently, not enough interagency activity occurs between schools and vocational rehabilitation agencies. Fiscal disincentives should be removed and waiver options provided to promote cost-sharing and resource-pooling among agencies to improve the availability of needed transition services and supports for students with disabilities.

Recommendations Regarding Challenge:

- Promote collaboration between schools and vocational rehabilitation through the establishment of jointly funded positions.

- Establish cross-agency evaluation and accountability systems to assess school and post school employment, independent living, and related outcomes of former special education students.

- Develop innovative interagency financing strategies. Identify ways to promote cost-sharing and resource-pooling to make available needed transition services.

- Use cross-training and other methods to promote collaboration between general education and special education in student assessment, IEP and transition planning, and instruction.

- Promote collaborative staff development programs. Effective approaches include cross-training; train-the-trainer; team-building; and others involving collaborative relationships between state and local agencies, institutions of higher education, parent centers, and consumer and advocacy organizations

Challenge 8: Ensure the availability of a qualified workforce to address the transition needs of youth with disabilities

State and local education agencies across the India are currently experiencing a shortage of qualified personnel to serve children and youth with disabilities. In 2009-2010, more than 12,000 openings for special education teachers were left vacant or filled by substitutes. Further, an additional 31,000 positions were filled by teachers who were not fully certified for their positions. Similarly, severe shortages of para-professionals and related services personnel nation-wide are widely reported, and, there is growing concern over the skill levels of those currently doing this work.

It is critically important to increase the number of secondary special education teachers who can ably support students with disabilities through the process of transition to adult life. However, few institutions of higher education offer pre service training programs providing specialized emphasis on secondary education and transition services. Consequently, many new teachers are entering the field without the specific knowledge and skills needed to support transition. Beyond pre service training, high-quality continuing professional development is needed to ensure that current teachers are up-to-date and fully able to support students in the transition from school to adulthood. In a national study, it was found that nearly 8 out of 10 teachers (80%) reported receiving five hours or less of in-service training regarding inclusion of students with disabilities in their districts' school-to-work programs. Further, nearly half (50%) indicated they had received no in-service training related to inclusionary practices for students with disabilities. These findings are consistent

with the report published by the National Center for Education Statistics regarding the preparation and qualifications of public school teachers. This report notes that fewer than 2 out of 10 teachers (20%) spent more than eight hours per year on professional development activities to address the needs of students with disabilities, despite the fact that teachers report that professional development of longer duration is more effective.

The implications of losing experienced qualified professionals and replacing those individuals with less qualified and inexperienced staff are obvious. This trend will have a tremendously detrimental impact on transition services, and the situation warrants a concerted effort to address this concern. In the immediate future, the collaboration necessary for transition may be in jeopardy until new counsellors fill the vacant positions, stabilize their workload responsibilities, and receive needed training. Progress in addressing this issue should be closely monitored.

Recommendations Regarding Challenge:

- Ensure that special education, vocational rehabilitation, and human services personnel possess the skills and knowledge required to address the transition service needs of youth with disabilities. These efforts should include cross-training, alignment of information to promote common understanding, an emphasis on

collaboration across groups, and commitment to securing outcomes.

- Carefully examine the role that general education teachers can play in transition. Specific attention to both preservice and continuing education programs is needed. Attention to the type and level of support needed by general education teachers during instruction will help increase the participation of these personnel in supporting students' preparation for transition.
- State and local education agencies should recruit individuals with specific responsibilities for transition to promote improved post-school outcomes among students with disabilities.

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