

ACCESS TO PRIMARY EDUCATION IN INDIA: FROM FACADE TO REALITY

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Access to basic amenities & resources like education, health, housing, sanitation etc. for the deprived and vulnerable sections is considered a principal criterion for evaluating and ensuring inclusiveness of growth process. The official version defines access entirely in terms of attainment e.g. access to primary education in terms of enrolment of deprived sections in schools. The available literature in Indian context takes a relatively broader view conceptualizing access in terms of availability (as reflected by the distance of school from the place of residence, infrastructure, number of teachers per students etc.) and affordability (represented by the cost of education). The present paper seeks to argue that the way access to primary education is conceptualized is wrong and viewing access in terms of attainment tends to overestimate our progress on this front. Merely not having something doesn't mean denial of access; non-availability becomes denial of access only when it comes through a societal process. In the similar vein mere attainment doesn't ensure access, access is ensured through developing the right attitude in the provider and adaptability in the receiver.

The paper primarily makes an attempt to develop a broader meaning of access to primary education, defining access in terms of functioning and capabilities (Sen) and attaching importance to equality of outcomes, fairness and justice in institutional arrangements and the attitude of those involved in providing education and response of those receiving it. It attempts to redefine access in terms of inclusion which means providing equal opportunity to all classes of people or groups, irrespective of race, social class, ethnicity, religion, gender and ability.

INTRODUCTION

The neo-liberal policies adopted in the period of reforms have not only neglected the issue of distributive justice but even intensified exclusion. The growth process, of late, has not been inclusive; education, health and basic amenities sectors have been the worst sufferers. While the government continues its celebration through reflecting on increased access to the basic facilities, based on apparent increase in enrolment-ratios, number of hospital beds and other infrastructural facilities; a deeper look reveals the progress to be grossly un-satisfactory. If we evaluate in terms of provision of quality education, returns to beneficiaries, commitment of the service provider as well as the response of receiver towards education, the progress has been almost negligible. Keeping this in mind, it is essential to redefine the process of evaluation and conceptualisation of access to bare amenities.

The present paper emphasizes on the issue of access to primary education. In India, the state of real access to education is very pathetic. The government on its own part has attempted to define access in terms of availability of schools, teachers and basic infrastructure and enrolment ratios. It claims that the condition of education has improved over time and people have now fair access to primary education. The literacy rate has risen significantly from the base 18.33% in 1951 enrolment ratios has soared up, teacher-pupil ratio has increased, average distance of schools from the residence of taught has gone down etc. The real issue however is '*Can enrolment in schools and availability of facilities be taken as indicators of real access to primary education, and if yes, then whether this*

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progress in achievement has resulted in an overall development in the form of positive social attitude and behaviour of the society? The answer would be a definite 'NO'. Access is not merely confined to attainment. The term has a far broader connotation which includes in addition to mere availability of infrastructure, the issues like affordability of education, approach and attitude of providers, as well as the response and willingness of the receiver. Despite huge investment by government and projects supported by the World Bank, the literacy rate in the nation is still very low by international standards because for bulk of population education is still not affordable and for a significant section it (education) is not even desired. There is a problem in the way we are defining access. We need to develop a broader concept that includes all the aspects of supply of education and incorporates the demand side as well. We need to develop a composite index of access based on all relevant aspects. It is precisely this that the present paper attempts to do. The paper primarily develops a broader concept of access including the supply side factors with a blend of demand perspective and attempts to operationalise the concept by developing a composite index and computing it on the basis of primary data.

The paper is divided into three sections. Section I attempts to conceptualize access in broader perspective looking at different indicators of access. Section II develops methodology for measuring access and attempts to develop a composite index of access using primary data. Section III deals with the interventions required for ensuring access to primary education.

CONCEPTUALIZING ACCESS

The debate related to "*access to education*" is intense and intricate. The concept is rather abstract and the available literature has so far failed to devise a means to identify suitable indicators that could measure it. From the official version of measuring it on the basis of enrolment ratios, to attempts made to relate it to the supply side issues like the availability of infrastructure, cost of education, attitude of provider, and the demand side factors, like response of education recipients etc., we have a situation of complete confusion and chaos. We endeavor to have a brief look at the debate in order to develop our own understanding of the concept, of course, *while doing this we keep our focus primarily to 'access to primary education'*.

Governments entrusted with the task of providing basic amenities to population were the first to attempt an understanding of the term access and defining it entirely in terms of *attainment*, i.e., the progress made in the sphere of universalisation of primary education to all children less than 14 years of age. Access in this case is evaluated by comparing the percent share of population belonging to the relevant age group (especially the deprived ones, like SC, ST, OBC, etc.) enrolled in primary education. Hence, access is used to compare the attainment of deprived section *vis-à-vis* other sections. *Availability* of requisite infrastructure has been judged to be the main determinant of attainment, as if the latter could be possible only through ensuring the former. Govinda and Varghese (1992)¹ have observed that retention in schools is related to the availability of basic facilities in schools. Tilak (1996)² found the proximity of primary school with the habitation area of the targeted children as a significant factor influencing the enrolment of children in schools. Dreze and Kingdon (2001)³ also found strong positive correlation between the availability of adequate school infrastructure and infrastructure surrounding the schools and enrolments in school, especially of girl children. Basant and Sen (2010)⁴ also measured access of higher education by the participation of different social and religious groups in terms of attainment and enrolment in higher education

Although viewing access as attainment simplifies things for us but it creates problems at the same time on three counts. First, it provides a partial picture of the whole concept of access. Mere availability of facilities will not ensure true access until the population, especially the vulnerable section, has requisite financial means to utilize these facilities. Availability of education facilities through private providers cannot ensure access, as these facilities are beyond reach of the vulnerable section still fighting a grim battle to make its both ends meet. Therefore, instead of relying on availability alone, the issue of affordability needs to be equally stressed upon. Second, Government's claims of increased availability & access are applicable only for normal population and not for physically challenged children whose needs are difficult to accommodate in mainstream classrooms (Freire & César, 2003)⁵. These children have special educational needs (SEN)⁶ and for them availability could be seen as having special schools, residential hostels, specialist knowledge, equipment and support and provision of non-formal education. The conceptualization of access as attainment ignores these factors. Third, defining access in form of attainment will be putting the cart before the ox, in reality "*access ensures attainment and not vice-versa*". In spite of high enrolment, people may not have access in true sense. It is often found that instead of acquiring needful knowledge and skill, people are mostly enrolled for the sake of enjoying various benefits from government schemes, e.g., midday meal programme and different affirmative actions and reservation policies. Treating attainment as the only indicator of access overestimates our progress made in universalisation of primary education and distorts our understanding of the real problem.

The objections raised above could be addressed by bringing in the issue of *affordability*. Affordability virtually means the cost of education which should be within the reach of recipient. Education involves two types of cost- Economic Cost and Opportunity cost-First, we have the economic costs measured in terms of school fees, expenditure on books & reading/writing materials, travelling to school, school uniform, etc. The government in a bid to increase access, over the years, has tried to reduce the economic cost to zero by providing free education, text books and writing materials and midday meal. There are, however, two hitherto ignored important aspects : (i) The entire cost of dress to be worn, books, writing materials, pocket allowance and some private/paid educational support to the children of illiterate parents are not met(ii) Education empowers the person, yet it also creates a concurrent discrimination if the quality of it made available to different groups differ significantly. Unfortunately, in India the weaker section is being provided access to education in government schools that have poor infrastructure, inefficient and insufficient teachers a majority of whom are not committed to the cause and a system that no one would gain anything substantial from. The efforts of subsidizing cost and making education affordable has been restricted to only government school where quality is very poor and not in good private schools.

Second, we have opportunity cost of education, something that the literature has by and large neglected. The opportunity cost could be seen directly in terms of loss of income when the child is prompted for schooling. For poor families even small children are source of earning and support for the family. They earn their meals and some money by serving as child labourers, support their parents in the family productive work, look after the household activities or the younger ones in the family. Schooling of children in such cases results in loss of family income which is even magnified when the quality of education provided in government schools is too poor to enhance the productivity of the taught. Sometimes, in addition to financial cost, parents are discouraged also as it demands a great deal of time and efforts on the part of them, like preparing the child for school, stimulating their interest, helping child in doing homework and establishing affinity with teachers. This ultimately

leads to the denial of access to education (Dreze & Sen, 1996)⁷.

Thus affordability is a very important determinant of access. With meager income, it is not possible to send all children to school so the variations of choices emerge, namely educate one child, withdraw the girl child, push the better performing child to another level or let the girls continue in government schools and move the boys to hostels (Meera Lal)⁸.

The cost of education is therefore important and better availability of educational infrastructure at times is negated by high cost of education. However, along with cost another factor that is crucial is the attitude of the providers. The factors aforementioned would fail miserably in ensuring access if those who are involved in making the facilities to the deprived section actually do not accept their role, acknowledge their responsibility and are not prepared to work tirelessly towards the end. This brings us to the third issue of *acceptability*. Access from this front demands that people who are entrusted with imparting/administering education must have the right attitude towards promoting participation of all social inter-sections of students, apart from abiding by the assigned service rules. They should accept the responsibility to provide educational facilities to the deprived children. If the teacher's behaviour towards underprivileged children is extremely detrimental, it will ultimately lead to the eviction of students from the educational system (Vasavi 2006⁹; Bordia 2005¹⁰).

This calls for a radical transformation of society focusing on strategies and activities to sensitize the community, *i.e.*, teachers, administrators, and pupils to change negative attitudes towards the education of marginalized children. Sometimes, it is observed that poor children get little attention and experience exclusion in the form of unfamiliarity with mainstream language used by teachers and other children. In government schools teachers have negative attitude towards education of weaker section of the society- they feel that the deprived section neither has the will nor the right and resources to be educated. They are destined to do particular type of work in the social hierarchy and any effort to educate them would distort the caste hierarchy and also the social division of labour. They make no genuine effort to bring them in the mainstream. Recently, when the government is making it obligatory for the private schools to admit students from weaker section (as a small fraction of their total intake), the reluctance of the school is becoming apparent and visible as they are coming up with a number of excuses and creating practical obstacles.

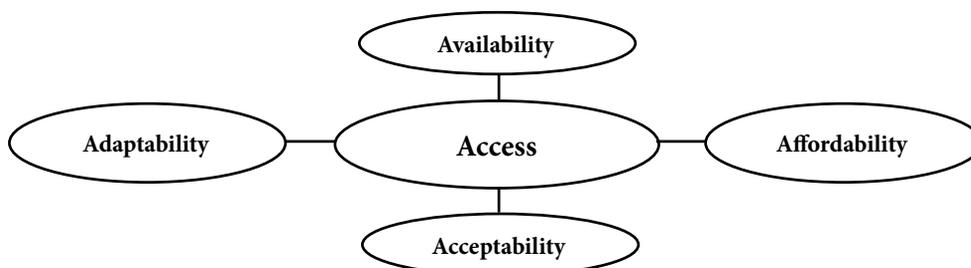
As a matter of fact in the presence of widespread inequalities in the distribution of educational facilities across region, social groups and communities and the lack of right attitude among the providers, the incorporation of the educationally deprived and marginalized children into education still remains a problem (Nambissan 2006¹¹; Saxena 2006¹²; Jha and Jhingran 2002¹³).

The aforementioned factors attempt to see access from the perspective of suppliers, defining it as bringing education within the reach of the recipient by ensuring all the three A's mentioned above. The real issue, however, is '*Can a mere availability of a facility/service be called access?*' The obvious answer is reiterated to be 'No'. True access remains imaginary unless there is a real demand for education, *i.e.* there is necessary motivation, will, and attitude to be educated. If the beneficiaries do not have the freedom, need and urge to avail the facilities, all efforts of creating the facilities, making it affordable and motivating the providers would fail. In most backward economies people do not have access because they do not want to adapt themselves to changes that education brings. Thus an important issue is *adaptability*. In its enthusiasm to criticize government and universalize availability, the literature has summarily neglected the issue of adaptability.

From the perspective of adaptability access means providing motivation to the children to consider education as an economic good and then adapt to the school environment. It involves a number of issues:- First issue is the extent to which the deprived sections consider education as an 'economic good' that at least has the potential of adding anything to their income generating capacity. A substantial number of illiterates are not those for whom the supply side deficiencies exist but those who do not consider education to be necessary and give preference to work at home or outside over going to school (Govinda & Bandyopadhyay)¹⁴. This section does not have access because it doesn't want it. Second issue is that even if they recognize the importance of education, they value it only for the male child who will be the bread earner for the family and not for girls, who are expected to look after the sick, perform household activities and take care of children (Mumba, 2002)¹⁵. Here, adaptability is very selective as the girls are either not admitted or are forced to frequently bunk classes for performing the household works. Third issue is whether those who are illiterate have the freedom to get access given the institutional dominance of caste and religion in India. In this context Sen observed that instead of focusing on the need of resources and opportunities for enrolment, attention should be shifted to the freedom or motivation that people have behind that particular choice of education (Unni.J, 2009)¹⁶.

The literature has so far neglected these issues while defining access and at the same time designing policies that could expand access. Any measure of access must include the recipient's perspective as well.

Thus, we can conclude that access can be truly conceptualized by taking both the supply and demand side factors. Access is multidimensional in nature and therefore its conceptualization should not only include availability (in terms of attainment) and affordability (in terms of cost), rather it must also emphatically involve the subjective aspects like acceptability of provider and adaptability of receiver (as shown in the diagram given below). Sometimes it may happen that a person who is sound from one perspective might be deprived on other fronts. In this context, as per Amartya Sen, 'functionings and capabilities to function, is the range of things that a person could do and be in his/her life' (Sen, 1989)¹⁷. Merely not having something doesn't mean denial of access; non-availability becomes denial of access only when it comes through a societal process. Similarly, mere attainment doesn't ensure access, access is ensured through developing the right attitude in the provider and adaptability in the receiver (Sen, 2000)¹⁸. Thus, it is essential to ensure inclusive education where access means providing equal opportunity, motivation and freedom of choice to all classes of people or groups, irrespective of race, social class, ethnicity, religion, gender and ability.



Once the indicators are developed, the next pertinent problem is to quantify these indicators and to prepare a composite index to measure access. This is what the next section attempts to do

MEASURING ACCESS: THE METHODOLOGY

The real concern of this paper to operationalise the concept of access by developing an *Access Index*, based on all the four A's mentioned above. The paper uses data collected through a primary survey of eight panchayats from four districts in Bihar. The survey was conducted in 2008 but information is being used for this work. The survey had chosen two districts Muzaffarpur & Gopalganj from North and Bhojpur and Rohtas from South Bihar on random basis. Based on random sampling method, two panchayats from each district were selected for data collection. Two groups of people were interviewed- parents whose wards were studying in the schools in the survey area and teachers/headmaster of different primary schools falling in the locality. The total sample size was 230 of which 179 parents and 51 teachers/ headmasters of the primary schools were interviewed. Since, the survey was not conducted for the purpose of the present paper, indicators chosen are not fully appropriate. This is a serious limitation of the present study.

The task of developing an Access-Index is difficult and faces three kinds of roadblocks:-

- Firstly, developing a group index for indicators of availability and affordability that are though quantifiable yet, depend upon a number of sub-indicators.
- Secondly, quantifying the qualitative or subjective indicators like, acceptability and adaptability and further developing a group index for them.
- Thirdly, assigning weights to different group-indices and finally developing a composite index of access.

Normalisation & Computation of Group Indices: - For measurement of the four A's i.e. availability, affordability, acceptability and adaptability, we have taken data from the primary survey quoted above. The absolute figures have been then normalized. The process of normalisation as used in *Human Development Index*¹⁹ has been followed for all sub-indicators after obtaining the individual scores through primary survey. Normalisation requires setting the goal post first. By setting the minimum and maximum values i.e. *goalposts*, different sub-indices have been transformed into indices having value between 0 and 1. For sub indicators which are quantifiable the maximum and minimum values as obtained in all samples taken together have been taken as the goalposts for indicators that are not measurable and whose percentage only can be computed 100 percent has been taken as the possible maximum and 25% as possible minimum. Since we do not have any actual observed data set for a large geographical area for the sub-indicators that we have chosen in the paper for measurement of different indicators, the paper is forced to resort to some degree of arbitrariness. The methodology is open to criticism for choosing the goal post in a rather 'arbitrary manner'. The maximum and minimum values for different sub-indicators are shown in the tables given in course of discussion of these indicators.

The method of normalisation is briefly explained here using an indicator of availability-

Let X_{ij} represent the value of the i^{th} availability indicator in j^{th} district, $\{i= 1,2,3,\dots\dots m; j= 1,2,3,\dots\dots n\}$. i represents the total number of sub-indicators and j represents the total number of districts. Having defined the minimum and maximum values, the sub-indices are calculated as follows:

$$\text{Sub Index } (Y_{ij}) = \left(\frac{\text{Actual } X_{ij} - \text{Minimum}_j X_{ij}}{\text{Maximum}_j X_{ij} - \text{Minimum}_j X_{ij}} \right)$$

If X_{ij} is negatively associated with the status of education, the above equation can be written as:

$$\text{Sub Index } (Y_{ij}) = \left(\frac{\text{Maximum}_j X_{ij} - \text{Actual} X_{ij}}{\text{Maximum}_j X_{ij} - \text{Minimum}_j X_{ij}} \right)$$

Obviously, the scaled values, Y_{ij} , vary from 0 to 1.

Table 1
Index of Availability

SN	Sub-indicator	Actual Value	Maximum Value	Minimum Value	Index
1	Distance of School from Place of Residence	0.3	0.5	0.1	0.5
2	Existence of Infrastructural Facilities-				0.48
	i. No. of classrooms(pucca and semi pucca)	3.39	5	1	0.60
	ii. No. of toilets in the school	0.76	2	0	0.38
3	Teaching sufficient for education of the child	50	100	25	0.33
4	Quality of Education-				0.39
	i. Percentage of teachers with at least a graduate degree	62.7	100	25	0.50
	ii. Percentage of trained teachers	47.5	100	25	0.30
5	Percentage of days(out of total working days) teachers were involved in teaching activities	82.5	100	50	0.65
Group Index ($I_{\text{Availability}}$)					0.44

The group indices/indices for availability, affordability etc. have been computed after normalising all the sub-indicators of the group. Geometric mean has been used to finally compute the access index combining the four group indices. Geometric mean has been used for aggregation because in this case the maximum value does not affect the relative comparison (in percentage terms) between access of primary education for any two places or between two periods in the same place. Thus after setting the maximum and minimum values and normalising the variables to compute group indices the following formula is used to compute composite access index-

$$\text{Access Index} = (I_{\text{Availability}} \cdot I_{\text{Affordability}} \cdot I_{\text{Acceptability}} \cdot I_{\text{Adaptability}})$$

Description of Indicators: The four group indices are based on a number of sub-indicators that are briefly discussed here-

1. Availability: The first indicator *i.e.* availability is based on five sub- indicators- (i), The first sub-indicator is the distance of school from place of residence that determines the decision

of sending children to school significantly. Since, students involved here are small children the maximum and minimum values have been fixed as 0.5 and 0.1 kms respectively. (ii) The availability of infrastructure is the second indicator. As authentic data was not provided by the schools surveyed as regards black-board, teaching aid etc. available, number of rooms per primary school and number of toilets were taken as two indicators of infrastructure. Since a number of schools in Bihar are running with just one room and no toilets, 1 class room and 0 toilet have been taken as minimum and since for efficient running of classes from 1-5, availability of at least 5 class rooms and 2 toilets (one for male and the other for the female students) are essential, these are taken as the maximum. (iii) The third sub-indicator is the extent to which the education provided is taken as satisfactory by the guardian. Obviously if the beneficiaries are not benefitted by the facility, facilities can be treated as virtually unavailable. The survey enquired the guardians whether they feel the teaching at school is sufficient for educating their children or not and 50% of them replied in negative. Minimum value of 25 has been taken in this and similar cases. (iv) The quality of education provided was taken as another indicator of availability. The quality was sought to be measured entirely on the basis of level of education and training of the teachers. It was supposed that the minimum qualification for working efficiently as teacher must be graduate and the person must be properly trained to understand the child psychology and aware of the teaching method and skills. (v) A major problem for schools is that teachers are involved by the government in non-teaching work and they are not always available for teaching work. Hence, number of days teachers were involved in teaching activities as percentage of total teaching days was taken as an indicator for the availability of teachers in teaching work.

2. Affordability: - Primary education is affordable only when it is provided free of direct and opportunity costs i.e. when net cost for the recipient is zero. Net cost is computed by subtracting from the gross cost, subsidies given in form of mid-day meal, scholarships etc. The paper has attempted to compute gross cost, benefits and ultimately net cost of education to measure affordability of education. (i) The direct cost has been computed by finding monthly expenditure on purchase of clothes/dress, books, writing material etc. on the basis of primary survey. (ii) The opportunity cost has been computed in terms of the loss to guardian by sending the child to school instead of sending him for wage work. Based on the data from Labour Bureau, Govt. of India (Wage Rate in Rural India) Rs. 28.979 for the corresponding year i.e. 2008) has been taken as standard wage per day for child labour. Opportunity cost per month has been computed by multiplying the wage rate by 20 days (20 days have been taken because average number of school days as per survey was found to be 240 days, dividing this by number of months we get a figure of 20 days per month). The total cost is obtained by adding the two costs. (iii) The only universal subsidy payable to all the students studying in govt. schools is in form of mid-day meal. As per the MHRD, Govt. of Bihar in the year of survey the per capita per day expenditure on midday meal was coming out to be Rs.2.83. Multiplying this figure by 20 days (for which teaching is normally done in schools) we get the total amount of subsidy paid.

Finally the net cost has been computed by subtracting subsidy from cost. The maximum cost that guardians are ready to pay for educating their children has been obtained by adding the cost of private tutor in total cost. The survey found that nearly 40% of the guardians were keeping private tutors and spending an average Rs.178.6 per month on tuition fee. This amount has been added to the net cost to obtain the maximum value for the service. Since the objective is to provide free primary education the minimum cost has been taken as 0.

Table 2
Index of Affordability

SN	Sub-indicator	Actual Value	Maximum Value	Minimum Value	Index
1	Direct Cost = Monthly Expenditure on schooling	Rs. 122.90	824.3	0	
2	Opportunity cost = Child labour wages @ Rs.28.97 x 20 days.	Rs. 579.40			
3	Gross Cost (1 +2)	Rs. 702.30			
4	Subsidy = Midday meal @ Rs. 2.83 x 20 days	Rs. 56.60			
	Net Cost of Education = 3-4	Rs. 645.70			
Group Index(I _{Affordability})					0.22

3. Acceptability:-The paper takes five indicators of acceptability all of which have been measured on the basis of the guardian's perception about the attitude of the teachers. The views are in terms of percentage of guardians who are in agreement of the statement- (i) The first sub-indicator is the attention paid to the weaker section students. A very common problem is lack of commitment of teachers and the apathetic attitude towards the weak students and students from the weaker sections of society. These discourage the students from joining primary education.(ii) The regularity of teachers in schools is taken as the second sub-indicator which mainly emphasizes on the honesty and job seriousness on the part of teachers.(iii) The conduct of remedial classes by teachers for weak students is taken as another indicator. The children who are comparatively weak primarily belong to the weaker section of society. Teachers must take special care of weak students otherwise these students will start lagging behind the rest of the class, feel disenchanted and might in the ultimate run discontinue studies.(iv) Continuous assessment of the student's performance is taken as another sub-indicator which emphasizes encouraging students to perform on a continuous basis in lieu of giving excessive reliance to only yearend examination.(v) The last sub-indicator is discouragement on the part of teachers to weaker section children by punishing them and creating the atmosphere of terror and fear.

4. Adaptability:- Adaptability is measured on the basis of attitude of the guardians towards primary education. As in the case of acceptability here also the measurement is based on guardian's perception and is reflected in terms of those interviewed responding in the particular fashion-(i) Guardian's attitude towards usefulness of primary education is taken as the first sub-indicator. One primary problem with guardians who have their first generation in school is that they are not convinced about the economic use of education and they have their wards in schools either to avail of some facilities (like mid-day meal) or because they find it socially insulting to be called illiterates. (ii) The second sub-indicator is the attitude towards girl's education. The family & society often consider educating girls as unwanted and undesirable. Due to social taboos, girls are not allowed to go to schools and normally are expected to perform household chores.(iii) The attendance of students in schools is another indicator of the interest in and demand for education. It is expected that barring those who fall sick for considerable period of time in a year, almost all the students should have more than 50% attendance.

Table 3
Index of Acceptability

SN	Sub-indicator	Actual Value	Maximum Value	Minimum Value	Index
1	Personalised Attention paid to weaker/deprived section students	82.23	100	25	0.76
2	Regularity of teachers in schools and their job seriousness	72.72	100	25	0.64
3	Remedial classes conducted by teachers for weak students	41.7	100	25	0.22
4	Continuous assessment of the student's performance or importance to term end examination only	65.21	100	25	0.54
5	Absence of discouragement to weaker section children due to teacher's punishment	81.65	100	25	0.76
Group Index (I _{Acceptability})					0.54

Access- Index

After the computation of sub-indices the final job is to compute the Access- Index using the formula given in (ii) above i.e.

$$\text{Access Index} = \sqrt[4]{(0.44 \cdot 0.22 \cdot 0.54 \cdot 0.22)} = 0.392$$

Access Index computed has a relatively small value. The availability index returns a very low value primarily on three counts- the poor infrastructure (the sub-indicator has a figure of 0.48), insufficiency of teachers with right qualification and training (0.39) and the reason that the type of education provided at the school is not at all considered anyway sufficient by the taught (0.33). Hence, the approved contention that the government has done tremendous job in making education available does not find support. It is clear from the sub-indices that the government's claim of providing free education is far away from the reality. The index of affordability gives a very low figure of 0.22. As a matter of fact the compensation paid by way of mid-day meal is insufficient to take care of large opportunity cost. Unless the government comes up with some scheme that provides other type of financial incentives/ real incentives to the taught, education will remain outside the reach of those who are poor/vulnerable.

The index of acceptability also is not very encouraging. It clearly shows that the guardians need personalized care and special efforts to take care of the weak and poor students. However the achievement on this front has been very unsatisfactory. As expected on the adaptability front too, the situation looks grim. The group index has a value of only 0.45. The attitude of the guardian towards education of girls is the main problem. Still people are not ready to send the girl child to school and a number of efforts are called for to convince these people to send their wards to schools. A number of measures to improve access can be suggested based on the analysis done here. The final section attempts the same.

Table 4
Index of Adaptability

SN	Sub-indicator	Actual Value	Maximum Value	Minimum Value	Index
1	Guardian's treating primary education economically productive for their wards	75.2	100	25	0.67
2	Guardians having positive attitude towards girls education	43.6	100	25	0.248
3	Percentage of students having more than 80% attendance	65.2	100	25	0.536
Group Index($I_{\text{Adaptability}}$)					0.45

ENSURING ACCESS: SUGGESTING SOME INTERVENTIONS

In view of its multidimensional concept, a multi-pronged strategy is necessary to universalize 'Access. Government's lop sided approach, emphasizing upon availability and affordability, while neglecting acceptability and adaptability issues, has been the reason for limited success so far. In fact a sense of commitment and dedication among the providers, coupled with recipients' understanding and acknowledgement is essential for needful success. We suggest some very specific measures that address the two neglected issues :-

- Government should provide free quality education to the disadvantaged section along with free text books, writing materials, *etc.*, compensate for travel expenses, grant students' pocket allowance, and facilitate out of class support to weak students (especially those whose parents are illiterate). This would encourage new entrants.
- Private schools should be compelled to admit at least 10% of their total intake from the weaker section without charging any fee for providing right exposure to such children. *Educators' Social Responsibility*, alike to the idea of Corporate Social Responsibility may play a definite role in this regard.
- Loss of income to very poor families owing to children's schooling instead of child-labour earning should be compensated. The scheme of mid-day meal has been though successful in attracting the students, encouragement for being regular in schools as well as some incentives and extra financial support may also be extended for performing well in the examinations.
- We need competent and committed brand of teachers who inherently love teaching profession as a service to the nation. A carrot and stick system should be followed to screen out and encourage school teachers with right attitude. Innovative rewards and periodical counselling/training need to be arranged, while keeping the teachers away from non-academic work and making them feel that apart from being knowledge providers they are the builders of modern society.
- Finally, the deprived sections need to be convinced with the utility and importance of

education. This is possible through adopting multi-pronged strategy. Firstly, efforts must be made to impress upon the taught the economic value of education, Secondly, efforts should be made to provide hostel facilities to the children from the deprived section with all facilities, along with some monetary compensation to their parents. Thirdly, although child labour has been banned, yet enforcement of this law needs to be stricter for reducing the opportunity cost of sending children to schools. Fourthly, the course content, the human and physical infrastructures, the method of presentation and the attitude of providers must be encouraging for the recipients. Lastly, regular meetings should be organized by the PRIs at village level to convince the vulnerable section of the realm of education. Provision of incentives to panchayats with higher literacy percentage will also be helpful in this regard.

To conclude, one has to note that providing access to education in real sense is not just a matter of ensuring high attainment and making education affordable by investing more resources. Rather, it demands a change in the mindsets, both from the provider's side as well as the receiver's side. We need a committed government, dedicated brand of teachers and educational administrators and receptive recipients. The society cannot shift the responsibility on those who are directly involved in the job of providing education, each one of us have to play a role of motivating the learners, encouraging and monitoring the providers and filling up the gaps if any. The issue of access to education is very crucial as unless this is insured we cannot even dream of inclusive growth.

NOTES

1 Notes & References

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