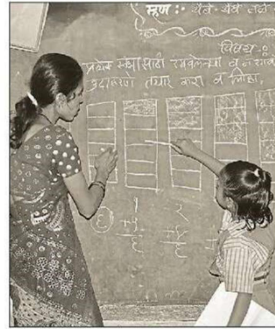


GOOD GOVERNANCE

For education, the new Niti Aayog Index could become a game-changer

It provides a road map for states to ensure consistent improvement in schools, while increasing accountability

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The NITI Aayog's recently launched State Education Quality Index (SEQI), which was developed to evaluate the performance of states and Union territories (UTs) in the education sector, has the potential to be a game-changer for improvement in education in India. In the past, the complexities of improving the quality of education have largely been relegated to a "good to have" list rather than a "must-do" list. By laying out a road map paired with increased accountability from states, we now have the potential to bring focus to quality education.

First, the index shifts emphasis from solely measuring inputs to measuring both inputs and outcomes of the education system. Second, it provides a clear direction to state governments in their efforts to ensure quality education by defining success metrics. Third, and most importantly, it adopts a systemic view of education reform by stressing both improvements in academics as well as governance processes related to learning, access, equity, and infrastructure. While most surveys in the past have been focused on either access or learning outcomes, SEQI makes an important departure by measuring 33 indicators to gauge the effectiveness of the school education system, 14 of which are related to governance processes. This acknowledges the interconnectedness of these two important pillars of change.

This new approach will have a direct impact on classroom outcomes. For example, studies show that teachers must make as many as 40 trips to state headquarters for their transfers in the absence of an online transfer system. Given its process and outcomes focus, the priority will be to put new processes in place to reduce that number. This, in turn, will positively affect learning.

In addition, SEQI can potentially achieve in education what the Ease of Doing Business (EoDB) Index has achieved in business activity. A high priority for the Indian government, the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) adapted the global EoDB index to India's federal structure by introducing state rankings under its Make in India initiative. In 2016, it released a 340-point Business Reform Action Plan (BRAP) with 58 regulatory processes spanning the life cycle of a business that needed improvement. Each year, states are ranked based on their performance in improvement with respect to each of these processes.

The results of this exercise have been astounding. Within a year of its rollout, the average implementation by all states of the BRAP stood at 48.93%, a significant jump from 2015's national average of 32%. In addition, 12 states achieved a greater than 90% implementation score. This improvement was also reflected in the India's stellar improvement in the global index rankings.

SEQI has adopted a similar approach to the

Like the Ease of Doing Business Rankings have changed the business environment, SEQI can alter education outcomes HT

EoDB index. It has clearly identified process enablers for quality education, such as good quality assessment data, teacher availability in schools, a transparent system of teacher allocation, teacher training, and school level planning. As an example, textbooks often arrive after classes have begun, with some arriving just weeks before examinations, leaving both students and teachers without proper materials as a result of unnecessary delays. These enablers form the very base of a well-functioning education system, without which it is difficult for any public education system to deliver consistently on quality. In laying out these metrics and creating a two-fold ranking system, SEQI has provided an actionable tool for state governments to undertake educational improvements and work toward consistent school quality.

In addition to providing this type of road map, SEQI also promises to increase the accountability of states to invest in measuring their own progress. The National Assessment Survey (NAS), which is being used to account for learning outcomes under SEQI, may also benefit from the added analysis by states. As SEQI begins to provide rankings, and inputs and outcomes start to become clearer, this data holds promise to become a rich source of knowledge for decision-makers as they focus on policy actions that can achieve the highest impact in their respective areas.

Evaluating performance in education is incredibly complex. The absence of a clear action plan, the contradictory opinions on the nature of reforms, and an inability to conclusively measure improvements and outcomes have discouraged efforts towards improvement. SEQI, with its clear clarification of desired actions and intended impact, is well positioned to overcome these barriers. It is poised to bring focus to quality education by facilitating cross learning between states and fostering a competitive spirit to motivate improvement. It is evident that NITI Aayog has its eyes set on making quality education a top governance priority, and for that, we couldn't be more excited.

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The views expressed are personal