



Learning little

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The reading and arithmetic abilities in rural schools are shockingly dismal

- The latest assessment of how children are faring in schools in rural areas indicates there has been no dramatic improvement in learning outcomes.
- The picture that emerges from the Annual Status of Education Report, Rural (2018) is one of a moribund system of early schooling in many States, with no remarkable progress from the base year of 2008.
- Except for a small section at the top of the class, the majority of students have obviously been let down.
- A significant percentage of students were not even able to recognise letters appropriate for their class, highlighting a severe barrier to learning.

Measures Suggested

- Now that the ASER measure is available for 10 years, the Centre should institute a review mechanism involving all States for both government and private institutions, covering elementary education and middle school.
- A public consultation on activity-based learning outcomes, deficits in early childhood education, and innovations in better performing States can help.
- The enactment of the Right to Education Act was followed by a welcome rise in enrolment, which now touches 96% as per ASER data.
- Empowering as it is, the law needs a supportive framework to cater to learners from different backgrounds who often cannot rely on parental support or coaching.
- There is concern that curricular expectations on literacy and numeracy have become too ambitious, requiring reform.
- It is worth looking at innovation in schools and incentivising good outcomes; one study in Andhra Pradesh indicated that bonus pay offered

to teachers led to better student scores in an independently administered test in mathematics and language.

Conclusion

- The solutions may lie in multiple approaches.
- What is beyond doubt is that governments are not doing their duty by India's children.

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