

ASER 2005: HIGHLIGHTS

ASER 2005 is a citizen's assessment of the status of elementary education in rural India. Facilitated by Pratham, & executed by local groups in each district, it is the largest household survey on school education in India done by non-government bodies.

To guarantee that all children (6 to 14) enroll in school, stay in school through the elementary stage and receive education of satisfactory quality, Government of India has launched a massive nation-wide program of universalising elementary education. Every Indian pays taxes to provide elementary education to the children of India. Every Indian also pays a 2% cess on all central taxes to help the government fulfill its commitment for universal elementary education.

ASER 2005 takes a look at India's progress towards these goals.

ASER 2005 reached 332,971 children in 191,057 households in 9521 villages across the country. 485 districts participated in ASER. In many states all districts participated. There was partial coverage in the states of the North-east, earthquake affected districts in the Kashmir valley and in snow bound districts of Himachal and Uttaranchal. ASER was not conducted in Chandigarh, Delhi, Lakshadweep, Mizoram, Pondicherry, Sikkim and Andaman-Nicobar islands.

More than 20,000 volunteers from 776 local groups, NGOs, colleges and universities participated in this effort. The data collection was carried out between November 14 and December 20 2005.

20 randomly selected villages were surveyed in each participating district. In each village, the ASER team visited 20 randomly selected households and interacted with all children (in the age group 6 to 14) in these households to find out whether they go to school and whether they can read simple text and do basic arithmetic. The household visit was usually on a Sunday or holiday. The team also visited the local government primary or upper primary school on a working day to observe teachers' and children's' attendance and to see if water, rooms and toilets were adequate and useable.

MAIN FINDINGS:

ENROLLMENT:

- The good news is that 93.4% children in 6 to 14 age group are enrolled in school. In the 6 to 10 age group, there is not much difference in the enrollment of boys and girls.

- Of the children not enrolled in school, 71.2% are in just five states: Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh and Orissa. Many states like Kerala, Karnataka, Uttaranchal, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, Goa and Gujarat have less than 4% children in the 6 to 14 age group out of school.
- Nationally, private schools provide education to 16.4% children in the 6-14 age group. In Haryana and Uttar Pradesh close to a third of all children are in private schools.

GENDER DIFFERENCES:

- 60% of students in private schools are boys.
- There are noteworthy state differences. At one end we have Rajasthan and Uttaranchal where the proportion of boys in private schools is over 65% and at the other end is Kerala where proportion of girls is 51%. Boys and girls are almost even in Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Maharashtra.
- Girls as a percentage of all out-of-school children are 52.8%.

READING

- The news on reading is not good. 35% of all children in the age group 7-14 could not read simple paragraphs at standard I level and close to 52% could not read a short story at a standard II level of difficulty.
- 40% of children who are in school and studying in standard V could not read the story text at standard II level of difficulty.
- Although many more children in higher classes (standard 6 to 8) can read, there are still 22% children in government schools and 17% in private schools who cannot read a standard II level text.
- Relatively, some states show better performance. For example, among children currently studying in standard V, in Kerala, Uttaranchal, West Bengal, Bihar and Chattisgarh, less than 25% are unable to read a story of standard II level difficulty. However, the proportion of children unable to read (Level 2) is substantially higher in several other states: close to 50% children in Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Gujarat, Karnataka and Madhya Pradesh cannot read a simple 'story' text of standard II level.

ARITHMETIC

- 50% of standard II to V children in government primary schools and 38% in private schools could not solve a two digit subtraction problem with borrowing.
- In higher classes (standard VI to VIII), 40% of government school children and 33% of private school children could not solve a simple division problem (3 digits divided by 1 digit.)
- As with reading, there are significant state-wise variations. For example, based on the sample of children in standard V, in West Bengal, Haryana, Bihar, Uttaranchal and Chhattisgarh over 50% children can do the simple division problems. In the bottom five states, 62% to 75% of standard V children cannot solve division problems (3 digit divided by 1 digit).

SCHOOL FUNCTIONING:

Teachers and children:

- On average, over 75% of teachers were found to be attending on the day of the visit in sampled schools. In 51 % of all primary schools, all teachers present on the day of the visit.
- While teacher absenteeism is talked about a lot, there is less focus on children's attendance. Across all states, 71% of enrolled children were present on the day of the visit. Bihar recorded the lowest attendance numbers with 51.8 % of enrolled children attending. In sampled districts of Uttaranchal, both teachers and students show over 80% attendance on the day of the visit. In Kerala, over 90% of children were attending on the day of the visit.
- Pupil-teacher ratio based on attendance (i.e. number of children actually present and number of teachers attending on the day of the visit) shows that this ratio, all India, is well below 40 – with the exception of Uttar Pradesh (49).

School facilities – provision and use:

- Nationally, in more than 80% schools, children in standard V had textbooks. This number is close to 90% in Rajasthan, W Bengal, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Goa, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu. The overall snapshot of textbook provision is a positive one suggesting that the supply and distribution of textbooks have improved greatly in large areas of the country.

- 70% of schools visited were preparing or serving mid day meals.
- 78% of primary schools visited had either a hand pump or a tap. Of these schools 85% had water supply. 60% of schools visited had toilet facilities out of which 70% were usable. (4891 primary schools visited.) The provision was 83% in upper primary schools.

ASER will be conducted on an annual basis until 2010. ASER 2005 shows that enrollment levels are very high in almost all states. Although there still can be improvement, there is considerable coverage with respect to school facilities. However, the learning dimension needs urgent attention. The foundations of our children's basic reading and arithmetic needs to be strengthened in the early grades in school. Children need to move quickly beyond the basics. A strong beginning is essential for building a solid foundation for elementary education.

For further information : write to aser@pratham.org

The survey had a two stage design. In the first stage, 20 villages were selected from the village directory of the 2001 Census using probability proportional to size. In the second stage, 20 households were randomly selected from these villages.