



Back to PISA after 2009

The Human Resource Development (HRD) Ministry has decided to participate in PISA, an international assessment of student ability, after a gap of almost 10 years.

What is PISA?

- Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) is an international survey held every three years, coordinated by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).
- First conducted in 2000, the major domain of study rotates between reading, mathematics, and science in each cycle.
- It is a competency-based test designed to assess the ability of the 15-year-old candidates that measures their reading, mathematics, and science literacy every three years to apply their knowledge to real-life situations.

India in PISA

- India was the participant country in PISA in 2009. However, students fared poorly then and bagged the 72nd rank among 74 participating countries. The then government had boycotted PISA, blaming “out of context” questions for India’s dismal performance and chose not to participate in the 2012 and 2015 cycles.
- The HRD Ministry first revisited this decision in 2016 and set up a committee to review the matter which recommended that the country should participate in the 2018 test cycle.

A Glance at Indian Education System

- Education in schools is one dimensional, with an obsessive focus on marks. Further there is lack of availability of trained teachers at all levels. Quality teachers are the missing link in the Indian education system.
- A majority of students in the university are unemployable because of their inability to apply their knowledge in real-life situations. This is because of a poor foundation in schools, where the emphasis is more on rote learning, rather than testing a student’s creative skills.
- As per UNESCO data, India has one of the lowest public expenditure rates on education per student, especially compared to other Asian countries like China.
- With a literacy rate of about 74 percent, India lags behind other BRICS nations, which have literacy rates above 90 percent.

Indian Education System and PISA

- Unlike most school examinations in India, PISA does not test a student’s memory and curriculum-based knowledge. For example, PISA’s science test, measures three competencies-the ability to explain scientific phenomena, scientific interpretation of data and evidence, and the ability to design and evaluate scientific query.
- Similarly, reading in India is commonly understood as basic decoding of information or reading aloud, PISA defines it as an individual’s capacity to understand, use and reflect on written information in a range of situations.
- The meaning of literacy and numeracy should not be traditional, but should be reoriented to

ensure that students understand and imbibe the values of critical thinking, problem solving and expression.

- Countries like Finland, Sweden and Denmark, who top the PISA tests have demonstrated that equity can considerably help to improve overall learning outcomes, through mixed and inclusive classrooms, that do not segregate the so-called 'bright' and 'slow learners', or children from different social, ethnic or other differences.
- Students who had attended pre-primary tend to perform better than those who have not. These approaches need to be emulated in our classrooms too so that the classrooms of the country resonate with the diversity of our country, and help improve learning outcomes as the Scandinavian school systems have shown.

Benefits of PISA

- PISA data reveals common patterns among high performing school systems. Likewise, the data also shows that school systems with the greatest improvement have used common tactics at different points in the reform process.
- The data is also used for benchmarking. Successful school systems have many internal measures but it is difficult to understand what the "best" really is. So an International benchmark like PISA can be a healthy driver for reform efforts worldwide.

Criticism of PISA

- Academicians raised concern about PISA that it has contributed to an obsession with standardised testing relying heavily on quantitative measures rather than qualitative aspects of education.
- It is criticized for shifting focus from long-term and enduring solutions to temporary measures which are being increasingly adopted by countries to improve their ranking.

Conclusion

India should take part in PISA and make efforts to take the maximum benefits out of the assessment which may transform the existing education system to compete at global level.