Annual Status of Education Report 2023

For Prelims: **Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM)**, **National Education Policy (NEP) 2020**, Annual Status of Education Report 2023, Beyond Basics, NGO Pratham.

For Mains: Education Status in India, Annual Status of Education Report 2023.

Source: TH

Why in News?

Recently, the 18th Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) **2023** titled **'Beyond Basics'** was released by NGO Pratham, discussing the activities students are engaged in, their basic and applied reading and maths abilities and digital awareness and skills.

What is the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER)?

- The ASER, **is an annual, citizen-led household survey** that aims to understand whether children in rural India are enrolled in school and whether they are learning.
- ASER has been **conducted every year since 2005 in all rural districts of India.** It is the **largest citizen-led survey in India.**
- ASER surveys provided representative estimates of the **enrolment status of children aged 3-16** and the basic reading and arithmetic levels of children aged 5-16 at the national, state and district level.

What are the Key Highlights of the ASER 2023?

- **Enrollment Rates:**
    - Overall, **86.8% of 14-18-year**-olds are enrolled in an educational institution.
    - However, there are notable differences visible by age, **with 3.9% of 14-year-olds and 32.6% of 18-year-olds not enrolled.**
        - Most students in the 14-18 age group are enrolled in the **Arts/Humanities streams, with more than half (55.7%)** in Class XI or higher studying in this stream.
        - There are gender differences, with fewer females (28.1%) enrolled in the **Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM)** stream compared to males (36.3%).
- **Vocational Training:**
    - Only 5.6% are taking vocational training or related courses. Vocational training is **more prevalent among college-level** students (16.2%).
        - Most youth are taking short duration courses of six months or less.
- **Basic Abilities:**
    - About 25% of the youth **cannot read a Class II level text fluently** in their regional language.
    - **Over half struggle with division problems (3-digit by 1-digit)**, with only 43.3% of

14-18-year-olds able to solve such problems correctly.

- **Language and Arithmetic Skills:**
  - While females (76%) outperform males (70.9%) in reading a Standard II level text in their regional language, **males excel in arithmetic and English reading.**
  - Only **57.3% can read sentences in English,** and of those, almost three-quarters understand their meanings.
- **Digital Awareness and Skills:**
  - Close to 90% of all youth **have a smartphone in the household**, and 43.7% of males have their own smartphone compared to 19.8% of females.
  - Males **generally outperform females in digital tasks,** and performance on digital tasks improves with education level and basic reading proficiency.
- **Foundational Numeracy Skills:**
  - Over 50% of students **in the 14-18 age group face difficulties with elementary division problems,** and around 45% struggle with tasks such as calculating the number of hours a child slept based on bedtime and wake-up time.
    - Inadequate foundational numeracy skills hinder youth proficiency in **everyday calculations, including budget management,** applying discounts, and calculating interest rates or loan repayments.
- **Recommendations:**
  - Government efforts are needed to bridge the gap in foundational literacy and numeracy skills, with a focus on initiatives for the 14-18 age group.
    - The **National Education Policy (NEP) 2020** recognizes the need for 'catch-up' programs for students who have fallen behind academically.
  - There is a need for initiatives aimed at improving foundational literacy and numeracy skills among youth, not only for academic performance but also to meet their everyday requirements.
- **Digital Education:**
  - **High Smartphone Penetration:**
    - Almost **90% of Indian youth have access to a smartphone** in their household and know how to use it. This indicates widespread digital connectivity among this demographic.
  - **Gender Gaps in Digital Literacy:**
    - There is a significant gender disparity in digital literacy. Girls are **reported to be less likely to know how** to use a smartphone or computer compared to boys.
      - **Males (43.7%) were more than twice as likely as girls (19.8%) to own their own smartphone.**
    - There is a **notable gender gap in smartphone ownership,** with males being more than twice as likely as females to own their own smartphone.
      - Boys outperformed girls across various digital tasks.
  - **Online Safety Awareness:**
    - **Boys are more familiar with online safety settings compared to girls.** This suggests a need for targeted efforts to educate and empower girls in online safety practices.
  - **Smartphone Usage for Education:**
    - About two-thirds used smartphones for educational purposes, **such as watching online videos related to studies,** solving doubts, or exchanging notes.
  - **Limited Connectivity for Assessment:**
    - While the survey aimed to assess digital skills using smartphones, not all youth could bring a **smartphone with good connectivity.** Boys were more likely to bring smartphones for the assessment compared to girls, indicating discrepancies in access.
  - **Educational Activities Among Non-Enrolled Youth:**
    - A quarter of non-enrolled youth reported engaging in educational activities on their smartphones, **emphasizing the role of digital devices in supporting** learning outside formal educational settings.

What are the Issues Faced by Elementary Education in India?

- **School Infrastructure and Amenities:**

- Despite improvements in retention rates, there are **concerns about the availability of basic amenities in schools**. While 95% of schools have drinking water and toilets, **over 10% lack electricity.**
- Additionally, there is a **lack of digitization, with more than 60% of schools lacking computers,** and 90% not having access to internet facilities.
- **Shift Towards Private Schools:**
  - Over the years, there has been a **shift in momentum towards private schools.** Government data indicates a **decrease in the share of government schools in the elementary category from 87% in 2006 to 62% in March 2020.**
- **Teacher Shortage and Quality:**
  - There is a **shortage of teachers in schools, and the student-teacher ratio is high.** The reliance on contractual teachers is noted, and there is **widespread teacher absenteeism.**
  - The quality of education varies, with a visible divide between well-funded, formal schools and under-resourced, informal schools.
- **Social Divides:**
  - There is the existence of social divides, including caste-class, rural-urban, religious, and gender divides, impacting the quality of education provided.

How Can India Enhance Basic Education?

- **Increased Funding and Resource Allocation:**
  - The government should **allocate more funds to education,** moving towards the **recommended 6% of GDP, as outlined in the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020.**
  - Prioritise funding for infrastructure development, teacher training, and the provision of necessary amenities in schools.
- **Teacher Recruitment and Training:**
  - Recruit and train a sufficient number of qualified teachers to reduce the high student-teacher ratio.
  - Implement programs for continuous professional development to enhance the quality of teaching.
- **Addressing Dropout Rates:**
  - Identify and address the **root causes of student dropouts,** including socio-economic factors, lack of infrastructure, and quality of education.
  - Implement targeted interventions, such as scholarship programs and mentorship initiatives, to encourage student retention.
- **Infrastructure Development:**
  - Invest in the **development of school infrastructure**, ensuring that all schools have basic amenities such as electricity, clean drinking water, and proper sanitation facilities.
  - Promote the integration of technology in education by providing schools with computers and internet access.
- **Focus on Quality of Education:**
  - Emphasise the importance of quality education over rote memorization.
  - Implement child-centered teaching methods and assessment strategies that encourage critical thinking and problem-solving skills.
- **Monitoring and Evaluation:**
  - Establish robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to assess the effectiveness of education policies and interventions.
  - Use data-driven insights to identify areas for improvement and adjust strategies accordingly.

What are the Government Initiatives Related to Education?

- **National Programme on Technology Enhanced Learning.**
- **Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan**
- **PRAGYATA**
- **Mid Day Meal Scheme**
- **Beti Bachao Beti Padhao**

- **PM SHRI Schools**
- **National Education Policy (NEP) 2020:**
  - The NEP 2020 introduces changes to the education system, including the use of mother tongue or local language up to class 5, comprehensive education frameworks, and the introduction of exams at various levels. However, challenges persist in the implementation of these policies.
  - The NEP 2020 emphasises the **need for increased public investment in education,** recommending a target of 6% of GDP.

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Question (PYQ)

Prelims

Q. Which of the following provisions of the Constitution does India have a bearing on Education? (2012)

1. Directive Principles of State Policy
2. Rural and Urban Local Bodies
3. Fifth Schedule
4. Sixth Schedule
5. Seventh Schedule

Select the correct answer using the codes given below:

(a) 1 and 2 only
(b) 3, 4 and 5 only
(c) 1, 2 and 5 only
(d) 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5

Ans- (d)

Mains

Q1. How have digital initiatives in India contributed to the functioning of the education system in the country? Elaborate on your answer. **(2020)**

Q2. Discuss the main objectives of Population Education and point out the measures to achieve them in India in detail. **(2021)**

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