

India's School Education System in Global Educational Discourse: Interpretations from International Agency Reports

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ABSTRACT

This research highlights the representation and interpretation of India's educational system in significant educational reports at the international level, which are published by the international organizations like UNESCO, UNICEF, World Bank, and OECD in light of global educational trends and issues. This research used the qualitative content analysis approach in which it analyzes seven selected reports out of numerous educational reports. The themes covered in this analysis include educational leadership, gender equality, multilingual education, climate change-sensitive education, digital transformation, cyber awareness, inclusive learning, and educational reforms in India. The research results show that international organizations portray India's education system as a large, dynamic, reformative, and transforming education system, which is making efforts to deal with global issues in education by making innovative policies, expanding in the digital domain, embracing multilingualism, becoming environmentally aware, and involving the community in education. The prominent examples of large scale innovations in India are SWAYAM, DIKSHA, Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS), Multilingual Education Programmes, and Climate Change-Sensitive Educational Reforms. However, the reports indicate that structural inequalities continue to exist along with the problem of implementation in connection with gender representation, leadership, vulnerability to climate change, inequality in education and unequal learning. It is concluded from this study that India continues to be seen as an example of global education transformation and innovation as well as a complex education system which continues to face various challenges globally.

Keywords: Global Education, ICDS, SWAYAM, DIKSHA, World Bank.

Introduction

The school education sector of India is often mentioned in reports related to international education, which are published by organizations such as UNESCO, UNICEF, the World Bank, the European Union, OECD, and many others. This paper focuses on the representation of India in major reports by international agencies in the area of global education trends and issues. The analysis of highlights from nine major international reports will help to examine the representation of India regarding the issues of educational leadership, gender parity, multilingualism in education, climate-sensitive education, digitalization, cybersecurity, and inclusive education. This paper attempts to explore dominant discourses that have been created about the education system of India, in order to analyze its positioning within the context of global education.

The selection of reports presents India as an extensive, active and reform-oriented education system that responds to global challenges through innovations, digitalization, inclusiveness, and participation of the community. However, at the same time, the reports reveal ongoing inequalities and

challenges, such as those regarding gender inequality, vulnerabilities to climate change, access to education, leadership and implementation. The aim of this analysis is to provide a critical assessment of the views of international organizations about India's education system in terms of its achievements, priorities and weaknesses, as well as the role India plays in the process of global education transformation.

Objectives

- To critically interpret the extent to which international reports position of India as both a developing education system facing persistent challenges and a global example of large-scale educational transformation and innovation.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative method using content analysis to examine and interpret textual content. The researcher conducts data familiarization, through Gathering, collecting, Organizing and structuring the international reports which includes carefully reading and reviewing the selected materials to gain an overall understanding of the content. The study adopted a systematic document analysis methodology to examine international reports published by international organizations on major global concerns related to school education. An extensive review of 212 documents was conducted over a period of two months, from which an initial set of approximately eighty reports were shortlisted. These eighty reports were then thoroughly reviewed by experts one by one in workshop, where both the final selection of thirty reports and an analytical framework were established.

Procedure of the Study

After examining and analyzing thirty reports on education from an international context, nine reports came to be regarded as significant sources of information on Indian educational policies, practices, reforms, and challenges. These nine reports were chosen purposively depending on the amount of information they had on the Indian education system. These reports were analyzed with a focus on the way in which India is portrayed in the different educational contexts in the world. References pertaining to leadership in education, gender equity, multilingual education, climate responsive education, digital education, cyber awareness, inclusive education, and policy reforms were looked for.

After that, the study went into the dominant narrative and perspective construction carried out by international agencies when talking about India's educational development and the problems associated with it. At the same time, there was an emphasis placed on the positioning of India regarding the world discourse on education in terms of innovative practices, inclusiveness, sustainability, and equality. Ultimately, the results of the research were interpreted to understand how international organizations construct India's image as the country experiencing educational inequality and implementing educational innovations.

Interpretations

International reports were chosen, and a two-step approach was used to conduct an analysis in order to determine the representation and interpretation of India's education system in global educational discourse. In the first step, it is necessary to pay attention to determining the context of mention of India within each report, i.e., to find out the specific educational context, policy area, initiative, reform, or problem in relation to which the international organizations mention India. It should be determined what kind of representation India has: whether India is represented as an underdeveloped education system, a reformist country, a digital education innovator, or a country with educational inequalities and implementation problems.

The second stage of the analysis was the interpretation of the reports with regard to the major aspects of education such as educational leadership, gender equality, multilingualism, environmentally and climate-sensitive education, use of digital technology, cyber awareness, inclusion, and policy change in India. The observations and references from the reports have been analyzed thematically to reveal the main narratives, recurring themes, and underlying perspectives adopted by international organizations. In this way, the study tried to examine how the international organizations interpret the developments in education in India within the context of global developments in education and sustainable development. The details of the report and its interpretation follow below:

- **Global Education Monitoring Report 2025 – Gender Report: Women Lead for Learning**

The report not only recognizes the importance of women's leadership in education but also the lack of their representation in political and educational leadership positions in India. The efforts of 265 women in village councils led to greater expenditure on education and other concerns associated with women's welfare (p. 35). Studies conducted in 16 states of India revealed that an increased presence of women in legislative bodies made the achievement of primary education more probable in cities; however, there were no such findings in rural areas owing to various differences (p. 36). In spite of this contribution, women continue to be underrepresented in senior political positions, where only 2 out of 30 cabinet ministers are women. However, the new 2023 reservation bill proposes to increase the representation of women in legislative assembly positions by reserving one-third seats for women (p. 31). Similarly, women are underrepresented as school principals across different categories of schools (p. 29).

- The report highlights the continuing underrepresentation of women in political and educational leadership positions. Although women leaders contribute positively to education and development, they still occupy very few high-level decision-making roles, both in government and in schools.
- The introduction of reservation policies for women in legislative assemblies is presented as an important step toward improving representation and promoting gender equality.
- Thus, the report interprets India as a country where women's leadership has demonstrated clear developmental benefits, especially in education and community priorities, but where significant gender gaps in leadership and representation still remain.

- **Languages matter: Global guidance on multilingual education**

The report highlights the progress of mother tongue-based multilingual education (MTB-MLE) policies and programs in Asia. Cambodia and India have developed some of the region's strongest MTB-MLE-friendly policies, while Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand have recently enacted policies supporting MTB-MLE and the revitalization of endangered languages (p.35). Awarding of such projects has led to the UNESCO King Sejong Prize for Literacy being bestowed on Mahidol University of Thailand (2016). There are several examples that prove the positive effects of the MTB-MLE approach – the project launched in 2019 in Dungarpur District of Rajasthan, India, which helped improve language skills and classroom activities of Indigenous students who speak Wagdi. Early evaluations revealed a significant improvement in learning outcomes due to reading in the mother tongue rather than a foreign one (p.42).

- According to this document, mother-tongue based multilingual education (MTB-MLE) becomes widely accepted in Asia as an effective and inclusive strategy to increase educational quality, preserve languages and ensure learner participation.
- The report identifies India as one of the leading states in Asia in terms of creating a proper policy of multilingual education that aims to facilitate learning through children's native languages. As an illustration of the benefits of multilingual education, there is an example of teaching children in their first languages that was shown in Dungarpur District of Rajasthan. The results indicate that multilingual education facilitates effective learning and ensures better student engagement and linguistic development.
- The findings demonstrate that children learn better starting with their native languages as compared to learning in an unfamiliar dominant language.
- In other words, India is presented in the report as a curriculum reformer that creates a culturally relevant education through mother tongues.

Global Education Monitoring (GEM) Report 2024

The report gives an extensive insight into the education leadership, policies, reforms, advocacy, and innovations in India. In Karnataka, Uma Mahadevan Dasgupta used the panchayats for promoting literacy through OduvaBelaku ("The Light of Reading") program, whereby over 4,000 libraries with computers and internet were set up in rural areas, as well as over a million books were distributed (p.11). Research from (India) indicates that principals who implement such programs as positive behavior intervention supports and restorative justice have been able to reduce the prevalence of bullying cases (p.35). Teachers in India see school principals as key leaders because they offer better guidance than

their colleagues or administration members; 62% believe principals to be the most helpful sources of guidance (p.35).

Principals are selected regionally; for example, in West Bengal, principals are selected from teachers who have some experience through a merit-based committee system (p.45). Leadership development has been very minimal; in 2016-2017, there was no leadership training for principals in 14 states (p.61). The 2020 National Education Policy introduced workshops and online tools in order to develop management skills of principals (p.61). In Delhi, mentoring and middle-level leadership development assisted teachers to overcome their initial hesitation, creating bridges between teachers and administrators (p.81). Parents in School Management Committees also helped in promoting inclusive education through girl's education, health, and hygiene(p.90).

Both policy and political considerations affect education: competitive constituencies witnessed more growth in education over 30 years (p.116), and discussions surrounding the amendment to the Right to Education Act were full of conflicts between student hard work, teachers' responsibilities, and the infrastructure problems (p.126). Teacher-driven reforms, such as activity-based learning, were piloted successfully via participation in their development (p.127). Public personalities, such as Aamir Khan, have had a say in education through media by addressing dyslexia issues, parents' pressure, and system rigidity (p.131). Advocacy groups have successfully used education as a political priority in the 2019 election campaign, contacting 122 members of parliament (p.136). Nevertheless, gender inequality remains the case for the higher education system: in 2022, women made up only 13% of vice chancellors in central universities, 12% in state universities, 8% in deemed universities, and 6% in private universities (p.195).

- The findings from the Global Education Monitoring Report 2024 are that there are many leadership influences, community involvement, policy changes, and governance cooperation in the education system of India, but still, there are structural disparities and difficulties in implementation.
- The Global Education Monitoring Report 2024 considers India as a vibrant and reformist education system wherein effective leadership on multiple levels ranging from the school principal, teachers, local government, parents, advocacy groups, and public figures has an important contribution to making quality and inclusive education possible.
- Through the case studies on Karnataka, Delhi, and West Bengal it becomes evident that decentralized and participatory leadership can help improve literacy, school management, teacher management, and inclusive education. Examples like rural libraries, mentoring program, and school management committees prove that improvements in education can happen in a more efficient way when communities, educators, and administrators cooperate
- Principals are considered to be significant educational leaders according to the report. It shows the necessity of good school leadership for teachers' support and avoiding bullying.
- Policy wise, the report explains India as an education system in which reforms and improvements are taking place regarding leadership and governance due to the National Education Policy 2020. The policy is making significant strides regarding training of principals and development of management skills. Democratic and political processes can be seen as having an effect on the development of education as competition and advocacy has increased the scope of education in India.
- Furthermore, the report presents India as an education system that encourages innovation and reforms through participation. Participation of teachers in reforms, advocacy by social activists such as Aamir Khan are ways in which social awareness and cooperation has resulted in education reforms. In addition, the report also discusses the challenges in this process including the issue of accountability, lack of infrastructure and gender disparities in higher education leadership.
- Consequently, India can be seen as an education system in which there are ongoing reforms in terms of leadership and participation, however, inequalities persist within them.

Education and Climate Change: Learning to Act for People and Planet

Moreover, the report emphasizes the effects of climate and environment on education in India by pointing out the negative influence of drought, floods, heat waves and other types of disruptions

caused by climate on children's educational results, health, and enrollment. For example, in rural areas of Maharashtra, drought led to decreasing the results in mathematics by 4.1% and reading by 2.7%. Long-term rainfall shocks have a negative influence on children's vocabulary, mathematics and non-cognitive skills, especially among disadvantaged children (p. 3). In addition, the report states that an inclusive education environment, fair teachers and involved parents can help to minimize the educational impact of climate disasters (p. 7). Climate education is also connected to education since better-educated people have a better understanding of climate risks and environmental policy (p. 8). Some initiatives of India include, for example, "Mera Planet Mera Ghar" project created by Sesame Workshop India and other materials created by the Centre for Environmental Education (pp. 17, 22). Another study titled *Learning Interrupted: Global Snapshot of Climate-Associated School Disruptions in 2024*, brings out India's vulnerability to the effects of climate change, since floods, cyclones, high temperature, and pollution are increasingly affecting education, where more than 54 million children are exposed to heat waves in the year 2024 alone (p. 11). To counter these challenges, India has introduced climate education in its curriculum and implemented Comprehensive School Safety Programs to build resilience and capacity of teachers (p. 6). The study further brings out India's initiatives in Early Childhood Care and Education by integrating pre-primary education into the formal school structure and the significance of Integrated Child Development Services in providing pre-school education, especially in rural regions (pp. 22, 24).

- The message of this report is that climate change and environmental disturbances have become major obstacles for education and learning in India. The report shows India as a very vulnerable country in terms of education with regard to the environment, since environmental issues like droughts, floods, heat waves, cyclones and pollution have a direct impact on students' performance, attendance and overall development.
- The results of the study in Maharashtra and other long-term studies show that climate disturbances affect learning outcomes, particularly math, reading, vocabulary and non-cognitive abilities. These impacts are more pronounced for socially and economically disadvantaged groups, such as children from poorly educated families and poor communities, and show how climate change increases educational disparities.
- However, the other message of the report is that an inclusive school environment and supportive community can decrease the adverse impacts of climate disasters on education. Good teachers, active parents and the support of schools allow children to continue learning despite the environmental crisis.
- The document also views India as a country gradually incorporating climate consciousness and environmental education into its educational policies and curriculum. "Mera Planet Mera Ghar," for instance, is one such initiative along with initiatives from Centre for Environment Education that work towards increasing environmental literacy and climate consciousness in young children. Integration of climate change into the curriculum and teacher training shows how countries are moving towards educating their future generation about environmental challenges.
- Additionally, the report highlights India's dedication to providing early childhood education through initiatives like Integrated Child Development Services which plays an important part in providing pre-school education, nutrition, and development assistance to children, especially those living in rural India. Hence, India is seen as recognizing the importance of early childhood care and education for building resilience and enhancing educational outcomes.
- Therefore, it can be said that the report shows India as a country struggling with disruptions in climate-induced education while taking huge steps towards becoming climate-conscious and resilient in education.

Report of G20 on Education

The report sheds light on the growing significance of digitalization in education worldwide, with the G20 Education Working Group concentrating on enhancing connectivity, digital pedagogy, online learning, digital devices and curriculum reforms through digital technologies in order to make education accessible and forward-looking (background). In this regard, India's SWAYAM digital education initiative is introduced as a prominent one for providing thousands of online courses in a variety of subjects, even in innovative areas like artificial intelligence and cyber security, and credit transfer and certification of learners numbering in millions (p. 25). In addition, the report focuses on SWAYAM Plus that further

connects education to employability via industry partnerships, internships and workforce-related courses and presents India as a forward-looking education system (p. 25).

- The interpretation of the report is that digitalization has become a key issue in transforming education systems and making it one of the top priorities on the global level. Furthermore, India becomes one of the important cases illustrating large-scale digitalization of the education sector. The report views technology not only as a supporting mechanism but also as an important tool for improving access to, quality of, and readiness for education.
- The debates taking place within the G20 Education Working Group show that nations around the world understand that it has become vital to incorporate digital technologies in various fields of education, including teaching methodologies, curricula, administration of schools, and skills development. This shows that there is a global transformation of the education system in the direction of making it technology-driven and student-centered.
- The discussion above allows interpreting India's SWAYAM platform as a significant national project showing how the digital infrastructure can be used to broaden educational possibilities. Providing free-of-charge online courses in different fields, including some highly specialized disciplines such as artificial intelligence and cyber security, India's SWAYAM project shows how education can be democratized and improved.
- Also, the report indicates that India has been taking steps towards a more innovative approach to education, where education and employability go hand in hand. The emphasis on industry tie-ups, internships, and vocational courses through SWAYAM Plus is a step in the direction of creating a balance between education and employability. Thus, India can be seen as an innovative education system that prepares itself for the future.
- Consequently, India is seen by the report as a growing digital education system that is effectively leveraging technology, online education, and digital pedagogy to ensure better educational opportunities and lifelong learning.

G20 Toolkit on Cyber Education on Cyber Awareness for Children and Youth:

According to the report, some of the measures taken by India towards ensuring digital safety, cyber awareness, and ethical practices include educating people about digital safety and cyber crimes and ensuring legal protection. In higher learning institutions such as colleges and universities, the University Grants Commission in India has made it mandatory for students to undertake a cyber security course which aims at making students aware about cyber threats and how to prevent them, as well as reporting and crisis management systems (p. 36). Other measures taken to ensure digital safety of children from the media include the formulation of advertising guidelines which do not allow misleading advertisements, especially those which may harm the body image of children (p. 34). Lastly, despite India having no law on online grooming, there is legislation on Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act (p. 32).

- The above report can be summarized as an attempt by India to establish itself as being more focused on improving its digital security environment through education and legislation.
- India acknowledges the significance of being digitally literate and safe by offering cyber security education to its university students. In addition, the country takes actions in order to secure its children from the detrimental effects of media through ethical advertising policies as well as POCSO Act legislation.
- Consequently, the report reveals India's intention of establishing itself as being digitally aware and ensuring the safety of its children.

Global Education Monitoring Report 2023 – Technology in Education: Whose Terms?

- Technology through digitization is revolutionizing education through improved generation and dissemination of educational materials such as digital textbooks, QR code enabled content, learning management systems, and digital repositories including the National Digital Library of India. (p. 47)
- The use of collaborative tools such as wiki sites facilitates the creation of participatory knowledge. Examples include Wikipedia and the SchoolWiki of India which demonstrate how both the students and educators can come together to create educational material. (p. 51)

- Government projects such as Project Gutenberg and the Million Book Project are examples of large scale digitization initiatives that demonstrate the way digital technology democratizes knowledge and makes books and other educational materials available to all. (p. 52)
- Inclusive digital education projects are increasingly becoming common throughout the globe and in India. Energized textbooks with QR codes, Indian Sign Language information, talking books, multi-modal digital books, and universal design for learning methods have improved the accessibility of learning for people with special needs and different linguistic backgrounds. Also, there is the Marrakech Treaty 2013 that helps publish books in an accessible form for visually impaired persons. (p. 53)
- National Digital Library of India is a big digital repository that integrates educational content from both national and international sources and allows searching content in terms of language, level, and content type to provide equitable access to good education. (p. 54)
- There is a DIKSHA platform in India which has become one of the biggest digital repositories in the world in terms of learning with energized textbooks, courses, quizzes, and pedagogical content. This project became even more important during the pandemic and by July 2022 was accessed more than 50 million times per day. (p. 55)
- National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 has allowed in India online learning at the university level with help of SWAYAM platform. People can now learn up to 40% of courses online. (p. 58)
- India is also leveraging digital technology to promote linguistic diversity with more than 45,000 multilingual Open Educational Resources storybooks across 323 languages, including those of indigenous and endangered languages, and facilitating bilingual and minority language education. (p. 60)
- Technology has become an essential tool for enhancing the quality of teaching and learning. States such as Uttar Pradesh and Haryana have introduced adaptive learning systems, digital literacy programs and tablet-led personalization of education for public school students. (p. 71)
- Technology has helped to enhance the performance in mathematics and sciences in rural schools, as satellite-delivered lectures have been used to complement classroom teaching and help teachers devote time to classroom activities. (p. 73)
- The report highlights that technology is most effective when combined with traditional teaching rather than substituting for it. It was observed in Gujarat that computer-assisted learning proved to be more effective as an after-
- School support program particularly for weaker students. (p. 75)
- India's Pradhan Mantri Gramin Digital Saksharta Abhiyan (PMGDISHA) has successfully promoted rural digital literacy through extensive training for millions of people in the use of digital devices, Internet, digital payments, and online government services. (p. 91)
- In addition to that, the report also emphasizes the importance given by India towards building digital competencies and preparing future-oriented educational programs. NEP 2020 includes competencies for artificial intelligence, machine learning, and digital technologies in the higher education curriculum, whereas DIKSHA and Free Software policy of Kerala have helped to build digital learning facilities in schools.

Therefore, the report shows India as a country that uses digital innovations to enhance the quality of education, increase its accessibility, protect linguistic diversity, and prepare the youth for future.

Conclusion

Consequently, the research has shown that the international agency reports depict the Indian education system as a large, diverse, dynamic, and reform-oriented entity that responds to the current global educational challenges by means of policy innovations, digitalization, multilingualism, climate-responsiveness, and participation in the development process on the part of the community. Thus, India is viewed as a country that is making considerable progress in terms of developing digital education, mother tongue-based multilingual education, cyber awareness, environment education, grassroots leadership, and socially responsive learning, where innovations such as SWAYAM, DIKSHA, ICDS, and multilingual educational programmes can be seen as large-scale innovations in the field of education. However, at the same time, the agency reports reveal the presence of structural inequalities and

challenges in terms of gender representation in the education sphere, leadership skills, climate-responsiveness, learning outcomes inequality, and educational accessibility and quality inequality. Despite the positive impact of women's leadership, decentralized governance, and the use of educational technology on educational development, progress in the development of India's educational system is still unequal for some regions and social groups. Thus, India should be perceived as both a role model for educational transformation and innovation in the world and a complicated system affected.

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