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Monday, Mar 25, 2019 | New Delhi 30 ℃ ⌄ | e-paper (http://paper.hindustantimes.com/epaper/viewer.aspx)

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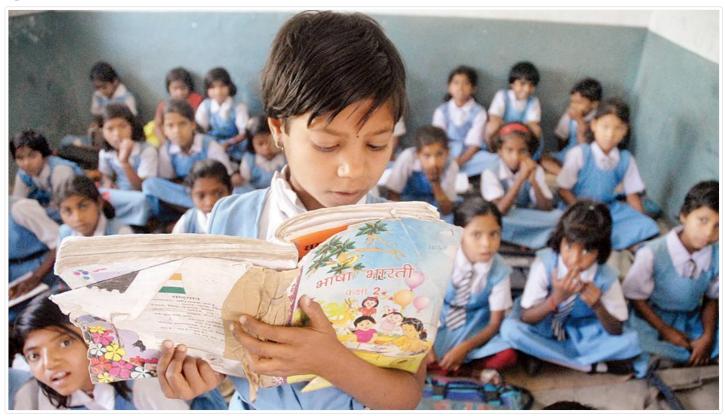brandstudio-live (http://brandleadership.hindustantimes.com/ht_live.html)   tech (/tech/)

# Education reform needs a systematic approach

Academic interventions like competence-linked teaching, learning and assessments need to be accompanied by an overhaul of the existing governance structures.

**ANALYSIS**   Updated: Mar 25, 2019 07:45 IST

ht   Amitabh Kant



To effect a large-scale transformation in education, what is needed is a comprehensive approach to coordinate academic and administrative change.(HT File Photo)

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Approximately 29% of India's population is below the age of 14, and, at 250 million, we have the highest number of school-going students in the world. Unfortunately, we also have a public education system that is failing the young population by denying them quality education.

To effect a large-scale transformation in education, a systemic approach, consisting of comprehensive and coordinated set of academic and administrative reforms, is needed. Academic interventions like competence-linked teaching, learning and assessments need to be accompanied by an overhaul of the existing governance structures.

Some states like Haryana, Rajasthan, Himachal Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh and Odisha have implemented these system-level reforms, leading to many early successes. Here are five key lessons that emerge from these comprehensive change programmes that can be useful for other states in their effort to improve their public education systems.

One, embed grade competence in all classroom transactions: More than half of our children studying in government schools lack competencies appropriate to their grade levels, which when accumulated over the years, lead to significant learning gaps. This is because teachers focus on syllabus completion instead of emphasising the attainment of competencies. Haryana has instituted a system of *saksham taalika* that takes the shape of a table that defines grade competencies for all subjects for each two-month cycle in an academic year. These grade competencies are mapped to all teaching and learning material — specific chapters in the text books, state designed remedial programmes and teacher training programmes. To close the loop, assessments are conducted and mapped to the grade competence framework with standardised statewide Summative Assessment Tests (SATs), conducted every two months to track progress on these metrics over time.

Two, ingrain human enablement in the system: For quality delivery of education, it is important to empower frontline workers such as teachers as well as those working in the background such as education officers, state board officials, etc. with appropriate skills and resources. In recognition of this, states have taken several steps. Himachal Pradesh, for example, has launched the TeacherApp, which is a tech-based teacher training platform that provides bite-sized content for easy consumption by teachers. Remote training ensures that teachers do not lose time in travel and can upskill themselves continuously. Another great example of human enablement comes from Andhra Pradesh where an assessment cell has been created with 13 subject matter experts. This cell aims to build capacity of relevant stakeholders.

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Three, leverage data/ technology to improve efficiency: According to a report by the National Institute of Education Planning and Administration (NIEPA), teachers spend less than one-fifth of their time on teaching activities, with more than double their teaching time being spent on administrative activities such as data collection, material distribution and redressing their human resource and personnel issues. It is widely accepted that accountability in delivery of services is achieved when stakeholders are enabled to better perform their core functions by minimising time and labour on tasks removed from their primary responsibilities. In acknowledgement of this, states like Rajasthan have sought to free up teacher time by creating an enterprise system like the *shaala darpan* web portal. This portal allows for faster grievance redressal, online transfers and postings, and acts as a single source for all school-related data, eliminating the need for repeated data collection for various material distribution and other activities.

Four, strengthen monitoring and evaluation systems: Most states have an established system of inspection of schools by the education department to ascertain their quality, but the reality is that the target numbers of school inspections are rarely met because of manpower shortages. Mindful of this, states like Andhra Pradesh have created systems that set in place publicly available, real time and data backed monitoring mechanisms.

Five, build momentum through a public campaign: All the above interventions are dependent on stakeholder commitment and their consistent high performance. This can only be brought about by a steadfast political and bureaucratic commitment to the goal of improving learning outcomes. A dynamic campaign with the support of highest levels of political leadership needs to be built to provide momentum and align all stakeholders on a single transformation road map.

While these interventions are replicable everywhere, their success or failure ultimately rests on a state's ability to move these parts simultaneously. Given the right momentum, these interventions can, over time, mature into transformative juggernauts such that they both individually thrive, and collectively drive the education system to produce consistently better outcomes.

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*The views expressed are personal*

First Published: Mar 25, 2019 07:36 IST