

## Unfulfilled education aspiration

January 10, 2011, Author: Rajesh Shukla

Financial difficulties, household responsibilities, guardians' disinterest and non-availability of good institutions are the main reasons for the youth not pursuing higher education.



Today's youngsters are better educated than their parents. They are generally economically better off, enjoy more freedom, are ambitious, and have more choice and opportunities. Most importantly, they are also more materialistic than their forebears.

Surveys by the US National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) show that the percentage of young people who, two years after high school, deemed having lots of money as very important increased from 10% in 1974 to 35% in 1994 (Larson presentation, 4th Committee Meeting-Irvine, December 2000).

What are the problems faced by the youth of the country as far as education is concerned? National Youth Readership Survey (NYRS), 2009, put some questions to literate youth respondents to ascertain their views.

NYRS 2009 found that at the all-India level, 30% of the literate youth have only up to primary level education and about 10% are graduate and above. The remaining 60% youth have qualifications varying between Classes VI and XII. It is also evident that about 76% of the targeted youth have not studied beyond Class X.

The persistent and serious problems that hamstring universalisation of primary education in the country is the heavy dropout rates. NYRS 2009 has revealed that nearly 88 million (26%) of the literate youth had stopped their studies at different levels, though they had aspired to go further. Of these youth, 64% (56 million) live in rural and the rest in urban areas. About 55% (48 million) of the dropouts are male.

About 62% of these unlucky youth had stopped their studies before completing Class X with dismal level of education. About 18% had stopped after completing Class X and 12% after higher secondary.

It can be observed that 29% of the primary passouts, 25% of the 'matric' passouts and 22% of the graduates had stopped their studies although they had aspired to study further.

Of the youth who are primary passouts, 45% had the aspiration to pass 'matric', 24% higher secondary and 13% graduation and 12% post-graduation.

Among the matriculates, 27% had aspired to complete higher secondary, 53% graduation and 18% post-graduation, while among higher secondary passouts, 64% had aspired to become graduates and 30% post-graduates.

In the case of graduates, 79% had aspired to complete post-graduation and 21% had wanted to get professional degrees.

Financial difficulties seem to be the paramount reason for not pursuing higher education. About 58% gave this as the first reason and 21% as the second reason. However, household responsibilities also turned out to be a major factor with 12% citing it as the first reason, 33% as the second and 26% as the third reason.

In 10% of the cases, parents or husband not allowing further studies was cited as the first reason, with 18% citing it as the second and 15% as the third reason.

A few youth also cited non-availability of good schools and colleges in the locality as the reason for not pursuing higher education.

India trails most countries, including those in the developing block, in the crucial area of spreading education. In 1960, South Korea, Hong Kong and Thailand had literacy rates hovering in the 70% region, while India lagged behind with 28%.

By 1990, the East Asian 'tigers' had crossed the 90% mark, but India barely covered 50% of its population. In 1990 and 1999, China's literacy rates were higher than India's by 28% and 27% respectively (Dreze and Sen, 2002).

There are several issues that are peculiar to the education scenario of India. There is a serious paucity of quality schools, proper infrastructure and facilities, and well-trained teachers. There are also political externalities like the volatile issue of caste-based reservation in higher education.

There are serious disputes over the appropriate medium of instruction. Should education be imparted in English, which is supposed to be the world's business language, or in the regional language?

The country has also been grappling with the problem of a high dropout rate. Recent thoughts on restructuring the education system have thrown up new issues like need for introducing sex education in the academic curriculum.

While it is true that India has a long way to go before reaping the demographic dividend in all its glory, the flow of trends is positive.