ASER 2024 and Elementary Education

[Source: HT](#)

Why in News?

The [NGO](#) **Pratham Foundation** released the [Annual Status of Education Report (ASER)](#) **2024** on **learning outcomes of school students** in **rural India.**

- It is based on a 2024 survey conducted in **17,997 villages across 605 rural districts.**
- It reached **649,491 children in the 3-16 years age group**, and tested the **reading and arithmetic skills** of over **500,000 children in the 5-16 years age group**.

What is ASER?

- **About: ASER** is a **nationwide, citizen-led household survey** that offers an insightful snapshot of children's schooling and learning in rural India.
  - Launched in **2005,** ASER tracks **educational trends and challenges** in rural areas, evolving in **coverage, focus, and frequency**.
- **Focus Areas**:
  - **Enrollment**: ASER tracks **school and preschool enrollment** trends, highlighting improvements and challenges by state and age group.
  - **Learning Outcomes**: It assesses basic **reading and arithmetic skills**, showing children's progress at **primary and secondary levels.**
  - **Digital Literacy**: ASER 2024 evaluates older children's **smartphone skills**, including tasks like setting **alarms, browsing, and messaging**.

What are the Key Findings of the Report?

- **Pre-primary (Age Group 3-5 Years):**
  - **Enrollment**: Enrollment in pre-primary institutions ([Anganwadi](#)**, government pre-primary class, or private LKG/UKG**) has steadily increased since 2018.
    - E.g., Enrollment of **3-year-olds** rose from **68.1% in 2018 to 77.4% in 2024**.
  - **Pre-primary Institutions: Anganwadi centres** are the main provider of pre-primary education, enrolling over **half of 3-4-year-olds,** while **one-third** of **5-year-olds** attend **private schools or preschools.**
- **Elementary (Age Group 6-14 Years):**
  - **Overall Enrollment**: Enrollment dropped slightly from **98.4% in 2022 to 98.1% in 2024**, with **government school** enrollment declining from 7**2.9% to 66.8%.**

- **Reading and Arithmetic Skills:** In 2024, **23.4% of Standard (Std) III** children in government schools could **read Std II-level text**, up from 16.3% in 2022.
    - In 2024, **45.8% of Std VIII** students could solve **basic arithmetic problems,** showing slight improvement.
    - **Arithmetic abilities improved more than reading skills**, with **government schools showing faster progress** than private schools.
- **Older Children (Age Group 15-16 Years):**
    - **Enrollment:** The dropout rate for **15-16-year-olds** decreased from **13.1% in 2018 to 7.9% in 2024**, with **girls** at a higher rate of **8.1%**.
    - **Smartphone Access and Usage ([Digital Literacy]):**
        - **Access**: Nearly **90% of 14-16-year-olds** have smartphone access, with **boys (85.5%)** using them more than girls **(79.4%).**
        - **Ownership**: **27%** of 14-year-olds and **37.8%** of 16-year-olds own smartphones**.**
        - **Use**: **82.2%** of children use **smartphones**, with **57% for education** and **76% for social media.**
        - **Digital Safety**: **62%** of children know how to **block/report profiles**, and 55.2% know how to make profiles private.
- **School Observations:**
    - **Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN):** Over **80%** of schools implemented **[FLN] activities**, with at **least one teacher in 75%** of these schools receiving **FLN training**.
    - **Attendance:** Student attendance increased from **72.4% in 2018 to 75.9% in 2024,** and **teacher attendance** increased from **85.1% to 87.5%.**
    - **School Facilities:** There were slight **improvements** in the availability of **basic school facilities:**
        - Usable **girls' toilets** increased from **66.4% in 2018 to 72% in 2024.**
        - **Drinking water** availability rose from **74.8% to 77.7%.**
        - The use of **non-textbook books** (e.g., novels, short stories, folk tales) by students increased from **36.9% to 51.3%.**
        - The percentage of schools with **playgrounds** remained stable at around **66%.**
    - **Difference in Outcome:** There are significant **state-level differences** in **learning outcomes and improvement** since the **[Covid-19 pandemic]**.
        - In **Std III, reading ability lagged behind 2018** levels in over half the states, but **arithmetic improved** in all but six.
        - In **Std V and VIII**, many states **did not reach pre-pandemic levels,** even in arithmetic.

What is Elementary Education?

- **About: [Elementary Education]** is the **foundation** of the entire educational system, typically beginning at the **age of six.**
    - It marks the start of **formal education**, crucial for a child's **physical, mental, emotional, intellectual, and social development.**
- **Significance:**
    - **Foundation for Future Learning**: It provides **core skills (reading, writing, math, problem-solving)** essential for higher education and careers.
    - **Development of Social Skills**: Children learn **teamwork, communication, and empathy** through peer and teacher interactions.
    - **Personal and Emotional Growth**: It builds **self-confidence and motivation**, allowing children to explore their potential and creativity.
    - **Promotion of Motor Skills**: Activities like **sports and creative expression** develop fine and gross motor skills.
    - **Building Social Awareness**: Children learn **hygiene, social responsibilities, and civic duties,** fostering informed future citizens.
    - **Long-Term Economic Impact**: Investment in elementary education drives **economic growth, innovation, and productivity.**
- **Challenges:**
    - **Poor School Infrastructure:** Of over **14.71 lakh schools** in India, **1.52 lakh** lack functional **electricity**, hindering the use of technology like computers and the internet in

teaching.

- **67,000 schools**, including 46,000 government-run, **lack functional [toilets](#).** Only **3.37 lakh government schools (33.2%)** have disabled-friendly toilets, with less than a **third being functional.**
  - ○ **Limited Access to Technology:** Only **43.5%** of government schools have **computers** for teaching, compared to **70.9% in private, unaided schools.**
  - ○ **Poor Teacher Student Ratio:** India has nearly **lakh schools** with just **one teacher each.**
  - ○ **Social Divides:** Social divides, such as **caste-class, rural-urban, religious, and gender disparities**, affect the quality of education.
  - ○ **Language Barriers:**The **lack** of textbooks and materials in **regional languages** limits education access for those **not proficient in Hindi/English** medium of instruction.

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](#)**

Way Forward

- **Early Intervention**: Immediate interventions should be made to **increase retention** by focusing on **socio-economically disadvantaged groups.**
  - ○ Introduce **flexible, part-time education** to accommodate children who need to **work or assist at home.**
- **Literacy for Non-Enrolled Children**: Launch **supplementary literacy programs** for children who have **dropped out or missed school.**
- **Improve Accountability**: Establish **District School Boards** for local educational planning and development. Increase **school inspectors** to enhance oversight and education quality.
- **Provision of Schools:** Ensure **school access within 1 km (walking distance)** by establishing more schools in **rural and tribal areas.**
- **Parental Education:** Launch campaigns to **educate parents** on the importance of education, particularly for **girls,** and how education can improve their **children's future.**

Drishti Mains Question:

Discuss the state of elementary education in India? What structural and policy changes are needed to strengthen elementary education in India?

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Question (PYQ)

Prelims

Q. Which of the following provisions of the Constitution of 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. Discuss the main objectives of Population Education and point out the measures to achieve them in India in detail. (2021)

Q2. How have digital initiatives in India contributed to the functioning of the education system in the country? Elaborate on your answer. (2020)