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Lessons That India Can Derive From PISA

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This article is based on **“Lessons from PISA 2018 for India: Addressing educational inequality holds the key”** which was published in The Times of India on 22/12/2019. It talks about the issue of educational inequality in India’s schools.

Recently, India has announced that students from Chandigarh, will take part in the **Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) test** in 2021. Before this India has participated in the PISA test only once before (in 2009), where **India ranked 72nd out of 73 countries**.

In this context, India can take lessons from PISA 2018 report, to prepare itself for the 2021 test.

What is PISA?

- The PISA is a study done to produce comparable data on education policy and outcomes across countries (**any country can voluntary opt for PISA**).
- It was initiated by the **Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)** in 2000.
- It conducts a test every three years, evaluating 15-year-olds in member and non-member countries to assess the quality and inclusivity of school systems in these countries.
- Individual schools are chosen which are approved by the PISA governing board and evaluated using stringent criteria. These schools **represent the country’s education system**.

What does the test entail?

- The PISA test **does not assess students on their memory** but attempts to evaluate whether students can apply the knowledge they have gained through primary and secondary education.

- Apart from subjects like math, reading comprehension and science, the test also includes an optional section on innovative subjects such as collaborative problem-solving and financial literacy.
- The test aims to give a comprehensive analysis of how education systems are working in terms of preparing its students for higher education and subsequent employment.
- Further, the test evaluates whether the education system in these countries teaches students adequate social and community skills, which will enable the students to excel holistically as a member of the workforce.
- After collecting results from across the world, experts translate these results into data points which are evaluated to score the countries.

What lessons can be drawn from the PISA 2018 report?

Educational Inequality:

- Despite all evidence emphasizing the need for educational equity for success, many educational systems across the richest countries remain unequal.
- On average across OECD countries, 12% of reading performance was accounted for by students' economic, social and cultural background; students from poor and marginalized communities are less likely to succeed.
- 17.4% of advantaged students and 2.9% of disadvantaged students were top performers on reading.
- Furthermore, disadvantaged students are less likely to be in the same school as high achievers in school systems.
- Also, limited social diversity in schools means that disadvantaged students are enrolled in schools that have disproportionately large concentrations of low achievers – which may negatively affect their performance.

Indian education system suffers from the same systemic issues

- **Non-uniformity in quality standards**

Though, universalization of education has been achieved by creating a multiplicity of schools. However, these schools are of unequal quality which makes it impossible for students from different economic groups to meet and learn together.

- **Inadequate expenditure**

PISA results show that there is a positive relationship between investment in education and average performance (up to a threshold of \$ 50,000 or Rs 35 lakhs in cumulative expenditure per student from age 6 to 15).

- In the Indian education system, the per-child unit cost in government-run Kendriya Vidyalaya schools is Rs 27,000.
- The expenditure per child average cost in government schools of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar (two of the most backward in India) is Rs 7,613 and Rs 9,583 respectively.

- **Unfulfilled RTE norms**

The government's data suggests that **18.5% of India's schools continue to lack the necessary minimum professional qualifications** and a **third of our schools (34.4%) lack the requisite number of teachers as per the Right to Education Act norms**.

Way Forward

- Introduction of **formula-based funding approach can be a solution**, whereby the resources allocated to a school depending on its socioeconomic context.
This will help to fund in remote schools to come at par with, roadside, urban and other categories of schools.
- Attracting the **most qualified teachers** to the most challenging classrooms will play a critical role in determining the success of India's educational success.
- India needs to do more to **restore the dignity of the teaching profession**. Teachers need to be supported not only in their professional and personal lives but their efforts need to be valued and publicly recognised.

Investment in equitable education while addressing regional, gender and social disparities can correct historic wrongs done to India's poor and socially disadvantaged. Also, this will pave the way for more effective use of resources, ensure that the labour force has the skills needed to rekindle economic growth, and would be a step towards promoting social cohesion.

Drishti Mains Question

Resolving educational inequality in India is a multi-dimensional challenge.
Comment.