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Navigating the Global Knowledge Economy through Access to Primary Education in India

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Abstract

Globalization and the knowledge economy present both opportunities and challenges for emerging nations like India. With a workforce of about 500 million, over 90% of them work in unorganized sectors, India faces significant barriers due to a lack of formal vocational education. This shortfall leads to poor working conditions, low incomes, and economic stagnation, particularly as global economic shifts demand skill upgradation and reskilling. The vast unorganized sector complicates the implementation of formal training mechanisms, further hindering progress. Amidst this, India's demographic dividend, its young working-age population offers a unique opportunity. However, to capitalize on this, the nation must first ensure universal access to quality primary education. Despite improvements in enrollment and literacy rates, the quality and relevance of education remain inadequate. The focus on access has often been limited to quantitative metrics, overlooking the need for education that genuinely enhances productivity and real-world applicability. This paper examines the intricacies of access to primary education in the context of the global knowledge economy, with a specific focus on Bihar. It is structured into three sections: Section-I conceptualizes the link between education and Knowledge economy; Section-II evaluates primary educational access across Indian states, particularly in Bihar; Section-III offers strategies or policy implications to improve educational access in Bihar.

Keywords: Globalization, Unorganized, Vocational, Access, Skill Development

Introduction

For emerging nations like India, globalization and the knowledge economy present both opportunities and many obstacles. In India, there are about 500 million workers. More than 90% of them work for disorganized, unincorporated businesses where they pick up conventional knowledge on the job. For a significant portion of this population, formal vocational education is lacking, which results in subpar working conditions, low incomes, and workforce inertia that impedes economic progress. As some industries decline and new opportunities arise in others, the global flow of goods, services, and know-how puts pressure on economies to restructure. These forces also create a demand for skill upgradation and training in new skills for those employed in new industries, as well as for the reskilling of those made redundant.

Based on a global assessment, India currently has one of the highest labor surpluses among working-age people (1564 years old) globally. India is experiencing a demographic dividend and has the ability to produce skilled labor for jobs by utilizing vocational and skill development training efficiently. The first step towards making the most of the country's rich demographic dividend is to guarantee elementary

school access. The goal of making primary education universal has not yet been achieved, despite the achievement seeming very remarkable. This is due to two factors: first, the official definition of access is extremely limited and unclear; and second, the type of education that is provided does not demonstrate any real-world productivity.

Based on apparent increases in enrollment ratios, the literacy rate, and other infrastructure facilities, the administration continues to celebrate by reflecting on improved access to basic facilities; however, a closer examination finds the progress to be woefully inadequate. The amount of advancement has been nearly nonexistent when considering the delivery of high-quality education, returns to beneficiaries, the service provider's commitment, and the recipient's attitude toward education. Thus, the yardstick of access i.e., the degree to which the amenities have been made available to the weaker or more vulnerable sections becomes more exacting and appropriate from this perspective. The government's second duty is to give vocational and skill development training in primary education so that parents can learn about the broader conceptualization of access.

The present paper attempts to understand the necessity of global knowledge economy by measuring access to primary education for different states of India in general and Bihar in particular. In light of this, the present paper is divided into three sections. Section-I conceptualizes access to primary education with in the conceptual framework of global knowledge economy. Section-II measures access to primary education for different states of India and seeks to identify the position of India in overall educational development. Section-III suggests some strategies for ensuring comprehensive educational access therein.

Section-I: Global Knowledge Economy: The Access Perspective

An integral part of the economic growth and development process is structural transformation. The structure of output and employment changes as a country grows and develops. A well-known stylized fact is that the share of agriculture in output and employment falls and the share of manufacturing and services correspondingly rises during the industrialization process. As a result of the 1998-99 World Development Report on Knowledge for Development, the topic of the knowledge economy gained prominence with policymakers worldwide. With a vision of transforming India into a knowledge superpower, gradually the country followed a paradigm shift towards a knowledge based economy.

The World Bank Institute offers a formal definition of a knowledge economy as one that creates, disseminates, and uses knowledge to enhance its growth and development. As per World Bank, there are four pillars of the knowledge economy within the Knowledge Economy Framework (World Bank, 2002). These pillars are economic incentive and institutional regime, educated and skilled workers, an effective innovation system and a modern and adequate information infrastructure. This is depicted in table given below-

Table-1: World Bank's Four Pillars of Knowledge Economy

Pillar 1	Pillar 2	Pillar 3	Pillar 4
Economic & Institutional Regime	**Education & Skills**	**Information & Communication Infrastructure**	**Innovation System**
Economic & Institutional regime	The country's people need	A dynamic information infrastructure is needed	The country's innovation system—

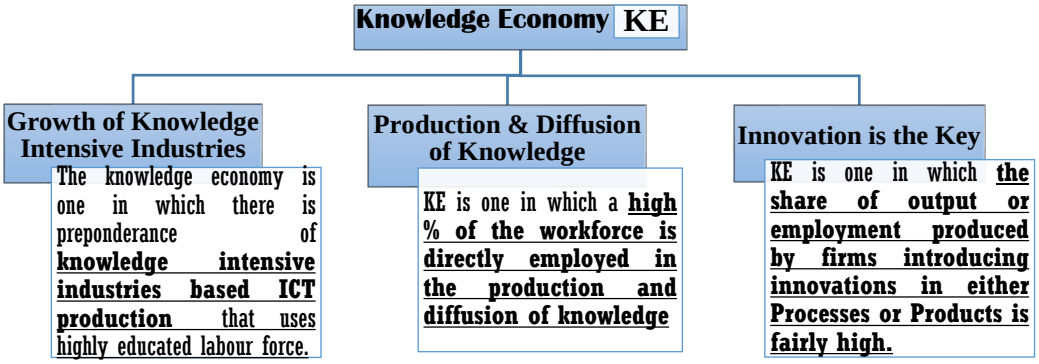
must provide incentives for the efficient use of existing and new knowledge and the flourishing of entrepreneurship **An economic incentive, policy, & Institutional regime for efficient creation, dissemination and utilization of knowledge;**	education and skills that enable them to create and share, and to use it well. **Thus the need is- Educated & Skilled Workers Capable of Upgrading & Adapting Continuously;**	to facilitate the effective communication, dissemination, and processing of information. **A modern and adequate information infrastructure for communication & dissemination**	**firms, research centers, universities, think tanks, consultants, and other organizations —must be capable of tapping the growing stock of global knowledge, assimilating and adapting it to local needs, and creating new technology**

Source: World Bank Institute (2002)

A knowledge economy uses data as it raw material and transforms it using technology, analysis tools, and human intelligence into knowledge and expertise. Definitions of the knowledge economy "the role of knowledge (as compared with natural resources, physical capital and low skill labour) has taken on greater importance. Although the pace may differ all OECD economies are moving towards a knowledge based economy" (OECD 1996).

Knowledge Economy is not just high-technology industries or ICT. More appropriate to look broadly –it is an economy that harnesses and uses new and existing knowledge & Skill to improve the productivity of agriculture, industry, and services, and increases overall welfare. The knowledge economy is not just a synonym for information economy or information society. The concept of knowledge economy can be understood with the help of figure given below-

Figure-1: Concept of Knowledge Economy

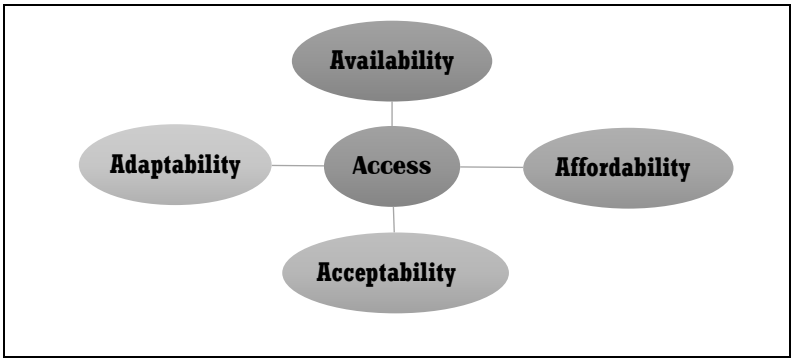


The knowledge economy is a learning society. Economic success and a culture of continuous innovation depend on the capacity of workers to keep learning themselves and from each other. According to OECD, successful knowledge economies rely on four sources of innovation- scientific and technical knowledge, interactions and incentives to innovate among users and doers, decentralized modular patterns of innovation within a coordinated system and widespread application of information and communication technologies, including in education.

Knowledge economies work best when they are developed in conjunction with knowledge societies. Partly, this means recognizing and ensuring that knowledge economy initiatives do not only bolster

existing or emerging elites, but also yield social dividends for the broader civil society through reductions in poverty, improved health, greater education and workforce participation for women and girls, and declines in levels of violence. There is a yawning gap between these preferred futures of knowledge economies and knowledge societies and the current realities of most developing countries, where industrialism, unemployment, subsistence living and vast informal economies define day to day life for most of the population. One way to close the gap is through access to primary education and vocational training. We argue that the progress in the field of universalization of primary education can be measured on the basis whether access to primary education is being ensured or not. From this perspective access is a composite of four factors (Raman & Sulochana, 2013).

Chart-1
Aspects (Indicators) of Access to Primary Education



The official approach conceptualises access entirely in terms of attainment. *Availability* of requisite infrastructure has been judged to be the main determinant of attainment. Govinda and Varghese (1992), Dreze and Kingdon (2001), Tilak (1996), etc. found strong positive correlation between the availability of adequate school infrastructure and enrolment/retention in school, especially of girl children. Although viewing access as attainment simplifies things for us but creates problems at the same time. It provides a partial picture of the whole concept of access. Mere availability of facilities will not ensure true access until the population, especially the vulnerable section, has requisite financial means to utilise these facilities. Therefore, instead of relying on availability alone, the issue of affordability needs to be equally stressed upon. Access has been viewed in terms of affordability i.e. in terms of helping the taught to bear the economic cost (Mehrotra & Panchmukhi, 2006) and opportunity cost (Dreze & Sen, 1996; Lal, 2010) of education. The economic cost is measured in terms of direct cost as well as indirect cost. The government in a bid to increase access, over the years, has tried to reduce the economic cost to zero by providing free education, text books and writing materials and midday meal. The entire cost of dress to be worn, books, writing materials, pocket allowance and some private/paid educational support to the children of illiterate parents are not met and thus some direct cost is always there. The opportunity cost is involved in the sense that parents have to sacrifice the wages that the child would have otherwise earned by working as child labour. Availability and Affordability would fail miserably in ensuring access if those who are involved in providing the facilities to the deprived section actually do not accept their role, acknowledge their responsibility and are not prepared to work tirelessly towards the end. This brings us to the third issue of *acceptability* which has been highlighted by the scholars like, Vasavi (2006), Bordia (2005), Nambissan (2006), Saxena (2006), Jha & Jhingran (2002), etc. However the aforementioned A's ensure access from the supply side, yet the true access remains imaginary unless

there is a real demand for education, *i.e.*, there is necessary motivation, will, and attitude to be educated. If the beneficiaries do not have the freedom, need and urge to avail the facilities, all efforts of creating the facilities, making it affordable and motivating the providers would fail. In most backward economies people do not have access because they do not want to adapt themselves to changes that education brings. Thus an important issue of *adaptability* has been highlighted by the scholars like, Govinda & Bandyopadhyay (2008), Jha & Subrahmanian (2006) and Chattopadhyay, Guha & Durdhawale (2005).

We argue that access can be truly conceptualized and achievement in the field of education can be measured by taking both the supply and demand side factors. ***Access is multidimensional in nature and therefore its conceptualization should not only include availability (in terms of attainment) and affordability (in terms of cost), rather it must also emphatically involve the subjective aspects like acceptability of provider and adaptability of receiver***. If in any knowledge society we find the outcome (in terms of net enrolment ratio or literacy rate) is poor, the fault may not necessarily lie with 'availability of facilities', it can be with the issue of affordability or acceptability or adaptability. So, for making a successful knowledge economy and before providing skill development of masses, it is imperative to measure the performance in terms of the four A's so that appropriate intervention in the particular field could be made and hence real access could be ensured.

Section-II: Measurement of Access to Primary Education

The paper intends to measure inter-state variation in access to primary education keeping prior focus to Bihar, using State Report Card, DISE data for the year 2014-15. DISE is a comprehensive database on elementary education in India. Though it is a novel and welcome step by NUEPA yet there are a number of problems in using DISE data for the present work. The major limitation of DISE data are-

1. A number of the variables that ideally constitute a particular sub-indicator of access are not being generated by any secondary data source including the DISE.
2. DISE is unable to cover all the schools imparting formal education which is more specifically true for schools under private or unrecognised managements.
3. The indicators provided by DISE are essentially objective in nature. As far as present work is concerned, DISE has been helpful only for measuring access on the basis of objective indicators related with availability like, infrastructure, number of teachers, gross enrolment ratio, etc. When we talk of the subjective or attitude related aspects of access i.e., acceptability and adaptability, we have very limited scope of getting information from DISE.
4. DISE fails to provide any information regarding the cost of primary education. Therefore, the study has resorted to take the annual expenditure on tuition fee, exam fee, other fee and payments from NSSO 64th Round, July 2007-June 2008 all India data for computing affordability index. However such data of affordability gives a closer picture of states in overall access index, yet it gives distorted results when we compute access at the disaggregate level. That is why, the present study has computed two types of Access Index- First, including affordability index (4A's) and second, excluding affordability index (3A's). The district level analysis of Access Index is based on the second one.

Most of the indicators used in DISE depict outcomes which neither measures affordability nor the attitude of teachers or the willingness of children towards continuing/accessing education. Such indicators follow a one-sided approach considering only availability and tend to inflate the progress along educational development. Keeping these limitations in background, the study has chosen

following sub-indicators for the four dimensions of access. Appendix-I shows the detail list of sub-indicators chosen for different A's (Sulochana, 2015).

Availability

The present study has classified these sub-indicators of availability further into three sub-groups. The first group relates to the availability of teachers which includes indicators like, *percentage of female teachers, percentage single teacher school, percentage teachers having graduate degree and above, percentage of professionally trained teachers, pupil-teacher ratio and average teacher per school*. On the other hand, the second group highlights the availability of physical infrastructure i.e., *percentage single classroom school, percentage of schools with girls toilet, boundary wall, drinking water facility, playground, electricity, kitchen-shed, provision of midday meal and classrooms in good condition*. The third group of sub-indicators relates to other indicators of availability like, *Gross Enrolment Ratio and Net Enrolment Ratio*. As government defines availability mainly in terms of attainment i.e., the progress reflected in the form of increasing enrolment ratio, GER and NER has been taken as important indicators showing the outcome of education.

Affordability

Primary education is affordable only when it is provided free of direct and opportunity costs i.e. when net cost for the recipient is minimum or even zero. Net cost is computed by subtracting from the gross cost, subsidies given in form of mid-day meal, textbook, stationary and uniform. The *Direct Cost* on primary education includes the cost of tuition fee, exam fee, books and stationary, uniform, transport, private tuition and other payments. Since DISE data do not provide any information regarding the per head annual expenditure on the above heads, this information has been gathered from NSS 64th Round Survey (July 2007-June 2008), schedule no. 25.2 which is based on participation and expenditure in education. As the report of NSS do not provide the state-wise expenditure on different items for the primary level of education, the *Average annual private expenditure per head on primary education* i.e., Rs. 1413 for all-India level has been taken on a standard basis[1]. Here, the direct cost is estimated by deducting *the cost of tuition fee, exam fee, other fees and payments* from the average annual expenditure on primary education. *Per head subsidy in the form of textbook, stationary and uniform* is calculated by deducting the average annual expenditure on textbook-stationary (Rs. 285) and uniform (Rs. 206) from the average annual expenditure on education (Rs. 1413), as per data given by NSS 64th round survey (2007-08). The only universal subsidy payable to all the students studying in govt. schools is in form of mid-day meal. As per the Midday Meal Scheme, Annual Work, Plan and Budget, 2012-13, Govt. of India, the *per capita per day expenditure on midday meal* was coming out to be Rs.3.11[2]. Multiplying this figure by average number of instructional days per year, we get the total amount of subsidy paid. The *opportunity cost* has been computed in terms of the loss to guardian by sending the child to school instead of sending him for wage work. Based on the data from Labour Bureau, Govt. of India, Rs. 70.44[3] has been taken as *standard wage per day for child labour*. Opportunity cost on annual basis has been

[1] NSS 64th Round (July 2007 – June 2008), Education in India: Participation and Expenditure, *Report No*. 532(64/25.2/1), Statement 4.24 (Table 34 in Appendix-A), National Sample Survey Office, National Statistical Organisation, Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, Government of India, May 2010.

[2] www.mdm.nic.in\ meal provision

[3] Wage Rate in India, Labour Bureau, 2013, Govt. of India.

computed by multiplying the wage rate by average number of instructional days in a year for each state. Lastly, the *Gross Cost* is obtained by adding the two direct and opportunity cost. The *net cost* has been computed by subtracting subsidy from cost.

Acceptability

For measuring commitment and motivation level of teachers, indicators like, *percentage of schedule caste teachers (male & female) to total teachers in primary schools, percentage of schedule tribe teachers (male & female) to total teachers in primary schools, number of days involved in non-teaching assignment, percentage of teachers involved in non-teaching assignment and average number of instructional days in a school* have been taken into consideration.

Adaptability

For estimating the demand for education of social groups towards primary education, *enrolment of different social groups* has been taken as the first indicator of demand for primary education. In order to measure demand therefore we have computed '***participation factor'***. This is done by dividing the percentage of SC enrolment by percentage of SC population in the district. The percentage of girls by sex-ratio has been taken as an important sub-indicator of adaptability. We have divided the percentage of girls enrolled by the sex ratio of the particular district to get idea about demand for education for girls. Secondly**,** *Gender Parity Index* has been taken as second indicator taken as a proxy of demand for education of girls. Another important indicator of adaptability is the *Dropout rate*.

The methodology for computing Access Index is similar to the one as is used in the computation of EDI. Given the above list of indicators, first the indicators are required to be normalised before any statistical tool is applied. Normalised values range between 0 and 1 and it indicates the relative position of state with reference to a selected indicator. For normalisation, first the best value and the worst value has been identified which is further kept in the following formula of transforming sub-indices.

$$NV_{ij} = 1 - \left(\frac{\{Best\ X_i - Observed\ X_{ij}\}}{\{Best\ X_i - Worst\ X_i\}}\right)$$

Upon receiving the Normalised Values for all the indicators across States, the next step is to assign factor loadings and weights. Principal Component Analysis (PCA) is used to compute the Factor Loading and Weights of these indicators. Thus, by calculating indices for all the four types of indicators (4A's), the composite Access Index has been finally computed for Primary education. This Table-5 shows the relative position of different states in terms of access to primary education. Based on total span and equal (class interval), we have classified different states into three categories: top performer, medium performer and low performer. The evolved factor structure of the 4A's of access to primary education that are interconnected based on the Kaiser criterion of Eigen.

Table-6: Access Index of Major States of India

Category based on Access Index	States	Availability Index*	Affordability Index*	Acceptability Index*	Adaptability Index*	Access Index*	Rank
Top Performer	Tamil Nadu	0.765	0.511	0.548	0.798	0.663	1
	Kerala	0.638	1.000	0.254	0.713	0.648	2

<0.58	**Gujarat**	0.607	0.340	0.722	0.641	0.583	3
Medium Performer 0.50-0.57	**Odisha**	0.587	0.404	0.596	0.677	0.571	4
	Maharashtra	0.630	0.383	0.498	0.690	0.557	5
	Karnataka	0.675	0.277	0.429	0.728	0.538	6
	Uttar Pradesh	0.558	0.383	0.482	0.697	0.537	7
	Madhya Pradesh	0.526	0.574	0.566	0.465	0.531	8
Low Performer >0.49	**West Bengal**	0.580	0.085	0.456	0.791	0.493	9
	Assam	0.377	0.340	0.442	0.731	0.479	10
	Andhra Pradesh	0.268	0.489	0.449	0.663	0.469	11
	Punjab	0.742	0.000	0.551	0.529	0.468	12
	Haryana	0.566	0.149	0.436	0.589	0.445	13
	Rajasthan	0.419	0.362	0.464	0.411	0.415	14
	Bihar	0.484	0.043	0.502	0.551	0.405	15
	All States	0.561	0.356	0.493	0.645	**0.520**	

Source: *Author's Calculation from DISE Data
State Report Cards 2014-15: Elementary Education in India: Where Do We Stand?

The above table shows the ranking of states of India in terms of access to primary education. There are some important observations to be made – First, the overall achievement of the states in terms of access to primary education is not very satisfactory. The average index score of all states is found to be only 0.520. In an era in which the importance of education is supposedly appreciated by all, the figure is really dismal. It clearly indicates that the weaker section is still not convinced about the usefulness of primary education. Second, the states like, Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Gujarat falls in the category of top performer states in access index. This is quite obvious as these states are also having high literacy rate. This shows that people are more aware about the importance of education and they prefer to invest in children's education despite having its long term returns. That is why the demand for education in these states is also high with scores 0.798, 0.713 and 0.641, respectively. Third, if we closely analyse the states which are low performers and are placed in the bottom of access index, we notice that Bihar, Rajasthan Haryana, Punjab, Andhra Pradesh, Assam and West Bengal and have very high cost of education (as the affordability index is below 0.5). This shows that the affordability of primary education among these states is very low. This highlights that the typical attitude of parents which gives preference to immediate returns by engaging children in earning activities rather than sending wards to schools which gives returns only after a long period of time. As a matter of fact the problem of affordability is so acute in these states that it ultimately drags down these states in access index. Along with this, the acceptability index is also not very encouraging among these states. This is so because mostly teachers remain busy in non-teaching activities during school hours and rarely pay attention to the first generation learners. This unfortunately forces teachers to drift away from their commitment level and makes them resistant to accept their roles of imparting education to the weaker sections. Fourth, the states like, Bihar and Rajasthan are low performer in access mainly on account of poor demand for education i.e., adaptability. This shows that guardians are still not convinced about the

productivity of sending their wards to school. They rather prefer to engage their boys in some income generating activities and expect girls to perform household chores.

Section-III: Policy Implications

Improving access to primary education in Bihar, especially in the context of the global knowledge economy, requires a comprehensive approach that addresses both local challenges and global opportunities. Here are some policy implications that could be considered:

- First, focus must be given on ***strengthening educational infrastructure*** i.e., increased investment in building schools and maintaining basic facilities such as classrooms, sanitation, drinking water, and electricity, especially in rural and underserved areas. Also, expanding digital infrastructure, including internet access and the provision of digital devices, to support e-learning and bridge the digital divide, which is crucial for participating in the global knowledge economy.
- Second, ***teacher training and recruitment*** which means that regular training programs for teachers should be organized to equip them with modern teaching methods, digital literacy, and skills to handle diverse classrooms. In addition to this, continuous professional development to ensure that teachers stay updated with global educational practices and providing incentives, such as higher pay or additional benefits, to attract qualified teachers to rural and remote areas where teacher shortages are often more acute.
- Third, ***curriculum reformation*** to include skills that are essential in the global knowledge economy, such as critical thinking, problem-solving, digital literacy, and communication skills in multiple languages. Also the curriculum should reflect local needs and cultural contexts to make education more relevant and engaging for students.
- Forth, focus on ***equity and inclusion*** i.e., developing policies targeting marginalized groups, including girls, children from lower socio-economic backgrounds, and minority communities, to ensure acceptability perspective of access to education.
- Fifth, providing ***financial support and incentives*** to students from economically disadvantaged families to reduce dropout rates and encourage continued education. Conditional cash transfer programs should also be implemented to reduce the opportunity cost of education in the form of providing financial incentives to families for sending their children to school regularly.

Conclusion

To improve access to primary education in Bihar while aligning with the global knowledge economy, policies must be multifaceted, addressing infrastructure, quality of education, inclusivity, and relevance to global trends. This approach not only enhances educational access but also equips students with the skills necessary to thrive in a competitive, knowledge-based global economy.

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