Concerns with Learning outcomes in India

What is the issue?

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The future of the Indian education system looks dark without serious and systemic education reforms by the central and state governments.

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What is the background?

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- India has woefully neglected basic education ever since Independence, unlike China and most other East Asian nations.
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- The Right to Education (RTE) Act came into force in 2010, to provide every child full time elementary education of satisfactory and equitable quality in a formal school which satisfies certain essential norms and standards.
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- With that in force, India have dramatically expanded the number of schools and hired millions of teachers over the last dozen years.
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- This has resulted in the enrolment rates of the age group 6-14 consistently maintaining above 95%.
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- But the higher enrolment ratio does not necessarily result in achieving decent learning outcomes in our schools.
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What does the ASER report say?

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- Annual Survey of Education Report(ASER) is based on a survey of over 600,000 children in more than 16,000 villages in over 560 (rural) districts.
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- The first ASER (in 2005) reported that barely half the students in

government schools in Standard (Std) 5 could read a Std 2 text.
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- Post-RTE act, the proportion of children aged 6-14 enrolled in government schools fell significantly, while the proportion in private schools rose from 24% in 2010 to 31% in 2014.
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- In case of reading ability, the proportion of children in government schools in Std 5 who could read a Std 2 text fell from 51%in 2010 to 41%in 2013.
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- In case of arithmetic learning, the proportion of children in government schools in Std 5 who could do simple division was already miserably low at 21% in 2013.
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- Even in case of private schools, the number of children who can do simple division in Std 5 is consistently dropping down.
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- Taking all rural schools into consideration, slightly less than half of children in Std 5 could read a Std 2 text and barely a quarter of them could do simple division by 2016.
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How do different states perform in this regard?

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- ASER 2016 also reports some assessments of the proportion of children in Std 3 at “grade level”, according to simple criteria on reading and arithmetic skills.
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- According to these, only about a quarter of students in Std 3 in India’s rural schools are at “grade level”, with respect to both reading and arithmetic skills.
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- The situation is much worse than the national average in the populous, poor states.
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- Less than 15% of children in Std3 were at “grade level” in arithmetic skills in

Uttar Pradesh (UP), Madhya Pradesh (MP), Rajasthan, Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh.
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- In 2016, over 90% of children in Std 3 in government schools in UP and MP were already unable to cope with the arithmetic expected of them.
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- States like Tamil Nadu and Himachal Pradesh which have participated in the PISA assessment conducted by OECD in 2009 fare poorly, with Indian students ranked 72nd out of 73 countries, just above Kyrgyzstan.
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What should be done?

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- The above indicators show that though India nearly achieved “schooling for all”, it is far from approaching acceptable levels of learning in our schools.
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- The major impact would be seen in finding satisfactory employment with the very limited skills imparted by our school systems.
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- Thus, to achieve a sustained and inclusive social and economic development, systemic education reforms by both the central and state governments are needed.
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Source: Business standard

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