

Secondary Education: Challenges and Options

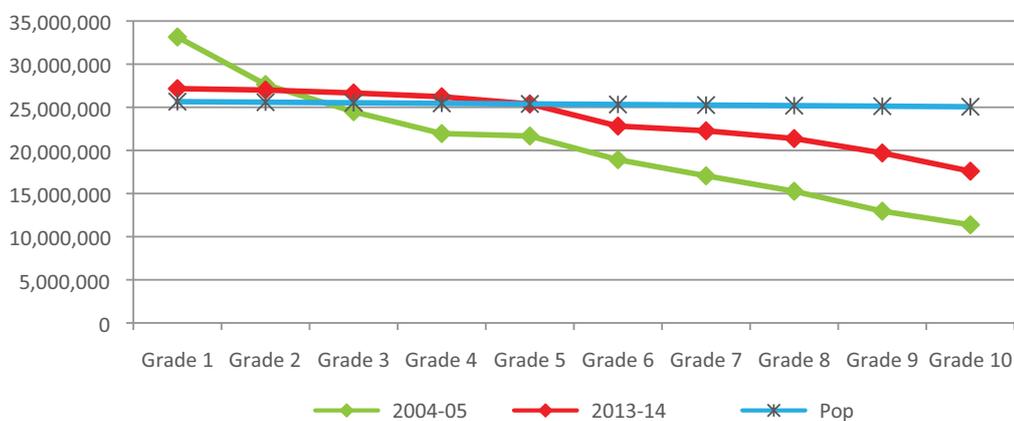
Part 2: Equity implications for expansion of secondary education

The expansion of secondary education in India will have significant implications for equity in access and successful completion of education. This policy brief summarises elements of a study that projects future expansion of secondary education. It is the second of three briefings that use this study to identify how the goals of RMSA can be achieved, and is an interim document based on modelling and not on substantial secondary analysis, empirical work and household surveys.

Equity issues will be central to secondary expansion. The growth in demand for secondary education is likely to come particularly from students from marginalised groups, who do not share access to existing schools evenly. These students are likely to have different needs, which should be anticipated and addressed. Costs, safety and security are likely to be particular constraints. Within this expected growth in demand from marginalised groups there is likely to be a further equity issue, as participation rates of children from richer SC, ST and OBC households grow at a faster rate than those of their less wealthy counterparts. Unless this is addressed, expansion could create a third-class system for new entrants from marginalised groups.

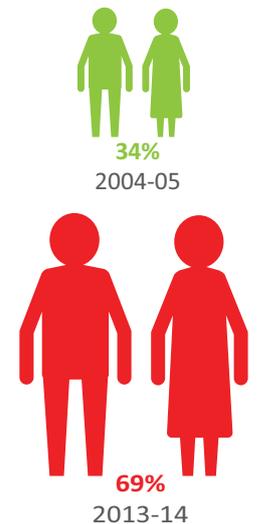
While overall survival rates have increased over recent years, as indicated by the slope of the lines in Figure 1, this masks wide inequalities.

Figure 1: Enrolment by grade 2004/05 vs 2013/14, national average

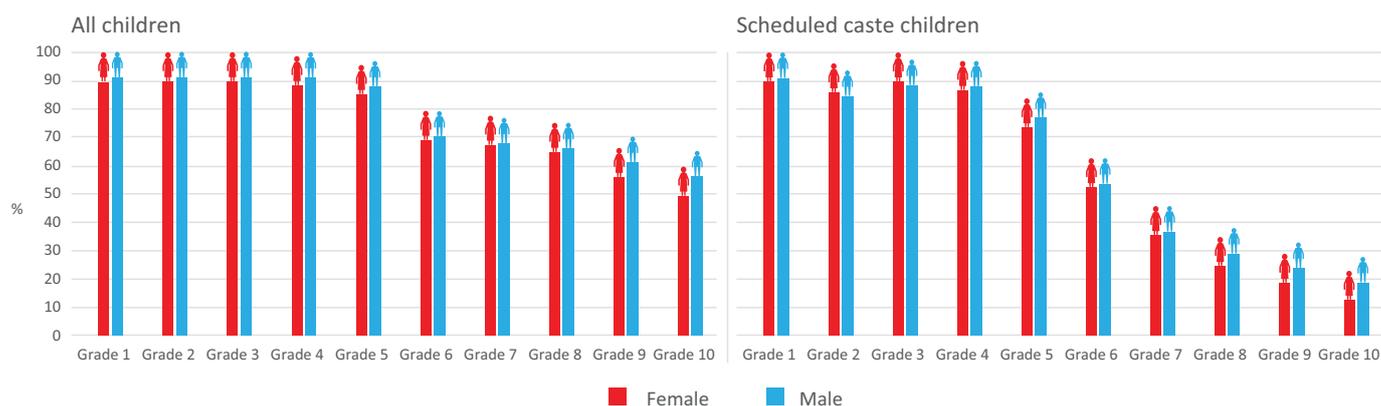


'Pop' shows age-grade specific population for 2011

Grade 10 enrolment as proportion of Grade 1 enrolment



Survival rates differ greatly between states, districts, blocks and social groups. Only 11% of children in the lowest quintile of household income reach secondary school, while almost all of those in the richest quintile complete grade 10. The average number of years of schooling received by all children varies by more than 2:1 between states. More than one in five poor children are two or more years over-age: this greatly affects access to secondary school. Boys entering school at the age of 10 have one-eighth of the chance of attending secondary schools of those entering at the age of six, and over-age girls have only one-sixteenth the chance. Reflecting these factors, the survival rate of scheduled caste children is shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Survival rate, for one study state, all children vs scheduled caste children

This inequity risks constraining the success of the expansion of secondary education under RMSA in several ways:

Students' needs will change as enrolment increases

Increased secondary enrolment will come particularly from marginalised groups who have not previously enrolled in, or completed, elementary education, and who may have different needs from those children who have previously enrolled in secondary education. These groups disproportionately include children from low-income households, those from rural areas and from urban slums, those from scheduled tribes and castes and other backward castes, and, in some states, girls. They typically have different characteristics to those children who currently attend secondary school, including being from poorer households with lower cultural capital and capability.

Cost and safety will become increasing constraints

Costs will be a constraint on attendance for these new entrants. Secondary school costs to households may be more than four times those for enrolment at local primary schools. One source of increased costs may be travelling distances to secondary school, since higher participation will come from areas located at a greater average distance from existing secondary schools. This also has implications for safety and security in some states, particularly for adolescent girls.

Expansion could lead to inequality within marginalised groups

The growth in secondary participation risks being inequitable even within marginalised groups. Children from richer SC, ST and OBC households may increase their chances of completing secondary school at the expense of those in the same groups from lower income levels. If academic achievement alone is used to select children into different secondary schools, inequality may be reproduced in ways that are not transparent.

Measures should be taken to address these issues and ensure expansion of secondary provision is equitable:

- Several steps are needed to address the needs of new entrants to secondary schooling. Curriculum reform and changes to teaching methods should be introduced to avoid an increase in failure rates and drop outs. Attendance must be fee-free with direct costs minimised for poorer households. Those at or below the poverty line are likely to need cash transfers to support the direct and opportunity costs of secondary school attendance, including travel costs, and should not contract debt to pay school costs. As most households below the second quintile find private schools unaffordable, the extent to which these schools can contribute to an expansion in secondary schooling will be limited.
- School type, location and working practices, including hours of operation and security arrangements, need to address issues associated with increased travelling distance. Research is needed to establish how distance to school may be changing and what the consequences are likely to be for access and equity.
- To address the risks of inequity within excluded groups, RMSA should monitor who benefits from expanded access and develop strategies to ensure that the most marginalised are also reached. Local solutions are needed to ensure equality of opportunity in secondary education and that changing patterns of provision and access are publicly monitored to limit elite capture of public subsidies.