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**Education sector should see more public-private partnerships**



Embracing the model has helped improve the quality of learning and increased access to schools

India is a developing country with around 28 per cent of the population in the age group of 0–14 years, according to the Educational Statistics 2018, Ministry of Human Resource Development. For higher education, the gross enrollment ratio (GER) is 26.3 per cent, which applies to the age group of 18-23 years. Indisputably, education has played a primary role in the nation's economic upliftment.

With the allowance for 100 per cent FDI in the education sector, there have been numerous initiatives from the Centre and State governments to develop the infrastructure, including renovating schools and the institutions of national importance, and promoting education in rural markets through

e-learning. These efforts have resulted in the student drop-out rate in Indian schools falling to 2.8 per cent.

Additionally, there has been a considerable decline in the number of women students discontinuing their studies, partly because of the Right to Education Act 2009, which mandates free and compulsory education for children aged 6 to 14. However, there is the issue of sub-par infrastructure standards, which requires scrutiny due to the increasing enrolments and expansion of educational institutions. The school-going population of India is largely proportional to its overall population, which indicates that it requires more investment, better infrastructure and improved operational effectiveness.

### **Cost-effectiveness, innovation**

For long, the Centre has been struggling to balance the paradigm of improving the GER, especially by improving the infrastructure needed. Consequently, many private schools and institutions have developed their own systems and infrastructure, and have managed to provide quality education. However, private education comes at a cost that is unaffordable to a large part of the population. This issue has created opportunities for public-private partnerships (PPPs) which are collaborations between the public and private sectors with a focus on system efficiency, cost-effectiveness, innovation and accountability.

In a PPP, the private sector provides infrastructure, assets and services that were otherwise provided by the Centre. Following the successful implementation of PPPs in commercial infrastructure, transport, energy, communication and airports, applying it to the education sector is a major step towards achieving improved learning outcomes.

In a typical PPP set-up, the designing, building and operating is undertaken by private players and the lump sum payment is recovered from the government. There are multiple reasons for the establishment of such partnerships, such as increased access to schools, using underutilized school infrastructure, improving education quality, initiating professional development, eliminating inefficiency and rigidity from public systems, increasing autonomy, and extending operations and support to existing institutions.

Numerous models have been devised to strengthen education infrastructure, from elementary school to higher education. One such model is a government-aided private school system, where a private non-profit organization sets up a school or institution for a minimum number of years before the recurring expenditure is fully funded by the government. Such institutions are subject to government regulations in terms of staff salary, incentives, examinations, fees and scholarships. Another model involves government investment in infrastructure and operations undertaken by a private partner.

A third model works in the opposite manner, with private firms building the infrastructure and operations being handled by the government.

### **The four models**

Similarly, there are models recommended for higher education as per the University Grants Commission (UGC) which includes — first, the basic infrastructure module where private sector invests in infrastructure and government runs the operations; second, the outsourcing model where the private sector invests and runs the institution, while the government pays for selective services; third, the equity model where the investment risk is shared by both and operations are handled by the private sector; and fourth, the reverse outsourcing module that has government capital expenditure but private-led management.

Irrespective of the models used, PPP covers the vital aspects of education that should include ownership, management, funding, policy-making, academia, extra-curricular aspects, examinations, admission criteria, hostel, healthcare, facility management, transport, international immersion, maintenance and security.

### **PPP and medical colleges**

According to the PPP Cell, the Infrastructure Division of Department of Economic Affairs, of the Government of Rajasthan has the highest number of ongoing PPP projects, predominantly engineering and women's polytechnic colleges that are either undergoing construction or are in the operations and maintenance stage. In order to address the shortage of qualified doctors in India, NITI Aayog has recently announced its decision to go the public-private partnership way while establishing medical colleges across the country. The government believes the move will combine the strengths of existing private medical colleges and functional district hospitals to rationalise the cost of medical education and augment medical seats.

Inarguably, the education sector has seen a host of reforms with a lot of focus directed towards the planned projects, and a vision to achieve an augmented GER of 50 per cent by 2030. Thus, we can safely conclude that the implementation of PPP in education infrastructure development is set to continue and expand in the forthcoming years.

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Link: <https://bloncampus.thehindubusinessline.com/b-school-corner/great-lakes-hosts-its-management-fest-themed-ikiqai/article30665399.ece>