Annual Status of Education Report 2019

Why in News?

The Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2019 data on early childhood education in rural areas was released recently.

What is the ASER report?

- ASER report is prepared by an NGO called Pratham.
- The ASER surveyors visited almost 37,000 children between 4 and 8 years in **26 rural districts** across 24 States.
- They asked each child to do a variety of tasks **testing cognitive skills** as well as **simple literacy and numeracy tests**.
- Social and emotional development was tracked through activities using cards with faces showing happiness, sadness, anger and fear.

What are the findings in the report?

- Only 16% of children in Class 1 in 26 surveyed rural districts can read text at the prescribed level while almost 40% can't even recognise letters.
- Only 41% of these children could recognise two digit numbers.
- Two-thirds of those in the Class 2 cannot read a text at age 7 that they were meant to read a year earlier.
- The performance only marginally improves for those in the Class 3. There are similar inadequacies for numeracy skills.
- Students appear to fare somewhat better in private schools with poorly paid teachers.

What does the data reveal?

- This data makes the case that the **pre-school system fails to give children a strong foundation**.
- This case is true especially in the government-run facilities.
- Going by the findings,
    1. The percentage of girls in government schools is higher than in private institutions,

2. The cognitive skills of children attending official anganwadi playschools do not match those attending private schools, and
3. There are a significant percentage of underage children in the first standard of formal school, in violation of the stipulated age of six.

- It is beyond question that children will be benefitted greatly if they are provided a properly designed environment to acquire cognitive skills.
- These skills are critical to their ability to verbalise, count, calculate and make comparisons.

What are the issues at policy-level?

- The ASER data seem to indicate that there is an apparent imbalance in State policies.
- This is disadvantaging the less affluent as anganwadis and government schools are poorly resourced.
- Official policies are also not strict about the age of entry, resulting in 4 and 5 year olds accounting for a quarter of government school enrolment, and over 15% in private schools.

What are the other problems?

- Nationally, the problem is of a weak educational foundation with little scope for creative learning in the 3-to-6 year age group.
- Another national problem is governmental system disinterested in giving children motivated, well-trained teachers.

What could be done?

- For better outcomes, a deeper look at how governments approach funding of institutions and teacher training is needed.
- It is as important to let teachers feel invested in anganwadis as play-and-learn centres aiding children in acquiring cognitive skills, as it is to provide physical infrastructure.
- Building human resource capabilities would depend on teachers being recruited on the basis of aptitude, their training in credentialed colleges and assurance of tenure of service.
- There is no dearth of literature on what works for creative teaching and learning, including from programmes like the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan.
- Neither is there a lack of financial resources. The governments should show commitment to education.

Source: The Hindu