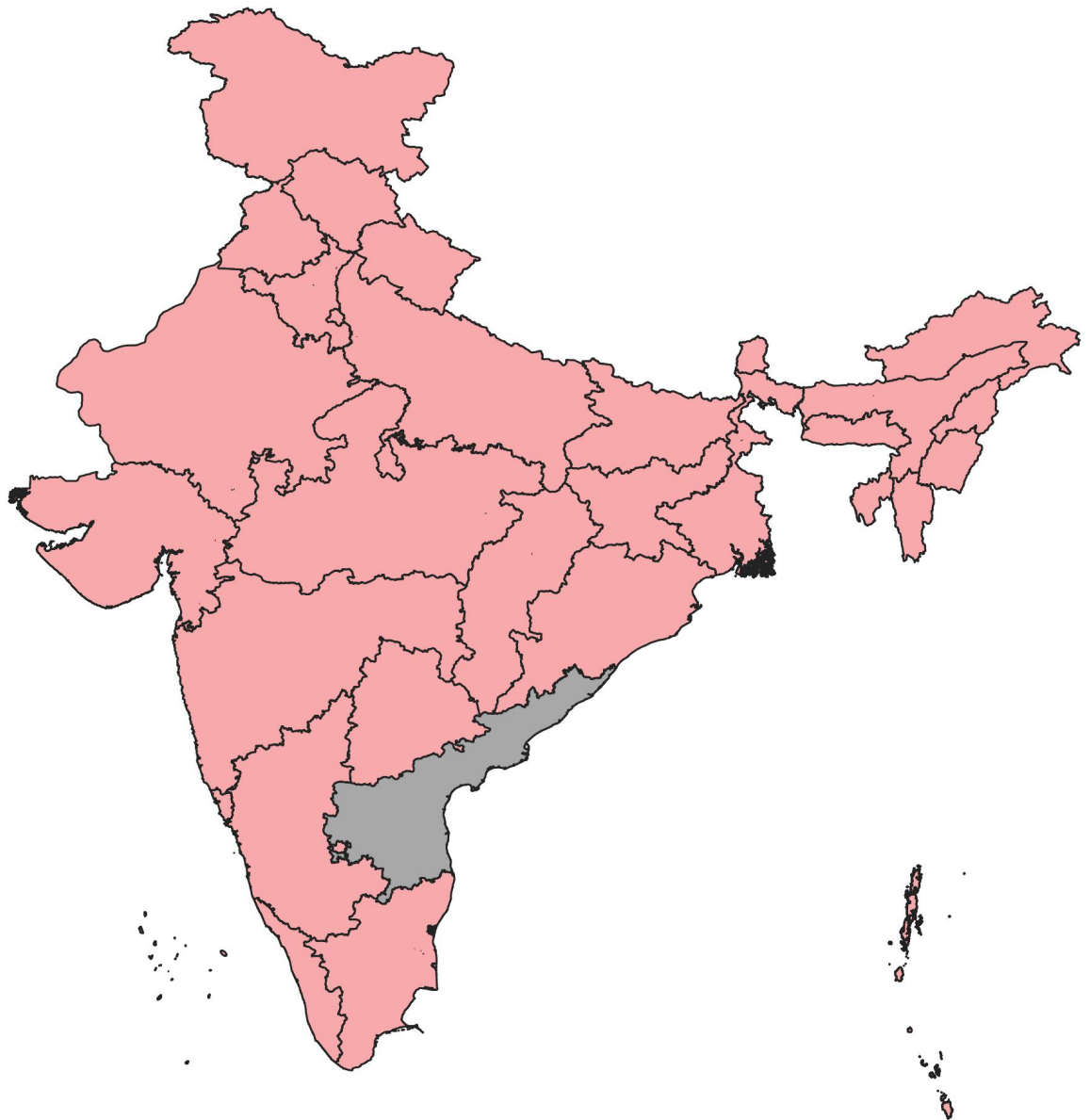


# QUALITY AND SYSTEMIC FUNCTIONING IN SECONDARY EDUCATION IN INDIA

## A STUDY IN ANDHRA PRADESH

December 2020



## POLICY BRIEF

# STENZON

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# INTRODUCTION

Andhra Pradesh (AP) is a relatively newly formed state; it was carved out of an erstwhile state with the same name that was divided into AP and Telangana in 2014. Andhra Pradesh has a favourable sex ratio both at childbirth, and, for the population as a whole, it also reports higher gender parity at all stages of school education. The participation of educationally disadvantaged communities such as Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), and Other Backward Classes (OBCs), has been increasing over the years at all stages except senior secondary. This could be attributed to several factors, one of which is the lack of accessibility to these institutions, especially for students from disadvantaged communities.

The incidence of child marriage has remained high despite higher levels of secondary schooling participation rates among girls. It is also interesting to note that child marriage does not emerge as a major reason in self-reported reasons for dropping out from schools. The issue of quality of learning are other major issues as the attendance ratios are low as compared to enrolment ratios, and merely high enrolments do not necessarily ensure learning. The institutional ethos as well as the state policies play a major role in determining how and what kinds of learnings are valued and promoted. A vast web of institutions exists at state, district, and sub-district (mandals in AP) levels for recruitment, control, and training of teachers; the schools merely become a tool for the implementation of various education related policies and production of datasets for the system rather than being independent and creative learning institutions.

One of the most important education related policies with implications for quality of education relates to language and the medium of instruction. Andhra Pradesh (AP) follows a policy where a child has the freedom to choose one of the three languages—English, Telugu, or Urdu—as their medium of instruction starting from class 1 up to class 10. This is challenging and it is unclear as to what the implications are with regard to education outcomes for different children choosing different medium. There are, however, some entitlements in place. Students in government schools in AP receive free midday meal (classes 1 to 10), three sets of uniforms every year (classes 1 to 8), bicycles for girls (classes 8-9), various kind of scholarships (girls, minorities, SCs and STs with varying eligibility and entitlements), and free education (no tuition fee for classes 1 to 10). The government of AP also has an elaborate hostel system for students of varying age and grades coming from disadvantaged communities. The objective of our work was to study the effect that policies and institutions have on individual children, who are trying to access some meaningful learning and complete a stage of schooling that could enable a change in their lives.

## METHODOLOGY

The primary goal of the study was to understand the status of secondary education (classes 9 to 12) in AP. If education is seen as a vehicle for social and economic mobility, the quality of access and participation at the secondary level is perhaps most crucial and an important phase in the transition to higher education (Jha, Ghatak, Minni, Rajagopal & Mahendiran., 2020). Previous research has already established that the state of secondary education is dismal, and there is a systematic dropping out of the most marginalised groups, including girls, SCs, and STs from secondary school (Joshi 2010; Kingdon, 2007; Reddy & Rao, 2003; Venkatanarayana, 2009). While issues such as inadequate funds, inadequate teacher training, children's work within the home and in the labour markets, and other issues have been documented within the secondary

schooling system, a deeper analysis is necessary to suggest pathways that can lead to an equitable educational system.

Therefore, the broad objectives of the study were to undertake a comprehensive analysis of the secondary schooling system, compare the access to education and the performance of children from different social groups, and identify key ways in which children from marginalised groups, especially girls, are able to participate more fruitfully in secondary education. In order to do so, we felt that the following factors would help to understand the macro and micro influences on secondary education: government policies and programmes, characteristics of the school including the enrolment, drop-out rates, quality of schools including the availability of teachers, pedagogic practices and social and economic factors including poverty and finally, gender issues that frame secondary education such as sexual harassment, and social barriers for girls' education.

In order to select the districts and the blocks in which to conduct the study, two factors were considered to ensure representativeness and inclusion of the socially and economically disadvantaged segments of the population. These were (i) the proportion of SC and ST population, and (ii) the average literacy rate. The district of Chittoor was selected based on these characteristics. The following methods were employed to collect the relevant data from the field:

- I. Analysis of existing documents and data, including textbooks and curricula available online.
- II. Survey of households where there were children eligible to go to secondary school.
- III. Village, school, and classroom observations.
- IV. Interviews with school managers and teachers.
- V. Interviews with community elders, panchayat representatives.
- VI. Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with parents, with boys and girls (both in-school and out-of-school) in addition to school management committees (where functional).
- VII. Assessment tests within schools.

The sampling strategy was to select the eligible schools first and then the feeder villages to these schools. The selection of schools was decided on the basis of data obtained from Unified District Information System for Education (UDISE), data collected from preliminary field visits to all the potential sites of schools, and data obtained from the local government schools. The villages were then chosen on the basis of the presence of the schools. Once the villages were identified, the research strategy was to first engage with the schools, and, after a sense of familiarity was developed with the area, to expand it to the village. At the village level, a social and physical mapping was planned to ensure that the listing process was able to identify households with children aged 14-20 years to be surveyed. In order to carry out these processes as well as the collection of qualitative and quantitative data, Centre for Budget and Policy Studies (CBPS) worked with Centre for Action Research and People's Development (CARPED), Hyderabad.

The study focused on six villages from two blocks: PLM and THM located in the Chittoor district. We were, therefore, able to identify six high schools, one primary school, one junior college, and one Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBV) as per our research design, so as to cover a range of schooling environments. All of the selected schools are government-run schools, and they

have both English and Telugu divisions within the school based on the medium of instruction. Results from the different sources of data (a summary of which is given below) were illuminating (as described below).

**TABLE: Description of research and sample design**

S No	Description	Quantity
1	Selection of sample villages from two blocks	6
2	Selection of sample schools from two blocks (six secondary, one senior secondary/PU [pre-university], one elementary, one of Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya [KGBV])	9
3	Village-based Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) (with parents [in-school and out-of-school], with out-of-school boys, with out-of-school girls)	12
4	School-based FGDs (with boys in classes 8 and 9, with girls in classes 8 and 9)	15
5	FGDs with teachers (of classes 8 and 9, per school)	9
6	School profiles through headmaster interviews	8
7	FGDs with School Management Committees (SMCs)	5
8	Children's in-depth interviews	24
9	Testing of children for classes 8 and 9	334
10	Village profiles through key informant interviews with Panchayat leaders, community members, women's groups, etc.	3
11	Household surveys	1365
12	Classroom observations	18
13	Management committee interviews	9
14	Collection of documents from cluster & block offices	As available
15	Study of block level offices/ institutions	As available
16	Interviews with Cluster & Block Resource Persons (one school administration official, Block/Mandal Panchayat member)	As available

## INSIGHTS FROM THE HOUSEHOLD SURVEY

As part of our research design, we conducted a survey for a sample of 1,365 households to explore the status of secondary education. In the household survey, we explored various factors influencing the continuation of secondary education including physical access to education, the quality of infrastructure prevalent in schools, the expenditure incurred by families on secondary education, the challenges faced in going to school or while in school, and the reasons for children dropping out from schools. The primary respondents in these surveys were either the parents or other elder members of the household.

When we look at the representation of various socio-economic categories in AP, we find that the proportion of SCs and STs population in AP was 17.08% and 5.53% respectively, as per 2011 census, which is fairly representative of our sample population. We also examined the retention rates by caste and gender. The data showed that there is an improvement in terms of retention rates at secondary level as compared to large scale datasets from recent years—86% of OBC categories in 14-17 years age-group in our sample reported to be in-school. However, interesting and somewhat worrying patterns emerge with respect to age, gender, and caste. With each level of schooling, the proportion of in-school children increases somewhat significantly: only

3% children were reported to be out-of-school for the elementary-school-stage age-group (6-13 years), while it became 14% for the secondary-school-stage age-group (14-17 years) and then as high as 42% for those aged 18-21 years old. Gender disparity in favour of girls becomes apparent at the elementary stage age-group itself with 2.4% girls as against 3.7% boys being out-of-school. It remains roughly the same at secondary-stage age-group but widens significantly for those aged 18-21 years with nearly 47% boys reporting to be out-of-school as against 37% girls reporting the same.

**TABLE: Representation of children from various age groups**

Age Group	Numbers in Sample					In-School					Out of School					Total
	ST	SC	OBC	GC	Others	ST	SC	OBC	GC	Others	ST	SC	OBC	GC	Others	
3 - 5	4	17	40	12		2	9	15	5		2	8	25	7	0	73
6 - 13	28	172	408	176	1	23	168	397	172	1	5	4	11	4	0	785
14-17	46	274	816	377	1	34	231	700	347	1	12	43	116	30	0	1514
18-21	16	117	318	156	1	7	60	170	115		9	57	148	41	1	608
<b>Total</b>	94	580	1582	721	3	66	468	1282	639	2	28	112	300	82	1	<b>2980</b>

Source: Authors' calculations from the household survey

Caste emerges as another dimension that determines the schooling status. While 89% of the General group children/young people in age-group 3-21 years reported being in school, the proportion was as low as 70% for the STs, and 81% each for the SCs and OBCs. Age/stage of schooling intersects with caste when we see that roughly the same proportion of SC/OBC and General group children attend schools at the elementary stage, but it changes for the secondary stage age-group. At this stage, the proportion of in-school children declines for all groups, but the decline is much sharper for the SCs and OBCs, as compared to the General category groups. The disparities grow further and become much wider at the post-secondary stage. What it tells us is that despite having similar schooling participation rates at elementary stage, the drop-out incidences are much higher for SCs and OBCs at secondary stage and later stages. The STs remain at the bottom of the ladder for all the age groups.

We also examined the occupations of the parents as they can have a major impact on school-related decisions of their children. We found that, as can be expected in rural Indian households, the largest proportion work in agriculture. Approximately 11% of males are farmers with own land holding, close to 7% are landless agricultural labourers, and around 11% are daily wage labourers who work in sectors other than agriculture. In case of female members of the household, close to 20% are engaged in unpaid care work. Of those who work, the largest proportion, almost 9%, are landless agricultural labourers. Moreover, a little over 17% the household elders were illiterate with a significant difference among the men (13%) and women (21%) members of the households.

According to the survey, 54.86% of those in our sample received free education; 43% accessed education from aided private schools; and only 0.01% go to unaided private schools. The average expenditure per household was Rs 13,057 per annum and the median expenditure on education

was around Rs 6,300. The average expenditure is thus influenced by higher spending by some households, noticeably those going to private schools and in some cases spending heavily on private coaching. We already know that even though government schooling is ostensibly free, there are significant expenses due to the purchase of books, uniform, or transport. The expenses on books and uniforms is a significant 20% the average expenditure. Though in government schools, books and uniforms are also supposed to be provided free, through our qualitative interview, we were able to ascertain that school uniforms were not always provided in the proper sizes, especially in secondary schools where children often outgrew them within the year. Hence, parents have to incur additional expenses on uniforms. The other significant component adding to the costs is transport, which contributes almost to 13% the average annual expense on secondary education.

**TABLE: Expenses incurred by household on education**

Component	Average Expenditure (Rs)	Proportion Spent
Course Fee	6,499.94	49.77
Books, uniforms, etc.	2,630.43	20.14
Transport	1,631.79	12.49
Private coaching	120.14	0.92
Others	2,175.57	16.66

Source: Authors' calculations from household survey

The most cited reason for discontinuity in secondary education across India for boys is 'engaged in economic activity' or 'not interested in studies'; for girls, it is 'engaged in economic activity', 'engaged in domestic chores' or 'not interested in studies. Children who do continue to go to school also face challenges that could potentially lead to poor academic performance, future chances of dropping out, and discontinuity of education. Seventy-two per cent of our respondents reported that their children faced no problems in going to school. Out of the rest, who reported some kind of problem, 8% cited distance from the school as a challenge. This was the major problem that emerged as a result of the inquiry. The second biggest challenge was financial constraints as parents were unable to afford the expenses associated with continuing education at school and thus were unable to send their children to school. Lack of or unreliable transport and unsafe route to school were some of the other challenges that students faced in going to school.

Essentially, our survey indicated that the lack of schooling infrastructure, parents' inability to afford expenses related to education, and the necessity to start earning income or contributing to the household through taking up domestic responsibilities are some of the challenges that continue to hinder access to secondary education in addition to the dynamics of caste and gender. While there are some positive findings such as access to government schools being quite high and the observed pupil-teacher ratio as per prescribed norms, it is clear that 13% the children in the relevant age group are out of school. But there are also challenges for students who are within schools; these are explored in the next section.



## QUALITY OF SCHOOLING

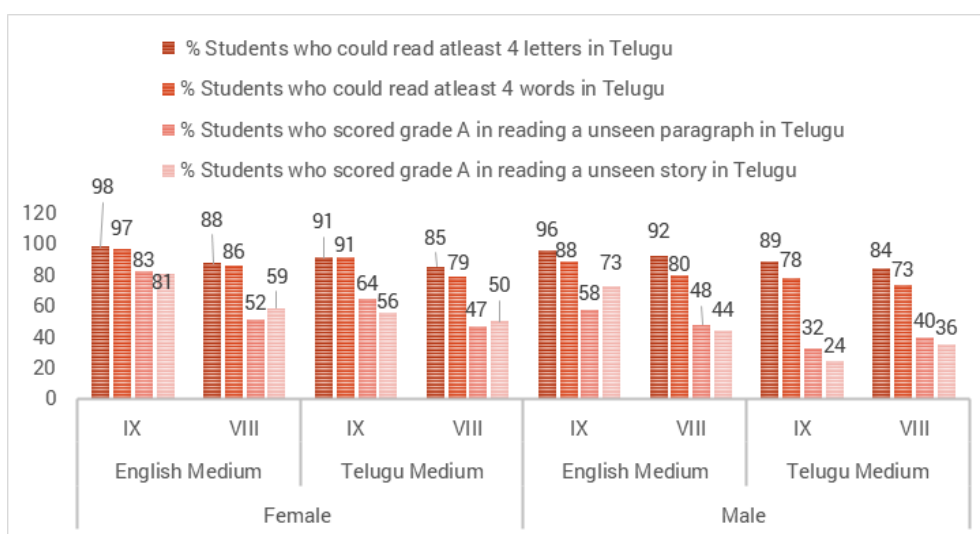
Learning assessments examined through tests are a common practice for understanding both the progress of an individual learner and the efficacy of an education system. We also administrated Learning Achievements Tests in this study that covered class 8 (terminal year for elementary level) and class 9 (first year of the secondary). A total sample of 334 students were tested from classes 8 and class 9 in the seven secondary schools. In all, we tested a total of 201 girls: 122 girls from English medium and 79 girls from Telugu medium. Similarly, we tested 133 boys: 51 boys from English medium and 82 boys from Telugu medium. Each student was tested in maths (or mathematics), English, and Telugu, and the mode of testing consisted of written and oral tests. No in-school teachers were present during the time of testing.

The assessment, both written and oral, was designed to be in congruence with the syllabus for the particular subjects and also the objectives of teaching that particular subject as prescribed by State Council of Educational Research and Training (SCERT). There was a progression in difficulty of the questions where the relatively easy sections required competencies equal to classes 2, 3 and 4. The medium level difficulty represented competencies of classes 5 and 6, and the relatively difficult questions were suited for students in classes 7.

What we found was that for the Telugu Language Assessment Results, the overall performance of students in Telugu oral was good. About 90% of the students could read alphabets, words, and sentences in Telugu. The scores show that the girls performed better than boys by 10 percentage points. The students in English medium did better in Telugu word reading by 12 percentage points, paragraph reading by 38 percentage points and story reading by 44 percentage points.

In general, the performance was fairly good when it came to Telugu writing. About 74% students could retrieve explicitly stated information from an unseen passage, while 77% students could answer questions based on vocabulary. The students, however, struggled greatly in application-based questions: open-ended and creative writing questions. Only 11% students could answer the open-ended questions on word meanings and 31% students did well in creative writing.

**FIGURE 1: Performance of students in Telugu Oral Assessment**



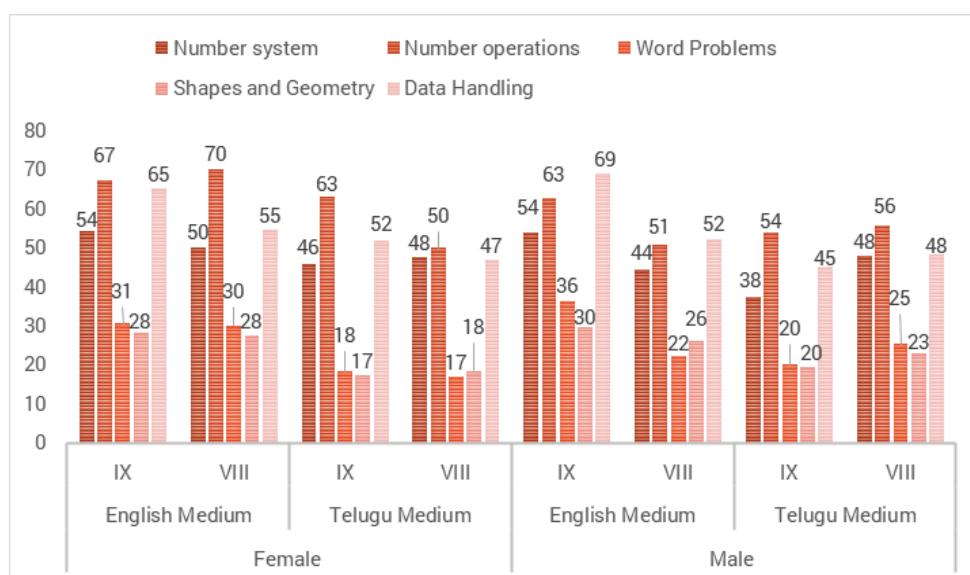
Source: Data collected by CBPS in the field



In the oral test for maths, almost all students could recognise single-digit, double-digit, and triple-digit numbers irrespective of gender and medium of instruction. The interesting pattern that emerges here is that while boys in Telugu-medium and English-medium class 8 did better than girls, this changed in class 9 where girls did notably better than boys in both English-medium and Telugu-medium groups. Additionally, students could answer simple questions like place value of four-digit numbers (68% could solve it), but when the same question was asked in a little twisted manner, they started struggling (scores dropped to 38%), thus showing the lack of adequate application of skill. In terms of number operations, students performed well when it came to addition with 89% students being able to solve it. The performance deteriorated with subtraction with only 65% students providing correct answer, and it further deteriorated with division with only 38% students solving the problem correctly. For English-medium students, scores were higher by 5 to 14 percentage points while girls did better than boys by 9 percentage points. Only 44% students could perform addition of simple fractions. Girls did better, while students in English medium scored far higher (21 percentage points).

A word problem based on class 6 competency levels saw students struggle the most—only 2.39% students could solve it. Less than half of the students (46%) could calculate the area of a field correctly, while only 19% could calculate the perimeter. A similar question based on class 8 competency level was given, this question also involved applied calculation in terms of application of basic arithmetic—only 7% of the students could solve this question. Here again, students from English medium did slightly better by 7 to 18 percentage points. Essentially, the overall performance of students in mathematics was lower than expected outcomes at respective levels. While the students did show clarity in some basic concepts, the application of these basic concepts were found to be lacking, especially among the students pursuing their education in Telugu medium.

**FIGURE 2: Performance of students in Mathematics written Assessment**

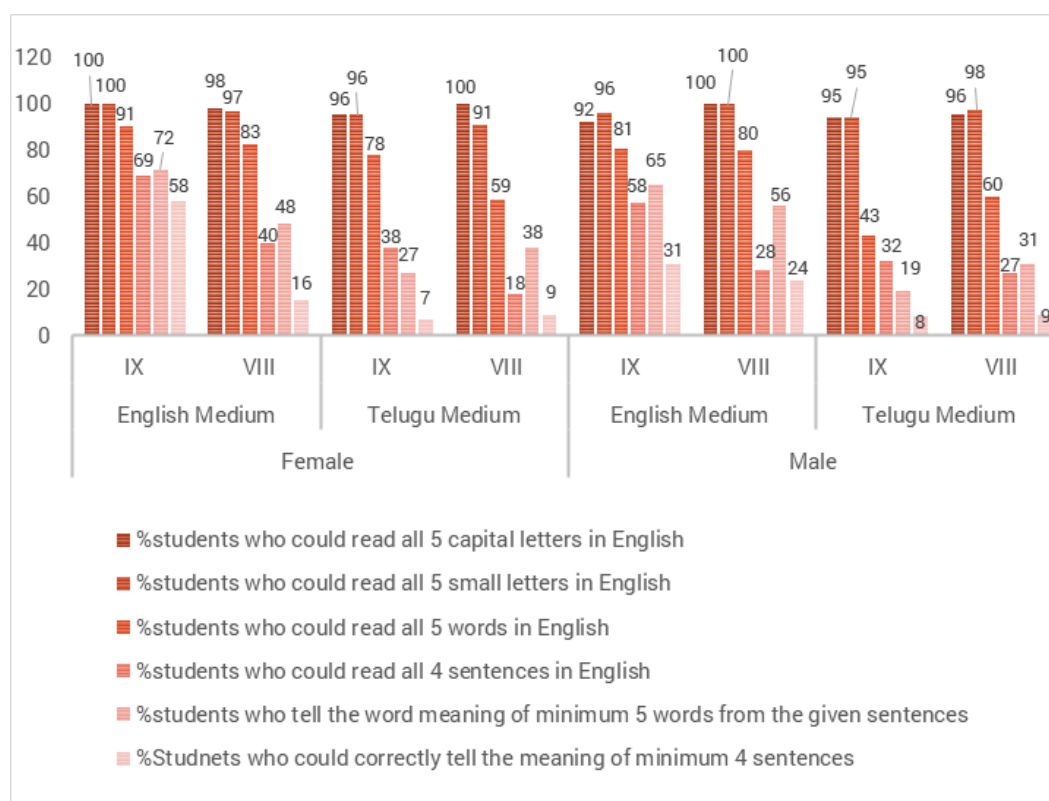


Source: Data collected by CBPS in the field

With respect to English, almost all students could read capital and small letters in English without any difficulty (97% to 99%), but the competency started reducing with the complexity of the oral test as demonstrated by the results. While 85% students could read words, only 41%

could read sentences, and only 22% could read with understanding. Girls performed better than boys by ten percentage points. There was a big difference seen in the performance of English-medium and Telugu-medium students with a difference of about 20 to 28 percentage points in sentence reading and of 31 percentage points in stating word meanings (see Figure 3).

**FIGURE 3: Performance of students in English oral Assessment**



Source: Data collected by CBPS in the field.

Language competencies are critical not only for proficiency in a particular language, but also for enabling learners to understand and engage with other subjects like mathematics, social sciences, and sciences better. The students in our sample did not perform well in some of the core language competencies like creative writing and vocabulary both in English and Telugu. This could be one of the reasons for their poor performance in word problems and other application-based topics in mathematics.

Essentially, the analysis of learning assessment results revealed three important points:

(i) English medium students in general fared better, (ii) girls in general, though not always, did better than boys not only in language but also in mathematics, and (iii) both girls and boys performed at a level lower than expected for the relevant grades they had completed, and they were particularly weak in application or language based problems in mathematics and open-ended or creative writing based questions in language.

When we matched learning assessment scores with school infrastructure, we did not find any clear relationship. Almost all schools, except one, had similar level of infrastructure present in terms of playground, library, and toilets, and this did not emerge as having any relationship with learning scores. The classroom observations clearly pointed toward the critical role of teacher engagement in the classroom and we also learned through our school-wise analysis that simple practices contribute heavily to the performance of students; for example, giving greater

attention to those who would otherwise remain silent, involving all students in the conversation, pro-active preparation for the classroom, and developing an active engagement with the students, and therefore also leading to a friendly school-ethos and identity.

Having said that, one always needs to bear in mind that learning is not a linear phenomenon and does not follow the expected normal pattern; learners learn at their own pace, and there are multiple factors that affect learning. To examine these factors, we engage with other structural contexts that influence secondary education in AP.

## UNDERSTANDING QUALITY THROUGH STRUCTURAL CONTEXTS

School performance is never a function of students themselves—instead, it is fundamentally tied to learning environments, infrastructural facilities, teacher engagement, and the larger socio-cultural contexts in which the students are located. In general, we observed that most teachers were apathetic to the needs of the students and did not have a good comprehension of the abilities of the students. When we spoke to the students in FGDs, they told us that the primary reason that they do not speak in class is because they are fearful of being ridiculed by the teacher for being stupid. They also do not want to invite negative attention from the teacher. However, as with the diversity of the students, there is also diversity among teachers. Some of the teachers we spoke to understood the constraints under which the students were learning and were attempting to redress the inadequacies within the class through various measures. All the schools we went to were functioning undercapacity. In some of the schools, there were only three to four teachers who were taking the entire load of the school because of the absence of teachers who were either on leave or deputed elsewhere. In all of the schools we visited, teachers had to combine and teach two to three classes together. This often leads to chaotic, noisy, and unruly classrooms where it is difficult to create conducive learning environments. For teachers, apart from having to “discipline” the children to some semblance of order, there is the ever-present pressure to complete the syllabus (Nawani, 2013). Teachers are not rewarded for how much the children have understood, but whether the syllabus has been completed or whether the children have been able to “pass” the exams.

Additionally, because of the paucity of teachers in the school, both English-medium and Telugu-medium students are taught together. Because many students are not able to speak or understand English, it is primarily Telugu that is spoken in the classrooms. This has consequences for students when they start to come to institutions of higher education. As many subjects at the higher levels are taught in English, even when children know the basic concepts, they are unfamiliar with the terminology. Another problem that this mismatch in language creates is a lack of confidence. Because there is an overwhelming social value attached to the knowledge and comprehension of English as a language, children who graduate out of secondary school and enrol in higher education often get scared and do not participate when the language employed in class is only English. Another problem is that children are considered “good” or “bad” students based on the medium of education. This division of students of Telugu and English, therefore, creates fertile grounds for stereotyping and discrimination within the classroom, which is not unnoticed by the students in the classroom; in addition, this hardly leads to any real English-medium teaching for even those who are made to opt for that.

Apart from these forms of discrimination, there is also a culture of fear and violence within the classrooms. Even in our study, we found corroborative evidence of corporal punishment. Children told us that teachers often carry sticks to class, and that the gender of the teacher does not matter. Women teachers are just as likely to hit as men teachers. When teachers were asked about the continued use of violence, most of them told us that they strongly felt that it promotes discipline and better learning outcomes. But we found that this is not necessarily true. In our study, we found that children who do not have school uniforms, who are unable to finish homework (as they do not have educational support at home), or do not have necessary books or equipment to work in the classrooms are often targeted.

Corporal punishment is also one of the main reasons for dropping out. Children also expressed a lack of interest in the school because they felt uncomfortable in the learning environment. They felt that teachers often engaged only with children whom they deemed clever, and they were not able to understand or comprehend the lessons taught in the classrooms. When these problems were compounded with specific learning abilities, health problems, or structural issues like poverty, children were even more vulnerable to be permanently excluded from the schooling system (Poffenberger, 1971; Venkatanarayana, 2009; Sikdar & Mukherjee, 2012; Jha, 2014). There are, of course, teachers who understand that children from the rural areas may face particular difficulties because of the structure of the agrarian economy or household poverty, but they are unable to do much more than provide remedial classes to such students.

The vulnerabilities of girls in secondary education are heightened by the sexual harassment that they experience. In all of our schools, we found that sexual harassment of girls was reported both by boys (through observation) and girls (through experience). Both girls and boys reported that they had seen or experienced it primarily from outsiders who are not from the school. Girls are also reluctant to talk about sexual harassment as they are often blamed for the violence. Much to our dismay, the teachers also reported that the girls are very safe. When probed further regarding the girls' reports of sexual harassment, some of the teachers told us that they do know of the sexual harassment, but they feel that they cannot do anything about it. Mothers also report knowing that their girls experience harassment, but the usual response is to withdraw the girls and get them married as quickly as possible.

Essentially, two major issues that schooling systems have to take into consideration are disparity and diversity. While the structure of schooling currently boxes children into particular categories such as smart/dull, it is vital that both disparity and diversity, and the discrimination that comes from these two concepts are strictly dealt with. Because of the existing unequal systems of caste, class, gender, or even region, we know that secondary education and higher education is still the realm of the elite. The disparity is clearer to see when we examine gender dynamics. While the proliferation of higher secondary and graduate schools has made higher education a viable option for many marginalised groups, the restriction on girls being sent to institutions of higher learning, even the ones in block headquarters, persists. Even now, when a choice has to be made, girls are not sent to school as it is thought that boys are 'deemed more fit to go away on their own...' (Chitnis, 1969, p. 1235). The fact that these attitudes have been prevalent even over the last fifty years is a clear indication of the stability of certain social structures, and the need to address the root of these forms of discrimination instead of incentivising gender-sensitive behaviour.

While schools are constrained by low-resources and assailed by structures of poverty, gender, caste, and class, the central problem is also that schooling systems are not geared towards learning. In order to truly influence any kind of change, we need to create schooling environments that enable support and provide safe spaces for children. Therefore, we are advocating for an inclusive space within schools so that educational systems are responsive to the needs of all children (Gulyani, 2017). Without this vision and aspiration, we will not be able to transform schools to be spaces where children can learn to become ethical, responsible citizens.

## CONCLUSION

The most important conclusion that emanates from this study is that despite progress in terms of laws, entitlements, provisions, and awareness regarding the importance of quality in education, the schooling system in Andhra Pradesh (AP) functions in complete isolation of the understanding of the socio-economic background of an individual child, their aspirations and insecurities. Policies, including those that are seemingly progressive in terms of their conceptual underpinnings and responsive to people's aspirations, appear to have led to institutional practices that are either aloof or discriminatory towards children. This incongruence is proving to be damaging for students' growth and educational performances. The system is further guided by multiple, and often contrasting interests on one hand and by the half-hearted and ill-understood educational principles on the other—both remain almost entirely indifferent to the life-situation of students.

Our classroom observations made it clear that Telugu-medium students face hidden, if not open, discrimination, and results of the learning assessment survey also clearly indicate that they were the lowest performers in most places. So, rather than receiving greater attention as they already had a weaker foundation at primary level, they faced further marginalisation, and obviously performed poorly. This was made worse by the experiences of violence and subjugation as reported by many during the FGDs that we had with children in the secondary age-group—both in and out of school. The high presence of private schools coupled with engineering -college- "coaching"-centeredness of the secondary stage in AP, means there are high stakes and vested interests involved, making it much difficult for the school system to intervene.

This is not to say that there are no exceptions. But it appears that the exceptions are more a result of individual motivation and efforts of teachers whereas the "rules" or the most commonly seen phenomena seemed to be a result of the systemic functioning caused mainly by a lack of a comprehensive and sound policy framework and absence of a detailed institutional-process-guidelines. The incongruence between (1) what is expected of a teacher in the classroom and what they experience in their own training programmes, (2) how teachers are treated by the school system, (3) the difference between what facilities "exist" in the school, and what is "used", and (4) the difference between what the policies intend to do and what they end up doing, impacts quality adversely for all and much more so for those who are coming from poorer and marginalised backgrounds.

Most children we spoke to cited fear of being wrong and getting stigmatised as a slow learner as the main reason for them to not participate in classrooms and consequently, preventing from learning. What made a difference was the teachers' attitude such as one who would conduct separate remedial classes and pay individual attention, one who went to the communities and



established a relationship that also made children coming from there more comfortable, or one who pushed children to solve problems creatively and in this process not only succeeded in them performing better but also have greater belief in themselves and interest in learning.

The presence of these support systems is especially important for girls. While many of them work hard to perform better as education is viewed as tool for change, this often comes at a price of high double burden of care-work and school-work, coupled with a culture of silence where experiences of sexual violence both inside and outside the school go unreported. The silence around these fears and experiences stem from other fears: fears of being stigmatised and fears of being pulled away from education, lest the parents find out.

Going back to our primary research question of understanding the issue of quality of education at secondary stage in AP in its entirety, several key gaps emerge in various realms of the state policy and approach including the following:

- (i) in the understanding of quality as a neutral concept and the invisibility of caste, class, and gender in this construct
- (ii) in understanding the interlinkages between quality and equality, and these two as an integrated concept,
- (iii) in translating the student-centric and participatory pedagogy in the classroom,
- (iv) in granting autonomy to the teachers and schools to look for and implement contextual solutions in collaboration with local institutions
- (v) finally, in providing highly centralised solutions without much attention to conceptual underpinnings, contextual diversity, structural inequalities, and absence of institutional preparedness.

For instance, while responding to the desire for English-medium education, the introduction of English right since primary stage alongside Telugu medium has become a highly discriminatory practice in reality. The recent move by the Government of AP to make English medium instruction compulsory for all schools (all management and from class 1 to 12) by 2021 can be further damaging if it manages to go ahead with this<sup>1</sup>.

In the absence of a transformative or critical pedagogy-based training for teachers, the teaching has remained not only teacher-centred but also highly disempowering for students coming from so-called lower castes and poorer economic backgrounds. While teachers are trained, it is clear that these trainings do not prepare them to understand the role of caste, class, and gender in learning with empathy and commitment, a few exceptions notwithstanding. The incentive or transfer schemes have played a role in continuation of students in secondary schools, and the presence of a decentralised and autonomous institutional system could make these far more responsive to the contextual needs and, therefore, more effective. The issue of gender needs to be understood more comprehensively from the perspective of how it disadvantages both boys and girls, and accordingly be addressed.

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<sup>1</sup> This decision has been challenged in supreme court and the legal case was ongoing at the time of writing this report.

Andhra Pradesh, therefore, is in definite need of reconsidering its conceptual frames, policies, and institutional mechanisms for delivery of secondary education to make the public education system stronger and equitable. Andhra Pradesh currently provides an example of a state where the government is spending fairly high (second only to Kerala among larger states and third if it includes Himachal Pradesh) on school education, but its ranking in the Education and Empowerment Index E&E Index is still low (7th among 16 and 8th among 17 states), thereby pointing to mismatches and inefficiencies that prevent it from reaping the full benefits of its high public spending. The role and significance of private schools and coaching institutions who not only control the education market but also play a major role in setting the markers of quality—often in a manner that is detrimental for the progress of an inclusive public education system—needs to be questioned.

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This policy brief has been prepared on the basis of a Report titled, 'Quality and Systemic Functioning in Secondary Education in India: A Study in Andhra Pradesh & Rajasthan', Chapter 6 titled, 'Dullards, Drop-outs and Daughters: Examining Quality of Secondary Education in Andhra Pradesh'.

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