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EDUCATION SYSTEM IN INDIA

Published on: June 24th, 2020

India is currently the sixth largest economy in the world and is forecast to become the third largest by 2030, it is also the second largest English-speaking country in the world, after the US. It has huge potential, but currently only five per cent of the population speaks English, and most Indians do not understand Western cultures.

India also has one of the most complex education systems in the world. With over a million schools, between them teaching more than 200 million students, it is also one of the largest. Much has improved in recent years in the education of India's children and young adults, but the country still has a long way to go before many relocating families would be likely to consider using its state education. Fortunately, many international school groups have taken up residence in India's major cities over the years, and many more are seeking to establish new campuses, providing relocating families with plenty of options. "The Indian school system is one of the largest and most complex in the world", says Rob Lynes, former director of the British Council in India.

The complexity of the system stems from India's need to maintain standards and uniformity while giving scope for its diverse culture and heritage to grow and flourish across the length and breadth of the country. After independence, India has worked hard to provide access to almost all its young people, but it has only just begun to focus on aspects of quality and seeking to improve learning outcomes. Duncan Wilson, the British Council's current Director of Schools, English and Skills (SES) India, coordinates the British Council's work in these sectors across the country. In the public sector, he works with national governments and other organisations to enhance capacity in teaching from pre-school to Higher Education.

The British Council's work in SES includes English teacher training and teacher language development, and providing access to a wide range of teaching resources, curricula, assessment tools and teaching qualifications. In India, the British Council aims to engage at policy level, including in the field of vocational and English education. In 2010, India's Right to Education Act came into force, giving all children between the ages of six and fourteen access to free, compulsory education in a local school. In its five-year plan covering 2012–2017, the Indian government committed to improving the quality of its education provision. According to the British Council, there are currently steep dropout rates at secondary level, particularly among disadvantaged groups, and the teacher-to-pupil ratio is extremely low, resulting in "weak learning outcomes". Ownership of schools is split between the government and private institutions, which receive a government grant. The rest are privately owned, privately run schools, usually teaching an international curriculum.

Extending the options

The global expansion of international school groups has meant that India now has more than 525 English-medium international schools in India, 30 per cent of them situated in Mumbai and Bangalore. Like many international schools in India, Pathways World School, a group of three schools located in Gurgaon and Noida, in the Delhi National Capital Region, teaches the International Baccalaureate (IB) programme. The IB has proved itself to be the big success story in secondary education over the past 30 years and is now taught in over 150 countries worldwide. The fact that the IB is accessible to students from any country, and from different educational backgrounds, makes it a popular choice for families relocating to India and concerned about the transferability of their children's education. "While the national curricula remain the root of all countries globally", says Dr Sarvesh Naidu, executive director of Pathways Schools. Schools are now preparing to offer a more diverse and flexible range of education that matches the aspirations of students and shapes them to face the evolving global environment and remain connected with technological advancements, frequent mobility and varied cultural and social norms.

Alongside the IB, many international schools in India offer learning systems from the English National Curriculum to the American programme. However, there has been concern among established international schools that some providers are taking advantage of the boom by setting up institutions using the international label when, in fact, they are not following an accredited curriculum.

The Importance of Accreditation

The popularity of private schools with aspirational local families is fueling the trend and according to research commissioned by the Institute of Labor Economics (IZA), in recent years there has been a rapid migration of students out of the state sector with 30 per cent of Indian students now attending some form of 'private' school. In 2009, the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) survey which tests the skills and knowledge of 15-year-olds with the aim of evaluating education systems ranked India near the bottom of the 74 participating countries and India has since boycotted the three-yearly survey. This is set to change, however as the Indian government has announced plans to participate in the 2021 test. Relocating families should therefore be aware that not all private schools are created equal. Families should always look for a recognized school accreditation, such as the Council of International Schools (CIS), The International Baccalaureate Organisation (IBO) and the Council of British International Schools (COBIS), if they are to ensure that their children receive the best quality education whilst living in India.

Tanu Goel

Shyam Lal College



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