

# PROGRESS OF IBSA COUNTRIES TOWARDS UNIVERSAL PRIMARY EDUCATION: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

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*Free and compulsory primary education remains a dominant priority area in the international policy perspective, starting from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948 to the formulation of Sustainable Development Goals in 2015. Under the impact of globalization, an impressive expansion in the access to primary education has been observed in recent decades and the global trends in enrolment rates across the developing world have attested this fact. However, many developing countries, such as India, Brazil and South Africa (IBSA), are still struggling with the goal of quality primary education for all. The IBSA countries are emerging economies and very proactive in addressing past inequalities prevalent in these countries. With the cooperation of international organizations, national policy planning and other initiatives, these countries have performed quite well in the educational attainment. But even today, these countries have not achieved the goal of quality primary education for all. This paper examines the trends in educational attainment in free and compulsory primary education in these countries, along with the challenges faced by these countries in the achievement of universal primary education. These challenges can hinder the progress of these countries towards the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 4.*

**KEYWORDS:** Universal Primary Education, Literacy Rate, Drop-Out Rate, Sustainable Development Goal

## INTRODUCTION

The paper attempts to trace the educational attainment of IBSA countries in the Post-Jomtien Period. The initiatives for international cooperation for education

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gained momentum in the 1980s, mainly due to the emergence of democratic regimes, rising globalization and the ending of the cold war. The significant effort in this direction was the Jomtien conference held in 1990 and this conference recognized the role of primary education in human development and emphasized that the countries need to take consistent measures in this direction. The conference document stressed that human beings of any age should be able to benefit from educational opportunities designed to meet their basic learning needs. The World Conference on Education for All 1990 held in Jomtien was considered a watershed movement in the history of growth and development of education for all in developing countries (Inter-Agency Commission, 1990). After a decade from this conference, the next effort in this direction was the 'World Conference on Education,' held in Dakar, to reaffirm the 'Education for All' (EFA) agenda. This conference proved to be the most comprehensive review of the progress made after the Jomtien conference and so brought forward the most accurate picture of the state of primary education around the world. The world education conference in Dakar chose six main goals as a follow up to the 'Education for All 2000' Assessment. From these goals, Goal 2 is related to free and compulsory primary education. The idea of gender equality in primary education is expressed in Goal 5. Goal 6 deals with the quality of education and excellence in education. The forum emphasized that countries should develop national education policies or modify their existing policy planning considering these international goals (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2002).

The Dakar goals were linked with millennium development goals in the same year and these goals represent a partnership between developed and developing countries. Out of these eight millennium development goals, two goals, namely Goals 2 and 3 deal with education. The text of Goal 2 put a strong emphasis on the enrolment and completion rates in universal primary education as a result of this, the enrolment rates increased at the expense of achievement levels in universal primary education. Still, many developing countries failed to achieve these goals. And so, these unachieved MDGs gave rise to the Sustainable Development Goals and a timeline of 2015-2030 has been set for 17 SDGs, ratified by 193 nations. Sustainable Development Goal 4 puts a strong emphasis on quality primary and secondary education of all children and adolescents (United Nations, 2015). The IBSA countries are signatories to these international goals and so the national governments of these countries put strong efforts for the achievement of these goals.

India-Brazil-South Africa (IBSA) countries are an important forum which bring together three large democracies from different continents. All the three countries are developing economies, multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, multi-

lingual, and multi-religious nations facing almost similar challenges. IBSA is an important south-south cooperation forum for the benefit of other southern countries in partnership with the United Nations system. These countries are very proactive in addressing past inequalities prevalent in these countries. Education is a great equalizer, so all three countries are working for education for all goals since their independence. With the cooperation of international organizations, national policy planning and other initiatives, these countries have performed quite well in the educational attainment. But even today, these countries have not achieved the goal of quality education for all. India is the second-most populous country having 29 States and 7 Union Territories. The gross and net enrolment ratio in primary education during 2015-16 was 92.8 and 88.31 percent, respectively. The literacy rate for the population age 15 and above was 69.3 percent with a gender gap of 19.5 percent in 2011 and the literacy rate for SC and ST was 60.4 and 51.9 percent respectively for the same period (Government of India, 2014). The education at primary and upper primary level also known as primary education is free and compulsory for the children aged between 6-14 years. The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009 (RTE) mandates free and compulsory education for all children aged between 6-14 years. As per the latest data, India is still in progress towards the achievement of Millennium Development Goal 2; however, it has achieved Goal 3 (GOI, 2018).

Brazil is the fifth most populated country in the world, with a population of 206.1 million. In 2007, access to universal primary education in Brazil was almost universal, but there were high repetition and drop-out rates in the country. Education is free and compulsory for children aged 7 to 14 years. Access to primary education has increased, but there were significant disparities in access to secondary education due to region and socio-economic background. The expected average completion rates slumped from 2000 to 2007, with an increase in the timeframe from 13.9 to 14 years. The indicators such as increased drop-out rates, high repetition rates, reduction in the average expected timeframe for staying in the school, etc. have connected with the decline in the quality of education in the country (Neri & Buchmann, 2008). South Africa is a multi-ethnic country divided into nine provinces. It is considered the most dominant country in the region, having a population of approximately 57.73 million. Primary Education includes Grade R to Grade 9, and education from Grade 1 to Grade 9 is compulsory for the children aged between 7 to 15 years as per the South African Schools Act 1996. The Gross Enrolment Ratio in the country in the year 2016 was 99 percent, with significant variations in different regions of the country (Department of Basic Education, 2018). South Africa is one of the four countries in which the EFA process has no

impact on the primary school enrolment and even the progress is reversed (UNESCO, 2015: 225).

The World Development Report 2018 highlighted the poor learning levels of school children in these countries and the low quality of the public education system. These countries are also suffering from the challenges of high illiteracy rates in India, a high number of out of school children, high drop-out rates in India, high repetition rates in Brazil and South Africa, low enrolment rates in lower secondary education all these countries, high enrolment rates in private institutions, etc. (Bhat, 2013; Jha & Parvati, 2014; Kempner & Jurema, 2002; Motala, 2013; Pandey, 2018; Soares, 2004; Souza, 2001; World Bank, 2018). Singh (2012) studied the implementation of policies and programmes for Education for All in India, Brazil and South Africa. All three countries have been very proactive in the realization of the goal of universalizing elementary education in the post-globalization period. Due to the adoption of neo-liberal economic reforms in these countries, the policy prescriptions of international institutions like the World Bank, UNESCO, OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development), etc. are finding their expression in the educational policy documents of these countries. The latest data on educational statistics indicated that Brazil was ahead of India and South Africa with a better Gross Enrolment Ratio at primary level. It was also reported that India's spending on education had been consistently lower than both other countries. Agarwal, Besada and White (2010) have reported that IBSA countries faced difficulties in the provision of education. The main problem in the provision of education in South Africa and Brazil is high repetition rates and for India, the major challenge is high drop-out rates. India has low completion rates as compared to other countries and due to this, the literacy rate of India is significantly lower than in Brazil and South Africa. The study observed that Brazil is in a better position to achieve the goal of universal primary education as compared to the other two countries.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Comparative education is a vast field that utilizes comparative methods to highlight similarities and differences among education systems of different countries. In most of the comparative education research, nations are the most preferred units of study, and most of the time, developed countries are compared with developing countries or comparison is done between developed countries. The comparative studies among developing countries are often neglected (Wolhuter et al., 2003). In this study, three developing countries are selected for comparative analysis as all the three countries shared common grounds in terms of colonial past and, at present, have developing economics.

The nations fall under the high and medium human development level and are yet struggling to provide the best public services to their citizens.

In this study, the descriptive method of educational research has been employed. This method of educational research obtains pertinent and precise information about the current status of phenomena and results in the formulation of general conclusions or principles of knowledge from the facts discovered. The progress on primary education in both the countries have been studied in terms of literacy rates, gross enrolment ratio, net enrolment ratio, enrolment in private institutions, drop-out rates, out-of-school children, repetition rates and primary school completion rates. The data has been gathered from global monitoring reports, human development reports, UNESCO Institute of Statistics, World Bank, etc. For studying the quantitative development of primary education in selected countries, the method of trend analysis has been employed. Trend analysis is based on the longitudinal consideration of recorded data and is considered as an interesting application of descriptive research as it is used to indicate that what has happened in the past, what the present situation reveals and based on this what will happen in the near future (Best & Kahn, 2007).

## **PROGRESS OF IBSA COUNTRIES TOWARDS FREE AND COMPULSORY EDUCATION**

The quantitative development of free and compulsory education in selected developing countries has been compared and presented in the form of tables to analyze the trends and patterns.

### **1. Literacy Rates of India, Brazil and South Africa**

Literacy is the most common outcome of primary education. The literacy rate of any country means the total number of literate persons in each age group and expressed as a percentage of the total population of that group. A literate person is one who can read and write a short simple statement on his or her everyday life (UNESCO, 2003). Literacy is very important in this knowledge-driven society, but it is one of the most neglected areas in policy goals of education for all. The global literacy rate has increased by 7 percent from 83 percent in 1995 to 91 percent in 2015 and the problem of illiteracy is quite significant in the most populous countries such as Brazil, India, Egypt, China, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Nigeria, Indonesia and Mexico (UIS, 2008). The EFA Global Monitoring Report, 2009 found that the issue of illiteracy continues to receive inadequate attention from the policymakers. Table 1 depicts the adult literacy rate in IBSA countries in 2016.

**Table 1****Adult Literacy Rate in India, Brazil and South Africa in 2016.**

<b>India</b>	<b>Brazil</b>	<b>South Africa</b>
69.3	91.7	94.4

*Source: Human Development Report, 2018.*

Table 2 shows the youth literacy rates of these selected countries and it has been observed that youth literacy rates have been higher than the adult literacy rates. From this improvement in youth literacy rate, it can be concluded that there has been an expansion in the access of universal primary education in these countries. From the data on the youth literacy rates of selected countries, it can be concluded that South Africa has the high literacy rate and Brazil has followed it. In Brazil, the children of most vulnerable sections of the society which include Afro-Brazilian, indigenous people, rural populations from North and Northeast Brazil are mainly excluded from the mainstream of education. Educational inequality is a serious concern in the country. The illiteracy level in some of the poorest states of the country has been found to be twice high as compared to the south-east region (UNESCO, 2010). The literacy rate of India is significantly lower than the other two countries, however, it followed an upward trend from 1990 to 2015. The illiteracy rate in India is higher in disadvantaged sections of society. The literacy rate for the population age 15 and above was 69.3 percent with a gender gap of 19.5 percent in 2011 and the literacy rate for SC and ST was 60.4 and 51.9 percent respectively for the same period (GOI, 2014).

**Table 2****Literacy Rates of India, Brazil and South Africa over the period 1990-2016 (Youth).**

<b>Country</b>	<b>1990-1996</b>	<b>2000-2002</b>	<b>2010-2012</b>	<b>2015</b>
<b>India</b>	61.90 (1991)	76.42 (2001)	86.14 (2011)	89.5
<b>Brazil</b>	.....	94.18 (2000)	98.61 (2012)	98.9
<b>South Arica</b>	93.90 (1996)	.....	98.78 (2011)	99.0

*Source: Human Development Report 2016, 1990-1996 UIS*

**2. Gross Enrolment Ratio in Primary Education in India, Brazil and South Africa**

Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in primary education in India followed an upward trend from 91.44 in 1990 to 112.96 in 2017 (Table 3). The ratio is highest in Brazil as compared to other countries; however, the GER of Brazil followed a

downward trend from 2001 to 2017. In South Africa, Gross Enrolment Ratio is nearly 100 percent and on the other hand countries like Brazil and India have a Gross Enrolment Ratio of more than 100 percent even in the year 2017. It means that these countries still have children who are not enrolled in their age-specific classes.

**Table 3**

**Gross Enrolment Ratio in Primary Education in India, Brazil and South Africa.**

Country	1990	1995	2001	2017
India	91.44	93.97	94.11	112.96
Brazil	.....	.....	150.79	115.45
South Africa	104.81	110.89	101.99	100.86

Source: UIS

**3. Net Enrolment Ratio in Primary Education in India, Brazil and South Africa**

Net Enrolment Ratio (NER) in primary education in the selected developing countries depicted that South Africa had the lowest net enrolment ratio in primary education have been given in Table 4. NER of Brazil in 2016 was 95.47 and it has registered an increase of approximately 10 percent from 86.4 percent in 1990. NER for India was 85.7 percent in 2000, it decreased to 83.83 percent in 2003 and again showed an increase to 92.25 percent in 2013. In South Africa, NER followed a downward trend from 89.4 percent in 1990 to 84.32 percent in 2015. The NER of South Africa was significantly low as compared to other countries. The possible explanation for this poor performance of South Africa is that the Constitution of South Africa lacks clarity regarding the right to education as the South African Constitution considers education as a right. Still, education is not directly free in this country, but it is compulsory for the children falling in the age cohort of 7-15 years. From the latest data, it can be concluded that none of IBSA countries have achieved universal primary enrolment rates.

**Table 4**

**Net Enrolment Ratio in Primary Education in India, Brazil and South Africa.**

Country	1990	2000	2003	2013-2017
India	....	85.7	83.83	92.25 (2013)
Brazil	86.4	96.7	93.18	95.47 (2016)
South Africa	89.4	88.9	88.39	84.32 (2015)

Source: EFA Report 2003, UIS

#### 4. Enrolment in Private Institutions at Primary Education Level as a Percentage in India, Brazil and South Africa

India remained ahead of all other selected countries regarding the enrolment ratio in private institutions at the primary level (Table 5). The rate of enrolment in private institutions in India was 16.53 in 2001 and it followed an upward trend and got doubled in 15 years with 33.42 percent in 2016. Regarding this, it has been predicted that if the current trends continue, in 2020, approximately 50 percent of students will be paying for primary education (Jain, 2015). The enrolment ratio in private institutions in Brazil was 8.33 percent in 2000 and it continued to increase from 2000 to 2016 at the rate of 17.83 percent in 2016. The percentage of enrolment in South Africa was only 4.49 percent in 2016. From the data, it can be concluded that more students at the primary level are going to private schools in India. The rising enrolment in private institutions is simultaneously related to the deterioration of the quality of education in public schools in these countries. This privatization of primary education is widening the existing inequalities in access as well as the quality of education in IBSA countries as the children of poor parents have to attend public schools of low quality and children from wealthy families will have access to quality education. This growing privatization is a clear indication of the failure of state responsibility to provide quality education to all without any discrimination.

**Table 5**

**Enrolment in Private Institutions at Primary education level as a Percentage in India, Brazil and South Africa.**

Country	1990	2000	2001	2005	2010	2015	2016
India	.....	16.53	16.53	.....	.....	34.78	33.42
Brazil	.....	8.33	....	10.28	13.78	17.34	17.83
South Arica	0.80	1.7	2.0	2.15	3.30	.....	4.49

Source: World Bank Data

#### 5. Drop-out Rates to the Last Grade of Primary Education in India, Brazil and South Africa

The drop-out rate to the last grade of primary education in India was 41.37 percent in 1994 and the country made impressive progress to reduce the drop-out rate to 12.26 percent in 2016. The drop-out rate has been still very high in South Africa with approximately 20 percent in 2015. Like the other countries of Sub-Saharan Africa, the drop-out rates in South Africa also followed an upward trend from 2001 to 2015 (Table 6). Brazil also faced the same challenge as South Africa, and it has a drop-out rate of 19.4 percent from 2008 to 2014. Rise



in the drop-out rates in basic education due to child labor and poor quality of education is also one of the significant challenges in the education system of Brazil. The drop-out rate of students is related to their socio-economic status and boys from the poorest households are more likely to drop out of the school and participate in criminal activities. The violence and conflict in the school results in a high rate of failure, drop-out and decreased school performance of the students (United Nations Children's Fund, 2012).

**Table 6**

**Drop-out Rates to the last grade of Primary Education in India, Brazil and South Africa.**

Country	1990	1994	2001	2008-2014*	2015	2016
India	.....	41.37	38.63	....	9.84	12.26
Brazil	.....	.....	15.38	19.4	.....	.....
South Africa	32.05	.....	19.93	23.0	20.30	.....

Source: UIS, \*HDR 2015

**6. Out of School Children in India, Brazil and South Africa**

Table 7 shows that India has the highest number of out-of-school children in the year 2010 mainly due to its high population; however, the number of out-of-school children in India reduced from more than 19 million in 1990 to less than 5 million in 2010. This number again increased up to more than five million children of primary-school-age children who were out of school in India in 2011. The latest number for out-of-school children in India was available for the year 2013 and from this number, it can be concluded that India had approximately 3 million children of primary school age who were out of school. In South Africa, the number of out-of-school children was approximately 8 lacs in 1991 and then the value decreased by half in 1999, but after that, the number started to increase and in the year 2015, more than 6 lac children were out-of-school. In 1999, the number of children of primary school age who were out of school in Brazil was 243626, then it reduced to approximately 1.5 lac in 2001, however after that this number started to increase and in 2011, Brazil has more than 5 lac children who were out of school. This number decreased in 2016 and as per the latest data for the same year, Brazil has approximately 4 lac children who were out of the school. The reasons for a high number of out-of-school children in these countries are demographic pressures, conflicts, marginalization of certain groups, lack of adequate political commitments, etc. Besides these, the challenges such as late entry of children in primary education, rural-urban gap, disability of the child, disadvantage and

marginalized children also hinder the progress towards the goal of universal primary education (UNESCO, 2015).

**Table 7**

**Out of School Children in India, Brazil and South Africa.**

<b>Year</b>	<b>India</b>	<b>Brazil</b>	<b>South Africa</b>
<b>1990</b>	23828518	...	...
<b>2000</b>	19010656	...	560378
<b>2001</b>	19170670	149812	555283
<b>2005</b>	...	548940	641312
<b>2011</b>	5376054	535410	...
<b>2013</b>	2897747	393728	.....
<b>2015</b>	...	454937	620845
<b>2016</b>	...	395798	...

*Source: World Bank Data*

**7. Repetition Rates in Primary Education in India, Brazil and South Africa**

Repetition rates in primary education were higher in South Africa and Brazil as compared to other countries. Brazil has a repetition rate of 8.54 percent in 2010 and South Africa has a repetition rate of 8.73 percent in 2015. In India, the repetition rates were lower than one percent as per the latest data available (Table 8). The low repetition rates in India are mainly due to the non-detention policy of RTE Act, 2009. Brazil has high repetition rates in the world; more than one-in-three students repeat a grade at least one in primary or secondary education. In primary education, students repeat a grade more than once and usually; it takes approximately 12 years to complete eight grades of primary school. Grade repetition is more common in disadvantaged students. However, the repetition rate has been reduced in the country with the help of extensive reforms in early childhood care and education through remedial education, learning programmes and abolishment of school fees (UNESCO, 2015). South Africa also has this problem and approximately 9 percent in 2016 repeat grades at the primary level of education.

**Table 8**

**Repetition Rates in Primary Education (all grades) in India, Brazil and South Africa.**

<b>Year</b>	<b>India</b>	<b>Brazil</b>	<b>South Africa</b>
<b>1990</b>	.....	.....	12.79
<b>2000</b>	3.69	20.95	9.32
<b>2002</b>	3.92	19.47	5.22
<b>2010</b>	4.99	8.54	.....
<b>2015</b>	0.52	.....	8.73

*Source: UIS*

### **8. Completion Rates in Primary Education in India, Brazil and South Africa**

Completion rates in primary education in India were 78.46 percent in 2006 and it increased to 91.58 percent in 2016. South Africa had a completion rate of approximately 93 percent in 2011 and the value increased to more than 94 percent in 2016. The value for Brazil increased from 68.84 percent in 2001 to 86.62 percent in 2016, but the country still had the lowest completion rates as compared to other selected countries (Table 9). However, none of these countries have achieved universal completion rates in primary education.

**Table 9**

**Completion Rates, Primary Education in India, Brazil and South Africa.**

<b>Year</b>	<b>India</b>	<b>Brazil</b>	<b>South Africa</b>
<b>2001</b>	.....	68.84	.....
<b>2006</b>	78.46	77.62	.....
<b>2011</b>	.....	79.53	93.05
<b>2016</b>	91.58	86.62	94.29

*Source: UIS*

## **CONCLUSION**

The global community recognizes the role of primary education and so the goal of universalization of primary education receives a lot of attention from the global development agenda. Due to these global efforts, access to primary education has been expanded a lot in the previous three decades. Some of the developing countries have performed quite well by achieving quality and

equitable primary as well as secondary education; however, the majority of nations, especially from Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, are still struggling with the goal of the universal primary education. From the analysis of education statistics of IBSA Countries, it has been observed that even today, these countries have not achieved the goal of universal primary education. The illiteracy issue of India, the high drop-out rate in all three countries, high repetition rates and high enrolments in private institutions are some of the severe challenges in the educational provision of these countries. The learning crisis of IBSA countries, as highlighted by the World Development Report 2018, also acts as a strong barrier in the achievement of the goal of universal primary education in these countries. The World Development Report pointed out that the students, who have spent many years in schools, are functionally illiterate due to poor quality of education in these countries.

In the context of Sustainable Development Goal 4, which is emphasizing quality and equitable primary and secondary education for all, these countries need immediate educational reforms for the amelioration of their education system. India and Brazil with the help of proper implementation of free and compulsory education programmes have been ahead of South Africa in terms of access to primary education. On the other hand, the performance of South Africa has followed a downward trend in the Post-Jomtien period mainly due to the lack of clear-cut policy on free education. IBSA forum is an important platform and all the three countries need to cooperate for improving the educational access and for eliminating/reducing inequalities in the access to primary education to survive in this knowledge-driv

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