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Bihar teacher recruitment policy: Why opposing it is illogical – and harmful for the state

The process of migration has played the most important role in the decline of poverty and improvement in the levels of living in the state. In this context, the demand for restricting local jobs from outsiders is hardly logical

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For higher education, there should be an active policy for hiring good teachers and academic leaders from outside Bihar, including from abroad. (File)

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Written by Alakh N Sharma

The Bihar government recently made a change in its recruitment policy for school teachers. The policy exempts the state domicile requirement and thus opens these jobs for aspirants from other states. Nearly two lakh school teacher posts are to be filled in the state. But the lack of sufficient qualified and competent applicants, particularly in mathematics and science subjects, is cited as a reason behind this policy change. Aspirants from Bihar see this move as a threat to their chances of employment and have launched an agitation against the policy. The lack of talent from within the state as a justification is being questioned and considered an insult.



The Economist in its latest issue has carried out an analysis of how poor schools threaten to jeopardise the demographic advantage that India has, compared to China and other more developed countries, which are becoming older. In among the countries where ten-year-old children learn the least at school. On the other hand, schoolchildren in Vietnam have been trouncing their counterparts from developed countries in international tests for the last decade or so. The Economist further reports that the most important factor contributing to the gap between schools in India and Vietnam is the difference in quality, training, supervision, and incentive structure for teachers. Bihar is among the states where this problem is more acute, typified by larger learning deficits. In this context, if removing domicile restrictions helps in recruiting qualified teachers, it should be welcomed.

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The issue needs to be discussed in the larger development context of Bihar. It's the most densely populated in the country with over 1,100 persons per square km, roughly three times more than the national average. In fact, Bihar is among the most densely populated regions in the world. The average agricultural land size is hardly one acre, which makes farming unsustainable. The level of urbanisation is only 11 per cent (as compared to 34 per cent all-India). With a small organised manufacturing and private service sector, the state's economy is unable to generate enough jobs for the skilled/educated and the unskilled/uneducated alike. Consequently, a large proportion of the workforce migrates to other states, irrespective of language and distance barriers. According to the longitudinal survey in rural Bihar conducted by the Institute for Human Development (with which this author has been involved), in 2016, some two-thirds of the rural households had at

least one migrant. The majority of the male youth migrate and the incidence is relatively higher among the educated, particularly among those with graduate degrees and higher.

Irrespective of the generally low quality of jobs, the integration of the Bihar market with the national labour market has benefitted the state. Of course, the recipient states have also been beneficiaries of this migration process. According to the IHD survey, remittances account for around 30 per cent of the total rural income of the state. Notwithstanding the role of various government social and economic programmes, which have shown expansion and improvements over the years, the process of migration has played the most important role in the decline of poverty in the state. In this context, the demand for restricting local jobs from outsiders is hardly logical.

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One important fact not widely discussed is the demographic advantage in India vs Bihar. India is likely to have the “demographic advantage” for the next 15 years or so after which its worker-population ratio will start declining. The southern states will experience this phenomenon even earlier.

Currently, 27 per cent of Bihar's population is under 15 years as against 20 per cent for India and 15-16 per cent in Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, and Punjab. The total fertility rate in Bihar is 3 – the highest in India (the national TFR is 2). In 2036, Bihar is projected to have 21.8 per cent of the population under 15 years while the Indian average will be 15.6 per cent and in several states, it will be as low as around 12 per cent. Clearly, Bihar will witness a “youth bulge” even after 2036 and the “demographic advantage” is likely to last till 2050 in the state.

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The demographic advantage of a country or region depends largely on the quality of education and skills of the labour force. These will become more important in the knowledge-driven economy of the future. Two-thirds of the present jobs are not likely to exist when those currently pursuing primary education will join the labour force.

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Bihar needs to considerably improve and strengthen not only its school education but also higher education along with technical education and skilling systems. The once prestigious higher education system in Bihar is in shambles. Out of the 100 best universities ranked by NIRF, no single university of the state including Patna University — the fifth oldest in India — finds a place. More than infrastructural development and lack of resources, the quality of teachers, training and a good governance system will play a pivotal role in improving education in the state. Qualified and good teachers, either in high schools or higher educational institutions, should be recruited wherever they are available. Along with mathematics, the lack of relatively good knowledge of English among the Bihari youth is an important barrier to accessing good jobs outside the state.

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For higher education, there should be an active policy for hiring good teachers and academic leaders from outside Bihar, including from abroad. The best American and other Western universities recruit many foreign teachers. China recruited a large number of English teachers from outside the country, fully realising knowledge of English along with Mandarin is important in the globalised market.

For Bihar, the lessons are loud and clear. The change in the recruitment policy for teachers in Bihar, although a small step, should be welcomed. The time has come for the state to bring a revolutionary change in education, otherwise, instead of an advantage, the state will have a “demographic disaster”. A good education will not only equip the youth from the state in accessing a wider labour market, but also contribute immensely to the development of the local economy which can generate jobs, either in agro-based manufacturing or organised service sectors. It is important to mention that the outside labour market cannot fully absorb the youth bulge that the state is likely to experience during the next two and half decades.

The author, a native of Bihar, is Professor and Director of the Institute for Human Development (IHD), New [Delhi](#). Views are personal

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