Poor Affordability and Low Access to Primary Education with Special Reference to Eastern Uttar Pradesh: Reflections from DISE Data

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Abstract

'Access to basic education' continues to be a matter of serious concern in India. While the quantitative expansion of the system appears to be very impressive, the achievement of the goal of universalisation of primary education has still remained elusive. This is because the government continues its celebration through reflecting on increased access to the basic facilities, based on apparent increase in enrolment-ratios, literacy rate and other infrastructural facilities; a deeper look reveals the progress to be grossly un-satisfactory. Availability of education facilities and attainment reflected in the form of increase in literacy rate, enrolment ratio, availability of educational infrastructure etc. cannot ensure access, as these facilities are beyond reach of the vulnerable section still fighting a grim battle to make their both ends meet. Although the government has provided free education to the children making the direct cost of education minimal, yet there are high indirect cost i.e., cost on books, stationery, examination fee, transportation, uniform, bags, etc. as well as opportunity cost i.e., the loss of wages to parents when the child is sent for schooling, which have not been taken into consideration by the government while subsidizing education. Therefore, instead of relying on availability alone, the issue of affordability needs to be equally stressed upon. The present paper highlights the issue as to whether mere creating the facilities and providing free education ensures access in real sense. It attempts to measure affordability in access to primary education in Uttar Pradesh with the help of DISE data for the year 2013-14.

Keywords: Access, Achievement, Universalisation, Opportunity Cost, Affordability

Introduction

Education has long been recognised as a central element in development. It is recognised as a basic input for empowerment to individual and overall development of the society. These benefits, together with the visible intellectual gains for individuals from education, have been the prime factors encouraging the government to make 'universalisation of primary education the avowed objective of its long term development strategy and invest huge amount of resources for the purpose.

Despite its importance, the performance of our nation on the front of education has been grossly unsatisfactory. Educational disparity in face of overall low achievement, on the one hand are threatening to smash the dream of the nation to become a knowledge superpower and economic force to reckon with, on the other challenging the basic philosophy of high growth. It is being increasingly felt that although the Indian economy has witnessed relatively higher rate of growth since the 1990s, yet the growth process here has not been inclusive.

It is commonly felt that inequality and deprivation in access to education are complicating things in other sectors of the economy as well and reinforcing exclusion. The official view looks access in terms of availability i.e. the progress reflected in the form of increase in literacy rate, enrolment ratio, availability of educational infrastructure etc. However, mere availability of facilities will not ensure true access until the population, especially the vulnerable section, has requisite financial means to utilise these facilities. To achieve this end, though the government has been creating the facilities and making them available free of cost, yet a significant portion of cost of education remains as it is which has not been compensated by the government. This unfortunately leads to put a question mark on children's continuance of schooling.

Keeping this in background, the present paper attempts to measure affordability of primary education which becomes a detrimental factor in taking the decision of either sending children to schools or prompting them to go outside for earning wages. In this direction, the present paper is divided into three sections. Section-I seeks to conceptualise the issue of affordability in access to primary education. Section-II measures affordability index for 70 districts of Uttar Pradesh and analyses the inter-zone disparities in primary education, using DISE Data for the year 2013-14. Lastly, Section-III intends to suggest how to counter educational deprivation and improve access to or universalisation of primary education on the basis of Affordability front.

Section-I: Conceptualization of Affordability in Access to Primary Education

Access as *affordability* means helping the taught to bear the economic cost as well as opportunity cost of education. The economic cost is measured in terms of direct cost as well as indirect cost. The opportunity cost is

involved in the sense that parents have to sacrifice the wages that the child would have otherwise earned by working as child labour. The whole concept of cost can be understood with the help of a flow chart given in appendix.

Direct cost includes cost of school fees, expenditure on books & reading/writing materials, travelling to school, school uniform, *etc*. Whereas indirect costs are those costs which are not undertaken by the government in computation of cost yet it is borne by the parents. The government in a bid to increase access, over the years, has tried to reduce the economic cost to zero by providing free education, text books and writing materials and midday meal, though it has not able to compensate the whole cost of education.

On the other hand, the opportunity cost could be seen directly in terms of loss of income when the child is prompted for schooling. For poor families even small children are source of earning and support for the family. Girls usually remain engaged in doing household activities and boys normally join labour force at an early age to supplement family's income. Even if parents recognise the importance of education, they value it only for the male child who will be the bread earner for the family and not for girls, who are expected to look after the sick, perform household activities and take care of children. Many studies found not only expenditure on girls' schooling to be lower than on boys', but also that an increase in the costs of schooling reduces the probability of girls going to school.

The issue of affordability has attracted the attention of many scholars who have found high cost of schooling as main deterrent for the poor section in sending their children to school. Tilak (1996) and Mehta (1996) for example found high cost of schooling in terms of tuition fees, examination fees, expenditure on books and stationary and private coaching as one of the main reasons for denying children's access to school. The NFHS-2 (1998-99) study reported that among the 6-17 year-old population, financial constraints was found to be one of the main reasons for non-enrolment in school. Shah (1989) and Diwan (1992) advocated in their study that free text books, free uniforms and midday meal programmes have to a large extent brought improvement in the general health of the children resulting in decreasing drop-out rate and thus contributing to the increase in enrolment and retention among children. These authors have observed that unless the deprived section of population is not compensated for high cost of education by offering incentives of both types- cash and kind; children of this section cannot be effectively brought to schools. Education has to be made affordable for the poor.

Ensuring affordability of primary education also raises the debate of government vs. private school education. Education empowers a person, yet it also creates a concurrent discrimination if the quality of it made available to different groups differ significantly. Unfortunately, in India the weaker section is being provided access to education in government schools that have poor infrastructure, inefficient and insufficient teachers who are not at all committed to the cause and a system that no one would gain anything substantial from. The efforts of subsidizing cost and making education affordable has been restricted to only government school where quality is very poor and not in good private schools. In this context, the work done by Mehrotra and Panchamukhi (2006) on the basis of their survey of eight states with the largest out-of-school population, claimed that financial burden of education is significantly higher for households located in urban centres and for those with children going to private unaided school. In absolute terms, on an average the cost per child in rural government schools in these states was Rs. 891 per annum, while in private unaided schools it was Rs. 1,588. In urban areas it was Rs. 1,100 in government schools, and Rs. 2,268 in private unaided ones. Tilak (2002a), PROBE (1999), Chandrasekhar and Mukhopadhyay (2006), Subrahmanian (2005) and Ramachandran, Mehrotra and Jandhyala (2007) also found that the "incompressible cost" (expenditure on tuition, examination fees, other fees, books and stationery in a government school) as well as the opportunity cost of education adversely affect the probability of children going to school, more so for children from poorer households. This is the major factor responsible for low access of dalit children.

The decision of parents to send their children to school is also determined by the opportunity cost of education. The opportunity cost could be seen directly in terms of loss of income when the child is prompted for schooling. For poor families even small children are source of earning and support for the family. They earn their meals and some money by serving as child labourers, support their parents in the family productive work, look-after the household activities or the younger ones in the family. Schooling of children in such cases results in loss of family income which is magnified when the quality of education provided in government schools is too poor to enhance the productivity of the taught. Sometimes, in addition to financial cost, parents are discouraged also as it demands a great deal of time and efforts on the part of them, like preparing the child for school, stimulating their interest, helping child in doing homework and establishing affinity with teachers. This ultimately leads to the denial of access to education (Dreze & Sen, 1996). Acharya's (2006) study of literacy status and access to elementary education in rural areas of Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh reveals that along with migration, peculiar demographic characteristics and select social discrimination, it is the low income and high direct costs of education that chiefly explains non-enrolment and drop-out of children. Child labour at home saves on cash outflow as well as releases adults to enter the labour markets uninterrupted. The opportunity cost

of education therefore becomes too high and discourages enrolment. In the same direction, although Pramanik (2007) does not directly addressed the issue of access but he highlighted that child work providing a means of subsistence can be an important deterrent to children going to schools. He suggests defamiliarisation process whereby the children could be made free from employment and domestic activities and could live their childhood in best possible manner.

The description given above is sufficient to highlight that along with availability of facilities, affordability is also a key factor. The best infrastructure in the world would not ensure access, if the infrastructure is not affordable to the majority of the population. Now the next important issue which is important is to measure affordability for Uttar Pradesh. This is what the next section attempts to do.

Section-II: Measurement of Affordability Index- The Methodology

The paper intends to measure the inter-district variation in affordability of primary education for the 70 districts of Uttar Pradesh, using District Report Card, DISE data for the year 2013-14. DISE is a comprehensive database on elementary education in India. This is a novel and welcome step by NUEPA but the problem with it is that it is available only with limited set of indicators. If education is expensive and not affordable even a very high availability index will not ensure access. The Governments in India provides subsidies to primary school going students to encourage them to go to school. The subsidies are paid in form of annual scholarship, midday meal, book grant, school dress etc. Higher the subsidy given to a student lower will be the net cost of education (Net Cost= Gross Cost-Subsidy) and higher will be the affordability of education.

Affordability index is computed for those students who study in government schools and belong to weaker section i.e., SC/ST etc., they get different kinds of subsidies like, midday meal, book grant, dresses, etc. For this group the subsidy paid is highest and net cost of education low.

- The Direct Cost on primary education includes the cost of tuition fee, exam fee, books and stationary, uniform, transport, private tuition and other payments. Since DISE data do not provide any information regarding the per head annual expenditure on tuition fee, exam fee, books and stationary, uniform, transport, private tuition and other payments, this information has been gathered from NSS 64th Round Survey (July 2007-June 2008), schedule no. 25.2 which is based on participation and expenditure in education. As the report of NSS do not provide the state-wise expenditure on different items for the primary level of education, the Average annual private expenditure per head on primary education i.e., Rs. 1413 for all-India level has been taken on a standard basis[1]. Here, the direct cost is estimated by deducting the cost of tuition fee, exam fee, other fees and payments from the average annual expenditure on primary education.
- Per head subsidy in the form of textbook, stationary and uniform is calculated by deducting the average annual expenditure on textbook-stationary (Rs. 285) and uniform (Rs. 206) from the average annual expenditure on education (Rs. 1413), as per data given by NSS 64th round survey (2007-08).
- The only universal subsidy payable to all the students studying in govt. schools is in form of mid-day meal. As per the Midday Meal Scheme, Annual Work, Plan and Budget, 2012-13, Govt. of India, the per capita per day expenditure on midday meal was coming out to be Rs.3.11[2]. Multiplying this figure by average number of instructional days per year, we get the total amount of subsidy paid.
- The opportunity cost has been computed in terms of the loss to guardian by sending the child to school instead of sending him for wage work. Based on the data from Labour Bureau, Govt. of India, Rs. 70.44[3] has been taken as standard wage per day for child labour. Opportunity cost on annual basis has been computed by multiplying the wage rate by average number of instructional days in a year for each state.
- The Gross Cost is obtained by adding the two direct and Opportunity Costs.
- The computation of net cost of education is given in the table-1 in Appendix-
- Upon calculating the net cost of education across districts, the values are normalised i.e., the best value and the worst value is kept in the following formula of transforming sub-indices. Since, the cost indicator is negative in nature, the lowest value has been considered as the best value and the highest, the worst value.

$$NV_{ij} = 1 - \left(\frac{\{Best\ X_i - Observed\ X_{ij}\}}{\{Best\ X_i - Worst\ X_i\}} \right)$$

- Following the above procedure, the affordability index for 70 districts of UP thus calculated is shown in table- 2 given in appendix.

As per table- 2, the net cost of education in states like, Gaziabad, Rampur, Kushinagar, Lucknow and Gorakhpur is low while it is high for Fatehpur, Chandauli, Bhadoi, Auraiya and Kanpur Dehat. The variation

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[1] NSS 64th Round (July 2007 – June 2008), Education in India: Participation and Expenditure, *Report No*. 532(64/25.2/1), Statement 4.24 (Table 34 in Appendix-A), National Sample Survey Office, National Statistical Organisation, Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, Government of India, May 2010.
[2] www.mdm.nic.in\ meal provision
[3] Wage Rate in India, Labour Bureau, 2013, Govt. of India.

among these two set of districts occurs because of the significant opportunity cost. Since the states having low net cost of education are primarily those districts which have high literacy rate. This depicts large awareness among people towards understanding the importance and necessity of education. Owing to this, parents prefer to send their children to school instead of engaging them in any income generating work. This makes their opportunity cost low which in turn makes education affordable. That is why the net cost of education is lower in these districts. Reverse is the situation with low performer states as named above, where the opportunity cost is much higher thus making the education less affordable.

As per table- 3, the Western region shows highest affordability index i.e., 0.810. This region is relatively the most developed region of the State in terms of economic prosperity. The agricultural productivity is higher and almost half of the industries in the State are located in this region. Owing to this, the impact of urbanization makes the guardians more conscious towards their ward's education and as such they do not feel education as a burden. They have the requisite purchasing power to afford basic education. This is why the affordability index of this region is highest. While the Eastern region shows a bit lower affordability index i.e., 0.781, thus stands at second position. This region is most densely populated with a heavy dependence on land marked by low productivity and low per capita income. Moreover, the illiteracy of guardians makes them unaware about the importance of education. They feel that children are helping hands to them in earning livelihood and sending them to school is a wastage and costly affair. So for them the cost of education especially opportunity cost seems to be very high.

On the other hand, Bundelkhand and Central region stand almost equivalent in affordability index with a value of 0.776 and 0.768, respectively. These regions have been receiving lot of attention from the government agencies and huge amount of money has been pumped in here to raise enrolment. However, the regions show attainment in terms of high enrolment and literacy rate, yet the problem of compensating educational cost remains as it is. Now-a-days, it has become a status symbol to send children to private schools which makes education more expensive. These are the reasons why education has become less affordable among these regions. Low affordability adversely hinders children's access to primary education.

Section-III: Policy Implications

Availability of education facilities through private providers cannot ensure access, as these facilities are beyond reach of the vulnerable section still fighting a grim battle to make their both ends meet. Therefore, instead of relying on availability alone, the issue of affordability needs to be equally stressed upon. Ensuring access requires compensating the high cost of primary education. This could be done by following a two-pronged strategy-

III.1. *Compensating the guardians suitably for the monetary loss* they incur by taking small children away from income generating activities and sparing them to attend schools. If on an experimental basis in some selected schools the children belonging to weaker class are provided some productive work e.g. painting, binding, weaving, tool making etc. and in lieu of the work done are financially compensated it might discourage children from leaving schools and might create a demand for education.

III.2. *Making primary education economically productive for children.* There are few important things that need to be done- (i) Vocational education should be made an integral part of primary education. In addition to providing deprived section students the normal education, they should be provided with some skill development training. (ii) Proper human resource planning is required to take care of students who are able to complete only primary education. Some kind of professional training should be provided to primary class pass outs who cannot continue further education. Government should ensure that there is some minimal type of occupation available for this section. This would create the feeling that even primary education can be of help. (iii) Special efforts should be made to provide secondary and higher education to the children belonging to the deprived section. This could remove the feeling that the maximum they can achieve is primary or upper primary education.

III.3. Education which was once supposed to act as a tool to remove discrimination has emerged as a source of discrimination. This is on account of huge difference between the quality of infrastructure, number and qualification of teachers, mode of education between the government and private schools. The poor are not able to access the quality education being offered by private schools. This is because there is no effective control exercised by the government on fees charged by private schools. This is wrong. Fee structure of private schools should be kept low so that poor children can also have a right to have qualitative education. Government should *subsidize the private school education at least for those poor students who are doing well in their studies*. This will give encouragement for others also to perform well.

The description given above is sufficient to highlight that along with availability of facilities, affordability is also a key factor. The best infrastructure in the world would not ensure access, if the infrastructure is not affordable to the majority of the population.

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Appendix (Tables)
Figure- 1: Cost of Education
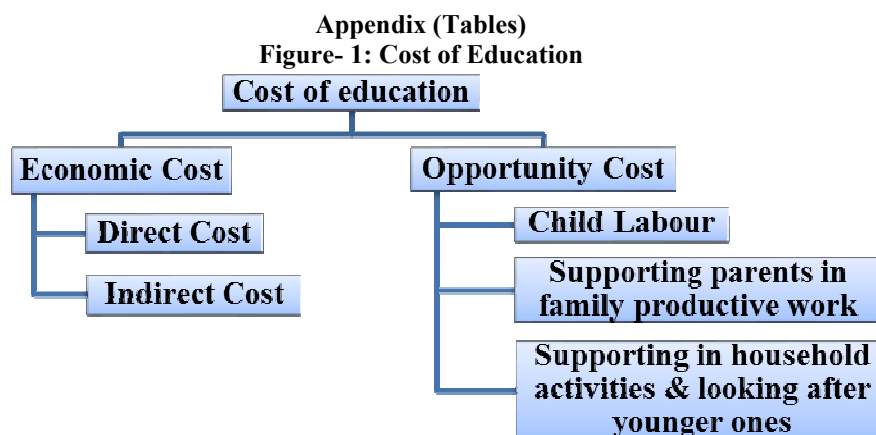
Table- 1: Net Cost of Education

SN	Sub-indicator	
1	Direct Cost =	Average Annual Expenditure on education- annual expenditure on tuition fee, exam fee, other fee and payments = Rs. 1413- (Rs. 430+ Rs. 193)= Rs. 790
2	Opportunity Cost=	Child labour wages @ Rs.70.44 x Average no. of instructional days per year
3	Gross Cost (1 +2)	
4	Subsidy =	a) Per head subsidy on textbook-stationary & uniform(Rs. 285+ Rs. 206= Rs. 491) + b) Per head subsidy on midday meal @ Rs. 3.11 x Average no. of instructional days per year
5	Net Cost of Education = 3-4	

Table- 2: Affordability Index for 70 Districts of Uttar Pradesh

District	Average no. of Instr. days	Opportunity Cost	Gross Cost	Annual Subsidy on MDM per head	Net Cost of Education	Affordability Index	Rank
Agra	228	16060.32	16850.32	709.08	15650.24	0.750	43
Aligarh	224	15778.56	16568.56	696.64	15380.92	0.821	21
Allahabad	224	15778.56	16568.56	696.64	15380.92	0.821	22
Ambedkar Nagar	230	16201.2	16991.2	715.3	15784.9	0.714	55
Auraiya	235	16553.4	17343.4	730.85	16121.55	0.625	67
Azamgarh	231	16271.64	17061.64	718.41	15852.23	0.696	60
Baghpat	229	16130.76	16920.76	712.19	15717.57	0.732	52
Bahraich	225	15849	16639	699.75	15448.25	0.804	30
Ballia	227	15989.88	16779.88	705.97	15582.91	0.768	40
Balrampur	224	15778.56	16568.56	696.64	15380.92	0.821	23
Banda	233	16412.52	17202.52	724.63	15986.89	0.661	65
Barabanki	226	15919.44	16709.44	702.86	15515.58	0.786	36
Bareilly	226	15919.44	16709.44	702.86	15515.58	0.786	37
Basti	225	15849	16639	699.75	15448.25	0.804	31
Bhadoi	236	16623.84	17413.84	733.96	16188.88	0.607	68
Bijnor	232	16342.08	17132.08	721.52	15919.56	0.679	63
Budaun	223	15708.12	16498.12	693.53	15313.59	0.839	18
Bulandshahr	225	15849	16639	699.75	15448.25	0.804	32
Chandauli	237	16694.28	17484.28	737.07	16256.21	0.589	69
Chitrakoot	228	16060.32	16850.32	709.08	15650.24	0.750	44
Deoria	227	15989.88	16779.88	705.97	15582.91	0.768	41
Etah	229	16130.76	16920.76	712.19	15717.57	0.732	53
Etawah	225	15849	16639	699.75	15448.25	0.804	33
Faizabad	228	16060.32	16850.32	709.08	15650.24	0.750	45
Farrukhabad	231	16271.64	17061.64	718.41	15852.23	0.696	61
Fatehpur	238	16764.72	17554.72	740.18	16323.54	0.571	70
Firozabad	228	16060.32	16850.32	709.08	15650.24	0.75	46
G.B. Nagar	221	15567.24	16357.24	687.31	15178.93	0.875	15
Ghaziabad	214	15074.16	15864.16	665.54	14707.62	1.000	1
Ghazipur	224	15778.56	16568.56	696.64	15380.92	0.821	24
Gonda	222	15637.68	16427.68	690.42	15246.26	0.857	17
Gorakhpur	220	15496.8	16286.8	684.2	15111.6	0.893	6
Hamirpur	220	15496.8	16286.8	684.2	15111.6	0.893	7
Hardoi	230	16201.2	16991.2	715.3	15784.9	0.714	56
Hathras	220	15496.8	16286.8	684.2	15111.6	0.893	8
Jalaun	226	15919.44	16709.44	702.86	15515.58	0.786	38
Jaunpur	230	16201.2	16991.2	715.3	15784.9	0.714	57
Jhansi	220	15496.8	16286.8	684.2	15111.6	0.893	9
J.P.Nagar	224	15778.56	16568.56	696.64	15380.92	0.821	25
Kannauj	223	15708.12	16498.12	693.53	15313.59	0.839	19
Kanpur Dehat	233	16412.52	17202.52	724.63	15986.89	0.661	66
Kanpur Nagar	226	15919.44	16709.44	702.86	15515.58	0.786	39
Kaushambi	220	15496.8	16286.8	684.2	15111.6	0.893	10
Kheri	223	15708.12	16498.12	693.53	15313.59	0.839	20
Kushinagar	218	15355.92	16145.92	677.98	14976.94	0.929	3
Lalitpur	229	16130.76	16920.76	712.19	15717.57	0.732	54
Lucknow	218	15355.92	16145.92	677.98	14976.94	0.929	4
Maharajganj	224	15778.56	16568.56	696.64	15380.92	0.821	26
Mahoba	230	16201.2	16991.2	715.3	15784.9	0.714	58
Mainpuri	219	15426.36	16216.36	681.09	15044.27	0.911	5
Mathura	227	15989.88	16779.88	705.97	15582.91	0.768	42
Mau	225	15849	16639	699.75	15448.25	0.804	34
Meerut	220	15496.8	16286.8	684.2	15111.6	0.893	11
Mirzapur	225	15849	16639	699.75	15448.25	0.804	35
Moradabad	232	16342.08	17132.08	721.52	15919.56	0.679	64
Muzaffarnagar	220	15496.8	16286.8	684.2	15111.6	0.893	12
Pilibhit	221	15567.24	16357.24	687.31	15178.93	0.875	16
Pratapgarh	231	16271.64	17061.64	718.41	15852.23	0.696	62
Rae Bareli	228	16060.32	16850.32	709.08	15650.24	0.750	47
Rampur	215	15144.6	15934.6	668.65	14774.95	0.982	2
Saharanpur	230	16201.2	16991.2	715.3	15784.9	0.714	59
S.K.Nagar	228	16060.32	16850.32	709.08	15650.24	0.750	48
Shahjahanpur	220	15496.8	16286.8	684.2	15111.6	0.893	13
Shrawasti	228	16060.32	16850.32	709.08	15650.24	0.750	49
Siddharthnagar	220	15496.8	16286.8	684.2	15111.6	0.893	14
Sitapur	224	15778.56	16568.56	696.64	15380.92	0.821	27
Sonbhadra	224	15778.56	16568.56	696.64	15380.92	0.821	28
Sultanpur	228	16060.32	16850.32	709.08	15650.24	0.750	50
Unnao	224	15778.56	16568.56	696.64	15380.92	0.821	29
Varanasi	228	16060.32	16850.32	709.08	15650.24	0.750	51

Source: Author's Calculation from DISE Data

IISTE

Table-3: Zone-Wise Index of Affordability in Primary Education for Districts of UP

Economic Region	District	Index	Rank
Western Region	Agra , Aligarh, Auraiya, Badayun, Bagpat Bareli Bijnor Bulandshahar Etah, Etawah, Farukhabad, Firozabad, Gautam Budhanagar, Gaziabad, Hathras, J P Nagar, Kannoj, Mainpuri, Mathura, Meerut, Moradabad, Mujaffarnagar, Pilibhit, Rampur, Saharanpur, Shahjahanpur.	**0.810**	**1**
Eastern Region	Allahabad, Ambedkarnagar, Azamgarh, Balia, Balrampur, Basti, Behraich, Bhadoi, Chandauli Deoria, Faizabad, Gazipur, Gonda, Gorakhpur, Jaunpur, Kaushambi, Kusinagar, Mahrajganj, Mau, Mirzapur, Pratapgarh, Sant Kabirnagar, Shravasti, Siddharthnagar, Sonebhadra, Sultanpur, Varanasi.	**0.781**	**2**
Bundelkhand Region	Banda, Chitrakoot, Hamirpur, Jalaun, Jhansi, Lalitpur, Mahoba.	**0.776**	**3**
Central Region	Barabanki, Fatehpur, Hardoi, Kanpur Dehat, Kanpur Nagar, Khiri, Lucknow, Rae Bareli, Sitapur, Unnao.	**0.768**	**4**

Source: Author's Calculation from DISE Data