Crafting India's Educational Future

This editorial is based on "Education crisis: Don't let fads disrupt the fundamentals of learning" which was published in The Livemint on 25/06/2025. The article brings into picture the idea that educational success in India relies more on consistent adherence to core principles like teacher quality and curriculum standards than on prosperity. It emphasizes the need for long-term, scalable reforms over short-term solutions.

For Prelims:

SWAYAM and SWAYAM Prabha, PM eVidya, National Education Policy, 2020 , NISHTHA, NIPUN Bharat Mission, PM SHRI Schools, Higher Education Commission of India, Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, University Grants Commission

For Mains:

Key Positive Developments in the Indian Education System, Key Persistent Issues in the Indian Education System.

Educational outcomes across Indian states show that prosperity alone does not determine success in schooling. Rather, it is the **consistent commitment to the fundamentals of education—regardless of administrative shifts**—that plays a pivotal role in shaping results. This suggests that sustained focus on core principles, such as **teacher quality, curriculum standards, and effective policy implementation,** is more critical than financial resources. As we delve deeper into **India's educational landscape,** it becomes clear that reforms must center on long-term consistency rather than short-term fixes, with a focus on creating robust, scalable systems for learning.

What are the Key Positive Developments in the Indian Education System?

- **Expansion of Digital Learning Infrastructure:** The rapid growth of digital learning has significantly improved access to education.
  - With the pandemic accelerating this shift, initiatives like **PM eVidya** and **SWAYAM and SWAYAM Prabha** have enabled millions to access online courses.
    - This digital revolution facilitates lifelong learning, but it also highlights the need for digital equity.
  - In 2023, India reported **over 400 million internet users** in rural areas, expanding access to online education.
- **Increased Focus on Skill Development and Vocational Education:** The shift towards integrating vocational education from early stages reflects the country's commitment to aligning education with job market demands.
  - By eliminating rigid boundaries between academic and vocational streams, the **National Education Policy, 2020** emphasizes **experiential learning** and **hands-on skills**.
  - This aims to reduce the skills gap and improve employability, addressing both the urban-rural divide and youth unemployment.
  - The introduction of **skill-based courses from grade 6** and the push for a 50% **graduate**

enrollment ratio by 2035 indicate India's evolving educational priorities.

- **Improvements in Teacher Training and Pedagogical Reforms:** The focus on **teacher training** under the **NEP 2020** and **NISHTHA** programs is a crucial development.
  - **NEP 2020 mandates a 4-year integrated Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) degree,** combining subject knowledge with pedagogical training.
  - These reforms aim to standardize and elevate teaching quality across the nation. The integration of **modern pedagogical techniques** into teacher training ensures better outcomes, moving away from rote memorization toward critical thinking.
  - **NISHTHA** has trained over **42 lakh teachers** as of 2024, enhancing their skills in **student-centered learning**.
- **Introduction of Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN):** The **FLN Mission** is a game-changer, focusing on literacy and numeracy for children by Grade 3.
  - It prioritizes foundational education as the bedrock for all future learning, tackling learning deficits at the earliest stages.
  - By addressing gaps in basic education, it aims to enhance **cognitive and social development** among young learners.
  - 2025 is going to be a defining year for FLN in India as th**e NIPUN Bharat Mission** aims to achieve universal foundational literacy and numeracy in primary schools by the end of this year.
- **Increase in Public Investment and Infrastructure Upgrades:** The government's renewed focus on increasing investment in education, with a commitment to raise spending to **6% of GDP**, is a significant positive change.
  - Infrastructure improvements under schemes like **Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA)** and **PM SHRI Schools** are critical for fostering better educational environments.
    - More funding is also aimed at **upgrading digital facilities**, enhancing both access and quality.
- **Focus on Multilingual Education and Regional Language Integration:** India's emphasis on multilingualism under the **NEP 2023** aligns with its cultural diversity.
  - The policy advocates teaching in **mother tongues** up to Grade 5, improving comprehension and learning outcomes for millions of children.
    - This shift not **only fosters inclusion but also respects linguistic diversity,** aiding in the retention of regional languages.
  - **Digital platforms** now offer **regional language courses**, benefiting over **25 million students** in non-Hindi speaking areas like South India.
- **Internationalization of Education and Global Collaborations:** India's **NEP 2020** encourages the internationalization of education, allowing partnerships with foreign universities for **exchange programs** and joint degrees.
  - Indian colleges are forming global partnerships to offer joint degrees, exchange programs, and internships, enhancing students' international exposure.
  - The **University Grants Commission (UGC)** has issued Regulations on Academic Collaboration between Indian and Foreign Higher Educational Institutions to offer Twinning, Joint Degree and Dual Degree Programmes
- **Reform in Higher Education Governance and Autonomy:** The restructuring of higher education governance, with the proposal for the creation of the **Higher Education Commission of India (HECI)**, is a positive reform.
  - By granting autonomy to colleges and universities, this move encourages **innovation** and **academic excellence**.
  - It aims to reduce the centralization of power, providing institutions with greater freedom in their operations and curricula.
  - The new **accreditation reforms** also saw an increase in university rankings on the **QS World University Rankings**.

What are the Key Persistent Issues in the Indian Education System?

- **Unequal Access to Quality Education:** The persistent **urban-rural divide** in access to quality education continues to hamper India's educational progress.
  - Despite various initiatives, rural areas still face significant challenges in **terms of**

infrastructure, qualified teachers, and resources.
    - This disparity leads to unequal educational outcomes, particularly for marginalized communities.
    - Only 18.47% of rural schools in India have internet access, compared to 47.29% in urban areas (Education Ministry).
        - Additionally, **rural areas still account for 37% of dropout rates (as of 2020-21)**, with infrastructure gaps exacerbating these issues.
- **Overemphasis on Rote Learning and Standardized Testing:** India's education system remains heavily reliant on **rote learning** and **standardized testing**, neglecting the development of critical thinking and creativity.
    - This limits **students' ability to innovate and solve problems in real-world situations.** The system continues to prioritize exam scores over holistic development, contributing to student burnout.
    - The 18th Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2023, which covers the 14–18-year age group, points at a significant education gap.
        - For instance, around **25% of youth cannot read a Class II-level text fluently in their regional language,** and only 57.3% can read sentences in English.
- **Teacher Shortages and Inadequate Teacher Training:** Despite reforms, teacher quality remains a major issue, with inadequate **teacher training** and **shortages** across the country.
    - The lack of **professional development** opportunities for educators exacerbates the quality gap. Teachers often face overcrowded classrooms, hindering effective teaching and student engagement.
    - **NITI Aayog's 2023 report** highlighted over one million teacher vacancies in the country, with rural areas facing acute shortage.
        - The **NISHTHA program**, though training millions, still faces challenges in **providing continuous, updated training**.
- **Poor Infrastructure and Resource Allocation:** While there has been investment in educational infrastructure, many schools still lack basic amenities like **clean drinking water, toilets, and libraries, particularly in rural areas.**
    - This poor infrastructure hampers students' overall learning experience, affecting their attendance and academic performance.
    - Around **23% of rural schools** have unusable toilets and 11.5% have no separate toilets for girls **(13th ASER Report).**
        - The **web series 'Panchayat'** effectively highlights the dire conditions of government schools in rural areas, where students often avoid using the washrooms altogether.
- **High Dropout Rates and Low Retention in Secondary Education:** High dropout rates remain a significant issue, especially in the **secondary education** phase.
    - Socioeconomic factors, poor infrastructure, and a lack of engagement in learning contribute to students leaving school before completing their education. This limits India's ability to build a skilled workforce.
    - The Union Minister of Education stated that the class 10 dropout rate in 2021-22 was a worrying 20.6%., with **financial constraints** and **family responsibilities** as key factors.
        - Programs like **Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA)** aim to curb this, but **dropout rates** are still higher in **rural areas**.
- **Gender Disparity in Education:** Although progress has been made, gender inequality in education remains a significant challenge.
    - Girls, particularly in rural and disadvantaged areas, face barriers like **early marriage**, **socio-cultural norms**, and a lack of **safe infrastructure**, which hinder their educational participation and retention.
    - Despite initiatives like **Beti Bachao Beti Padhao**, recent study states that most dropout girls were aged between **15 and 18 years (76%).**
- **Lack of Career Guidance and Skill Development:** A major challenge in India's education system is the **lack of career guidance** and **skills-based education**.
    - The traditional emphasis on academic subjects often leaves students unprepared for the rapidly changing job market.
        - There is a gap between what students learn and what employers need in terms of practical skills.
    - The **India Skill Report 2023** reveals improvement in overall employability among young

people is just **50.3%** .

- **Private vs. Public School Divide:** The growing divide between **private** and **public schools** in India is another persistent issue.
    - In higher education, **67.51% of 1,385 universities** and 37.81% of 60,127 colleges in India are private, with skyrocketing fees structures.
    - The **privatization of education** has led to a situation where access to quality education is largely determined by a student's socioeconomic status. This further exacerbates **educational inequalities**.
- **Insufficient Focus on Mental Health and Well-being:** The increasing **academic pressure**, particularly for students in competitive exams, continues to exacerbate mental health issues like **anxiety**, **depression**, and **suicidal tendencies**.
    - Despite a growing awareness, the education system lacks adequate **mental health support** and a holistic approach to student well-being.
    - According to the **National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB)**, **over 13,000 students** in India committed suicide in **2023**, with **academic pressure** cited as a leading cause.

What Measures can be Adopted to Enhance the Effectiveness of the Indian Education System?

- **Holistic and Interdisciplinary Curriculum Reform:** The curriculum should be reformed to foster **interdisciplinary learning** and critical thinking, breaking down traditional silos between subjects **as directed in NEP 2020.**
    - Encouraging **project-based, real-world applications** of academic knowledge will enhance problem-solving skills, creativity, and collaboration among students.

    - The aim is to shift from rote learning to fostering **analytical and adaptive skills** essential for the future workforce, encompassing both academic and vocational training.
- **Expansion of Vocational Education and Apprenticeship Programs:** Scaling up vocational education through **industry partnerships** will provide students with hands-on experience and job-ready skills from an early stage.
    - Expanding apprenticeship programs in high-demand sectors like **manufacturing, IT, and healthcare** will bridge the skills gap, reduce unemployment, and integrate practical learning into the education system.
    - By doing so, students will gain real-world insights and certification, making them employable immediately after completion.
- **Integration of Technology in Teacher Training:** The quality of teaching can be greatly enhanced by integrating **technology-driven, continuous professional development** for educators.
    - Implementing digital platforms for real-time feedback, **micro-credentialing**, and **interactive learning modules** will allow teachers to stay current with pedagogical advances and technology trends.
    - This can be coupled with **AI-driven learning tools** to personalize teacher training and cater to individual needs, enhancing teaching effectiveness.
- **Active Community and Parental Engagement:** A collaborative approach involving **parents, teachers, and community members** will enhance the relevance of education and ensure holistic student development.
    - Schools can organize **community learning initiatives**, regular **parent-teacher consultations**, and **volunteer programs** that align local needs with educational goals.
    - This will also help build stronger support systems for students, particularly those from marginalized or underprivileged backgrounds.
- **Promoting Entrepreneurial Thinking and Innovation:** Embedding **entrepreneurial skills** and **innovative thinking** into the curriculum from a young age will prepare students to adapt to dynamic job markets.
    - By offering **courses in design thinking, startup culture, and problem-solving**, students will learn to identify opportunities, take calculated risks, and develop a growth mindset.
    - **Innovation hubs** within schools and colleges can further foster entrepreneurial spirits and equip students with practical business skills.
- **Improved Infrastructure for Inclusive Education:** Investing in **accessible school infrastructure** will ensure that students with disabilities or special needs can learn effectively.
    - Implementing **universal design principles** in schools, including ramps, special teaching tools, and **assistive technologies**, will make education truly inclusive. Moreover, hiring specialized staff, such as **special educators** and therapists, will provide targeted support to students requiring additional help.
- **Streamlining and Strengthening Exam Systems:** While exams are necessary for assessment, the system can be revamped to prioritize **continuous, formative assessments** that track students' progress over time **(PARAKH Method).**
    - Moving away from **high-stakes examinations** and adopting **competency-based testing** will reduce pressure and allow students to showcase their understanding through diverse methods such as projects, presentations, and peer reviews.
        - This shift will align assessment with learning, encouraging deeper engagement and understanding.
- **Sustainability and Environmental Education Integration:** Incorporating **sustainability** and **environmental awareness** into the curriculum will prepare students to tackle pressing global challenges such as climate change.
    - Schools should introduce **hands-on environmental projects**, eco-clubs, and sustainability-focused lessons across subjects.
    - This not only equips students with knowledge but also instills a sense of responsibility toward the planet, contributing to the creation of environmentally conscious citizens.
- **Enhanced Public-Private Collaboration for Educational Innovation:** Fostering stronger **public-private partnerships** can help address resource and infrastructure gaps in the education system.
    - By leveraging the expertise of private players in **technology, curriculum design**, and **teacher training**, public schools can access the resources they lack.

    - These partnerships could also facilitate the introduction of **cutting-edge tools** and educational methodologies, ensuring that education remains relevant in a rapidly changing global landscape.
- **Focus on Rural and Remote Area Education:** Specialized initiatives targeting **rural and remote areas** will ensure that education reaches even the most underserved communities.
    - This includes **mobile learning units**, **community-run schools**, and **digital education centers** that bring schooling directly to children's doorsteps.
    - Additionally, incentivizing **teachers to work in remote areas** with better pay and accommodation will increase retention rates and ensure quality education in these regions.od
- **Strengthening Mental Health and Well-being Support Systems:** Establishing **comprehensive mental health support structures** within educational institutions is crucial to alleviate the stress and pressure faced by students.
    - Introducing **mandatory counseling services**, promoting **emotional intelligence** education, and creating safe spaces for students to discuss academic or personal challenges will foster a healthier learning environment.
    - Additionally, **mindfulness and stress management programs** can be incorporated into the curriculum to prevent burnout and mental health issues.

Conclusion:

In alignment with **SDG 4 (Quality Education) and Article 21A of the Indian Constitution,** , reforms should focus on **inclusive, equitable, and accessible education**. Sustainable, long-term investments in **infrastructure, teacher training, and mental health support are essential to building a robust educational system.** Emphasis on technological integration and skill-based learning will ensure that India's education system not only meets current needs but also **prepares future generations for an increasingly complex world.**

Drishti Mains Question:

Q. While financial resources play a role, long-term consistency in core educational principles is key to improving outcomes in India's education system. Critically analyze the effectiveness of current reforms and suggest measures to address the persistent challenges.

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Question (PYQ)

Prelims

Which of the following provisions of the Constitution does India have a bearing on Education? (2012)

1. Directive Principles of State Policy
2. Rural and Urban Local Bodies
3. Fifth Schedule
4. Sixth Schedule
5. Seventh Schedule

Select the correct answer using the codes given below:

(a) 1 and 2 only
(b) 3, 4 and 5 only
(c) 1, 2 and 5 only
(d) 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5

Ans- (d)

Mains

Q1. How have digital initiatives in India contributed to the functioning of the education system in the country? Elaborate on your answer. (2020)

Q2. Discuss the main objectives of Population Education and point out the measures to achieve them in India in detail. (2021)