# Revamping India's Secondary Education

***This editorial is based on Secondary education needs to improve, which was published in Business Line on 06/06/2025. The article highlights India's neglect of secondary and vocational education post-Unnikrishnan judgment, while Asian economies focused on these stages for growth.***

**For Prelims:** **Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), Atal Tinkering Labs (ATL), Eklavya Model Residential Schools (EMRS), Unnikrishnan Judgment (1993), PM SHRI Schools, India's education system, New Education Policy of 2020, PM eVidya, Skill India Mission, Atal Innovation Mission**

**For Mains:** Key Developments in India’s Secondary Education System, Measures to Transform Secondary Education

The **Public Report on Secondary Education (PROSE) 2024** reveals **India’s critical neglect of secondary and vocational education** despite gains in elementary enrollment. While high-performing Asian economies like Singapore and Japan leveraged robust secondary schooling to drive growth, India’s underinvestment has created a severe **skill-employability mismatch.** Alarmingly, **systemic deficits in teacher recruitment,** infrastructure, and governance threaten to squander the **demographic dividend**, risking the peril of "**growing old before becoming rich**." Urgent reorientation toward **quality, equity, and industry-aligned skills** is imperative to transform **human capital** into economic resilience.

## What are the Key Issues in the Secondary Education System?

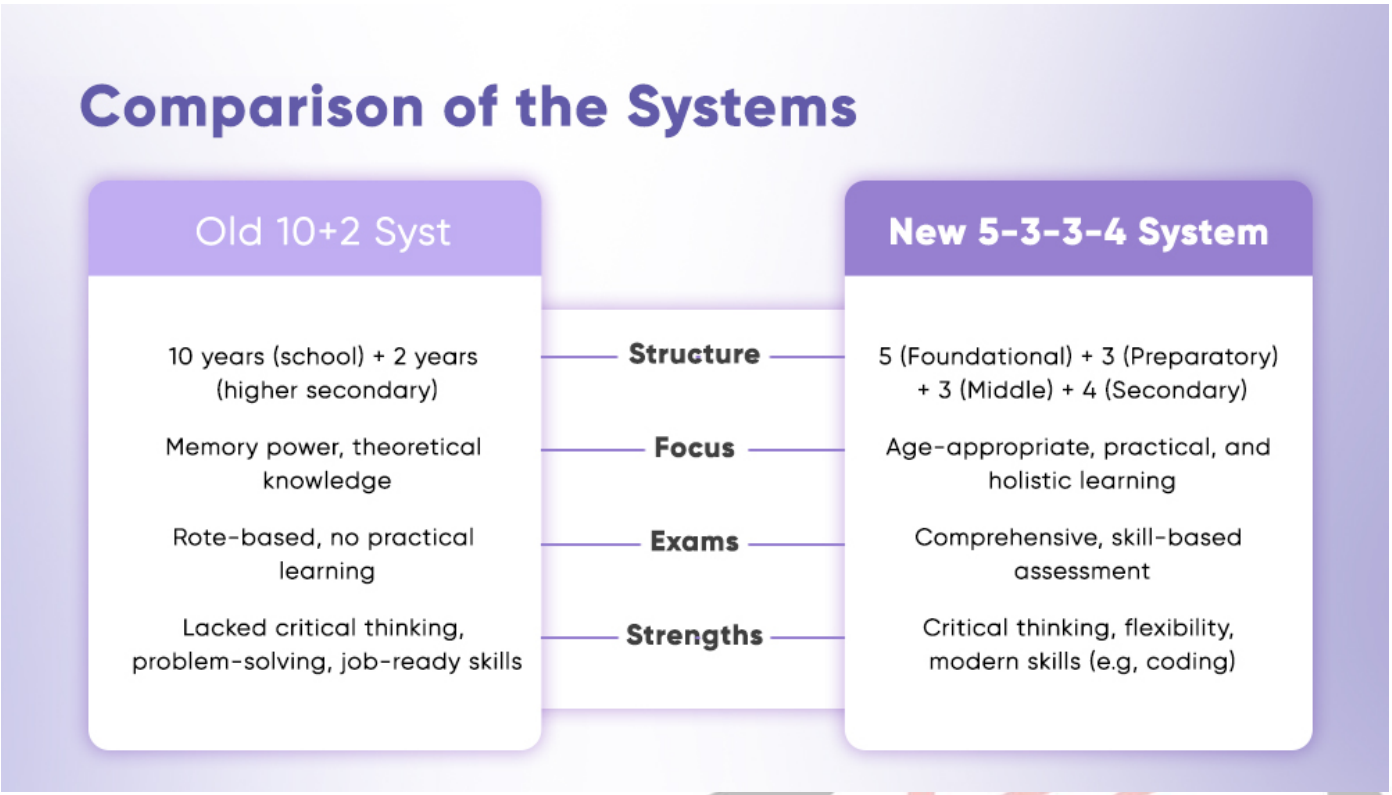
- **Teacher Vacancies and Ad-hocism:** Many states rely on **contract or guest teachers** to fill in for unfilled permanent positions, particularly in science. The **Ministry of Education reported over 8.4 lakh teaching vacancies** in government schools across India, covering both elementary and secondary levels.
- **Extreme Infrastructure Disparities:** The **disparity in per-child spending** across different schools is staggering. For example, Telangana's residential schools receive ₹2 lakh per student, while **Kendriya Vidyalayas are allocated just ₹65,000**.
    - Furthermore, **47% of schools lack drinking water facilities,** and 53% do not have separate toilets for girls, as reported by PROSE 2024.
- **Dysfunctional Governance and Funding:** School Management Committees (SMCs) are **largely ineffective, with minimal financial support**. Local governments are often sidelined, leading to poor management and oversight.
    - As per the **Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) report,** audits across 12 States/UTs revealed that between 3% and 88% of **schools lacked School Management Committees (SMCs)**, with several committees being formed after significant delays.
    - The funds allocated under the **PM SHRI scheme** are inadequate, even for established schools like Navodaya and Kendriya Vidyalayas, while Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and West Bengal

have received no funding from the Centre's share under the Samagra Shiksha scheme (SSA) for the 2024-25 financial year.

- **Vocational Education-Employment Gap:** There is a persistent gap between vocational education and industry demands, with **only 45% of Indian graduates deemed employable**, as highlighted by a recent Mercer-Mettl study, limiting their access to well-paying job opportunities.
- **Misaligned Digital Tools:** Digital tools in education are frequently misused, with **pre-recorded materials serving as replacements** for teachers instead of being used as conceptual aids to enhance learning.
    - According to data from the Union Education Ministry, **only 57.2% of schools in India have functional computers,** and just 53.9% are equipped with Internet access.
- **Socio-Economic Disparities:** Persistent economic and social inequalities hinder inclusive education, **limiting access to quality learning** for children from disadvantaged, rural, and tribal backgrounds.
    - Tribal students in **Eklavya Model Residential Schools (EMRS)** face educational challenges due to language barriers, as instruction is in Hindi rather than their native languages, like English or Telugu. This issue is worsened by **central hiring policies** that overlook students' linguistic diversity.
- **Shortcomings in Learning Methods:** India's education system **still prioritizes memorization** over developing analytical and problem-solving skills, limiting students' cognitive growth.
    - Although the **National Education Policy, 2020** advocates for competency-based learning, the shift from outdated exam-driven approaches is sluggish, with surveys revealing that a **majority of Class 3 students struggle with basic reading** comprehension.

## Structure of School Education in India

- India's school education system is transitioning in a phased manner from the 10+2 format to the 5+3+3+4 structure under the NEP, 2020.
- This revamped model spans ages 3-18, integrating early childhood care and education. It comprises:
    - **Foundational Stage (5 years):** 3 years pre-school + Classes 1–2
    - **Preparatory Stage (3 years):** Classes 3–5
    - **Middle Stage (3 years):** Classes 6–8
    - **Secondary Stage (4 years):** Classes 9–12




## What are the Outcomes of the Government Initiatives in India's Education System?

- **Equity-Driven Enrollment Surge:** The participation of **SC/ST students** and girls in secondary education has seen a significant rise, largely due to initiatives such as the **Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA)**, bicycle schemes for girls, and various scholarships.
  - According to the Ministry of Education report, there has been an **80.1% rise in female ST student enrollment** since 2014-15, with an additional 7.5 lakh students joining.
  - While gender parity has been achieved in several backward regions, the **issue of early marriage continues** to pose a significant barrier to the educational progression of adolescent girls.
- **Emergence of Blended Learning:** The use of smart boards and pre-recorded digital content, like YouTube videos, has **enriched the learning experience** by complementing traditional teaching methods.
  - However, these digital tools **often serve as substitutes for absent teachers,** which can limit students' understanding of key concepts and hinder deeper engagement with the material.
  - The **ICT and Digital Initiatives** component of **Samagra Shiksha** supports government and aided schools with classes VI to XII by providing financial aid for setting up ICT labs and smart classrooms.
- **Innovation Infrastructure:** **Atal Tinkering Labs** have been established to promote creativity and experimentation among students, yet their potential **remains largely untapped in schools** that lack qualified science teachers.
  - This underutilization highlights the challenges schools face in leveraging innovation-focused infrastructure to its fullest potential.
- **Expansion of Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas (KGBVs):** The KGBV scheme, launched in 2004, aims to provide quality education to girls from disadvantaged communities, including SC, ST, OBC, and minority groups.
  - As of 2025, 2,578 KGBVs have been sanctioned across 28 states and union territories. These residential schools **offer a minimum of 75% reservation for girls from these**

**communities**, ensuring access to education for those who might otherwise be excluded

- **Teacher Recruitment and Gender Sensitization:** Efforts have been made to **recruit more female teachers and provide gender-sensitive training.** This includes sensitization programs for teachers and the construction of separate toilet blocks for girls, which have **collectively contributed to improved enrollment** and retention rates among girls in schools.

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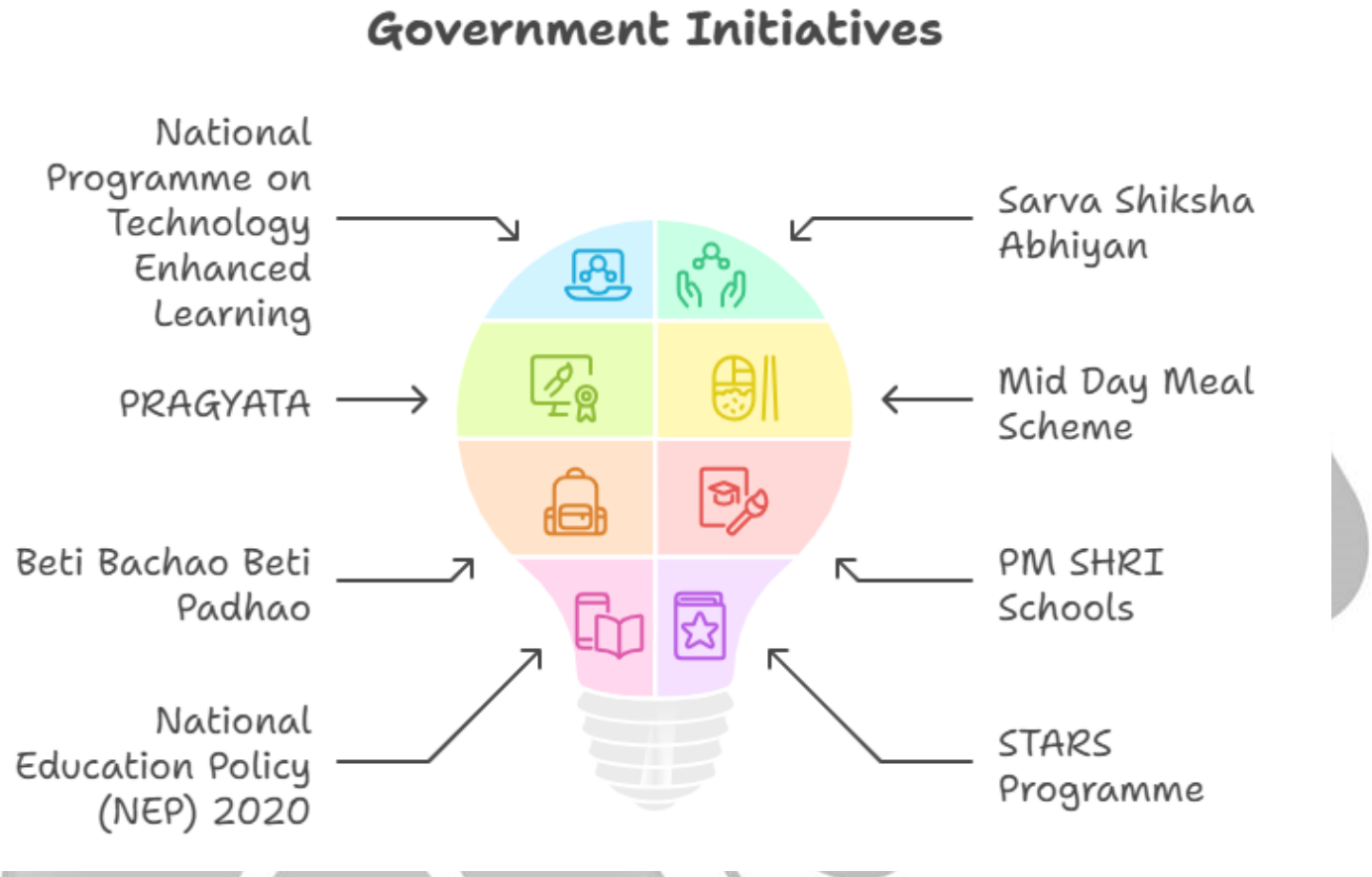


## Global Lessons for India

| Country Model | Core Strength | Lesson for India |
|---|---|---|
| Japan | Teacher autonomy and innovation | Empower teachers to design curricula and experiment. |
| Germany | Vocational-employment integration | Strengthen industry apprenticeships in schools. |
| Finland | Professional development | Invest in continuous professional development. |
| Singapore | Project-based learning (PBL) | Adopt PBL to enhance problem-solving skills and creativity. |
| Estonia | Digital learning infrastructure | Accelerate digital transformation and ensure equitable access to technology. |
| South Korea | Student-centered learning | Implement more personalized learning paths for diverse student needs. |

## What are the Measures Needed to Transform Secondary Education?

- **Teacher Capacity Building:** The vacancies for teaching positions, **especially in specialized fields like science**, should be filled based on priority, ensuring that qualified and skilled educators are recruited.
    - In addition, it is **essential to mandate pedagogical training** for all science teachers, ensuring they are **equipped with the latest teaching strategies** and methodologies to enhance their effectiveness in the classroom.
- **Community-Driven Governance:** School committees, where they do not yet exist, should be established. Once formed, they should be **empowered with the autonomy to manage their finances,** enabling them to oversee budgets and allocate resources effectively for the growth of their institutions.
    - However, this independence should be **balanced with strong oversight from local government bodies** to ensure the funds are spent wisely and in line with educational goals.
- **Equitable Infrastructure Fund:** To promote equal access to quality education, resources should be **redirected from well-funded "model schools" to ordinary State schools,** where the need is greater.
    - This shift would help **address disparities in educational infrastructure** and ensure that all students, regardless of their location or socio-economic status, have access to similar levels of support.
    - Additionally, **per-child spending across schools should be standardized** so that each student benefits equally from government investment.
- **Vocational-Employment Corridors:** The curricula in **Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs) and polytechnics must be restructured** to align more closely with the needs of industry. This alignment will better prepare students for the workforce, ensuring they possess the skills required by employers.
    - Furthermore, **the modernization of labs** and equipment in these institutions should be prioritized and can be achieved through **Public-Private Partnership (PPP) models.**
    - This collaborative approach will ensure that **these institutions are equipped with cutting-edge technology,** offering students the best learning experience possible.
- **Revision of Curriculum:** A shift from rote **learning to competency-based education** is essential, with an **updated curriculum that emphasizes critical thinking**, problem-solving, creativity, and interdisciplinary learning to equip students for contemporary challenges.
- **Blended Learning Framework:** Digital tools should be **integrated into the classroom** to **reinforce key concepts** and enhance the learning experience, but they should never replace teachers.
    - The role of digital tools should be to **support and supplement** the teacher's efforts, making learning more engaging and effective. By using technology in this way, **educators can maintain their central role** in the classroom while taking advantage of the benefits that digital resources offer.

## Conclusion

India’s secondary education stands at a make-or-break juncture. While **equity gains reflect policy commitment,** the neglect of quality, governance, and vocational linkages threatens to turn the "demographic dividend" into a crisis. Learning from PISA leaders, India must prioritise teacher empowerment, community ownership, and skills integration **to avoid "growing old before becoming rich."**

***Drishti Mains Question:***

India’s neglect of secondary education has created a critical skill-employability mismatch. Comment.

## UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Question (PYQ)

### *Prelims*

**Q. 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)**

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### *Mains*

**Q1.** Discuss the main objectives of Population Education and point out the measures to achieve them in India in detail. **(2021)**

**Q2.** How have digital initiatives in India contributed to the functioning of the education system in the country? Elaborate on your answer. **(2020)**

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