



Building a Stronger Education System in India

The editorial, titled "[Play-based Learning for India's Future](#)," was published in The Hindu on 27/08/2025. It highlights the significance of play-based learning within the broader framework of India's evolving education system. However, despite various reforms, challenges remain, including gaps in infrastructure, inadequate teacher training, and disparities in access that still need to be addressed.

For Prelims: [PM eVidya](#), [National Education Policy, 2020](#), [NISHTHA](#), [NIPUN Bharat Mission](#), [PM SHRI Schools](#), [Higher Education Commission of India](#), [Beti Bachao Beti Padhao](#)

For Mains: India's Education Sector: Related Challenges and Way Forward

With approximately **26% of its population aged 0-14 years**, [India's education sector](#) presents significant opportunities for growth. Over the years, the country has made notable strides in educational reform, particularly through initiatives like the **National Education Policy (NEP) 2020**. However, challenges such as high dropout rates, skill mismatches, unequal access to education, and infrastructure gaps remain. To fully harness the potential of India's education system, **key reforms are essential to improve education quality, boost employability, and promote inclusive growth, empowering future generations.**

What are the Key Developments in India's Education System?

- **Growth of Digital and Online Education:** India's education system has swiftly adopted digital learning, particularly in the aftermath of the pandemic.
 - The shift to **online platforms and blended learning models** has made education more accessible, especially for students in remote regions.
 - The growth of edtech companies, along with government initiatives like [PM eVidya](#), has greatly extended the reach of education.
 - In 2021, **Amazon launched its global computer science education initiative** in India (for grades 6-12).
 - Moreover, the government aims to set up a new **centre of excellence for AI** for education with an outlay of Rs 500 crore ([Union Budget 2025-26](#)).
 - Through these developments, the online education sector in India is expanding rapidly, with an anticipated growth of **USD 2.28 billion between 2021-25**, reflecting a [CAGR](#) of nearly 20%.
- **Integration of Vocational Education and Skills Development:** The [National Education Policy \(NEP\) 2020](#) emphasizes skill development and vocational education as key solutions to **India's employment challenges**.
 - By embedding **skill-based learning into mainstream education**, India seeks to better equip its youth with the practical skills required to meet evolving industry demands.
 - The [Skill India mission](#) aims to enhance employability and **promote skill development** across the country.

- With this, student enrolment in skill education has surged to over **30 lakh in 2024**.
- **Transforming Early Education:** The [Foundational Literacy and Numeracy \(FLN\) Mission](#) is a transformative initiative, focusing on ensuring literacy and numeracy for children by Grade 3.
 - It emphasizes **foundational education as the cornerstone for all future learning**, addressing learning gaps at the earliest stages. By closing these basic education gaps, the mission aims to foster cognitive and social development in young learners.
 - The year 2025 will be pivotal for FLN in India, as the [NIPUN Bharat Mission](#) strives to achieve **universal foundational literacy** and numeracy in primary schools by **2026-27**.
 - Initiatives like **Navchetna** further enhance early education by providing age-appropriate, **play-based learning activities** to support the development of young children.
 - Moreover, the [Poshan Bhi Padhai Bhi \(PBPB\)](#) initiative aims to transform [Anganwadi centres](#) into vibrant early learning hubs, focusing on both nutrition and education.
- **Enhanced Focus on Research and Innovation:** India is gradually transitioning towards a **research-driven education model** with an emphasis on innovation and industry collaboration.
 - The government's push for research in higher education institutions has been supported by initiatives like the [Atal Innovation Mission \(AIM\)](#) and funding through the **Research and Innovation in Higher Education (RISE)** program.
 - Over **10,000 Atal Tinkering Labs** have been established across schools, engaging over 1.1 crore students in hands-on learning.
 - Moreover, India's rank in the [Global Innovation Index](#) improved from 76 in 2014 to 39 in 2024.
 - [Anusandhan National Research Foundation \(ANRF\)](#) has been established to promote research and development and foster a culture of research and innovation.
- **Policy Support for Private Investment and FDI:** The Indian government has proactively fostered private investment in education, leading to substantial improvements in the sector's infrastructure and innovation.
 - The **allowance of 100% FDI in education** has attracted global players, creating a more competitive environment.
 - The education market in India is **projected to reach USD 225 billion by FY25** and FDI inflow in the education sector between April 2000 to December 2024 stood at USD 9.90 billion.
- **Rise of Multilingual and Regional Language Education:** The NEP 2020's emphasis on **multilingualism and regional language education** has marked a transformative shift in India's educational system.
 - By **promoting the use of regional languages as the medium of instruction**, the policy aims to bridge regional disparities and reinforce cultural identity.
 - [AICTE's e-KUMBH](#) (Knowledge Unleashed in Multiple Bharatiya Languages) continues to play a pivotal role in bridging linguistic divides and promoting equitable access to quality education.
- **Advancing in Teacher Training and Pedagogical Reforms:** The emphasis on teacher training in the NEP 2020 and [NISHTHA](#) programs is a significant advancement. NEP 2020 requires a **4-year integrated Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) degree**, blending subject expertise with pedagogical training.
 - These reforms are **designed to standardize and enhance teaching quality nationwide**. By incorporating modern pedagogical methods, the training fosters improved outcomes, shifting the focus from rote learning to critical thinking.
 - NISHTHA has trained over **42 lakh teachers as of 2024**, enhancing their skills in student-centered learning.
 - Moreover, with a user base of 27.5 crore, including 1.5 crore teachers across 36 states, the [DIKSHA](#) platform has achieved **70% rural penetration** (MoE, 2023).
- **Reshaping Higher Education Governance & Autonomy:** The proposed restructuring of higher education governance, with the establishment of the [Higher Education Commission of India \(HECI\)](#), is a positive reform.
 - By granting greater autonomy to colleges and universities, this initiative fosters innovation

and academic excellence.

- It **seeks to reduce centralized control**, offering institutions more freedom in their operations and curriculum development.
- Additionally, the **new accreditation reforms have contributed to improved university rankings**, with India surpassing China to become the **birth-largest country in terms of universities in the Times Higher Education University Rankings 2024**.
- India is also expanding its global presence, with **IIT Madras opening a campus in Zanzibar** and **IIT Delhi establishing one in Abu Dhabi**.

What are the Major Issues Impacting India's Education System?

- **High Dropout Rates in Secondary and Higher Education:** Although primary school enrollment is nearly universal, **dropout rates rise significantly in secondary and higher education**, especially among girls and socio-economically disadvantaged groups.
 - Contributing **factors include financial challenges, inadequate infrastructure**, early marriages, and cultural biases.
 - According to the [ASER 2024](#), the dropout rate for 15-16-year-olds was 7.9% in 2024, with girls having a higher rate of 8.1%.
- **Unequal Access to Education:** Despite the country's rapid economic growth and rising prosperity, many rural areas, **particularly in states like Rajasthan and Bihar**, along with underprivileged communities, still face barriers to quality education.
 - This disparity is **evident in the lower literacy rates and higher dropout rates among students** from these regions.
 - As per the [PLFS](#) 2023-24, urban India boasts a literacy rate of 88.9%, but **rural India trails far behind at 77.5%**.
- **Inadequate Funding and Resource Allocation:** While India's education sector has attracted growing investments, the funding levels are still insufficient to carry out the extensive reforms envisioned by NEP 2020.
 - NEP 2020 reiterated the long-standing goal of **increasing public expenditure on education to 6% of GDP**. However, actual spending has consistently hovered **around 3-4% of GDP for years**.
 - This funding shortfall impacts various aspects of education, including teacher salaries, infrastructure development, and the integration of digital learning tools.
 - According to [UDISE+](#), out of the over 14.71 lakh schools in India, approximately **1.52 lakh schools lack access to functional electricity**, and many also face shortages of basic facilities such as drinking water and toilet facilities.
- **Rote Learning and Slow Curriculum Transition:** India's education system remains heavily reliant on rote memorization, hindering the development of critical thinking and problem-solving skills.
 - Despite the NEP 2020's emphasis on competency-based learning, schools and **universities have been slow to move away from traditional examination methods**.
 - According to the ASER 2024, **76% of Class 3 students and 55.2% of Class 5 students** are unable to read at the Class 2 level, and over 66% of Class 3 and Class 5 students struggle with basic math.
- **Digital Divide and Technological Barriers:** While the pandemic has accelerated the shift towards digital education, a **substantial digital divide still hinders effective educational reform**.
 - Rural areas, in particular, face unreliable internet connectivity, making online learning difficult to access.
 - While initiatives like **PM eVidya and the Skill India Digital platform** have aimed to bridge the digital divide, a **significant number of students in rural areas still lack access to high-speed internet**.
 - The Ministry of Education in India reported in 2024 that **only 18.47% of rural schools had internet access**, compared to **47.29% in urban areas**.
- **Private vs. Public School Divide:** The widening gap between private and public schools in India remains a significant challenge.
 - In higher education, **67.51% of the 1,385 universities and 37.81% of the 60,127**

colleges are private, often with exorbitant fee structures.

- The privatization of education has created a scenario where **access to quality education is increasingly influenced by a student's socioeconomic background**, further deepening educational inequalities.
- **Teacher Shortages and Quality Issues:** India is grappling with a significant shortage of qualified teachers, with many schools relying on untrained or underqualified staff.
 - Additionally, teacher absenteeism, **outdated teaching methods, and the burden of excessive non-teaching responsibilities** (such as **election and census duties**) further undermine the effectiveness of the education system.
 - As per the [UNESCO report \(2021\)](#), the workforce has a deficit of over 1 million teachers.
 - As per **MoE data**, about 10 lakh teaching positions in government schools across elementary, primary, secondary and higher secondary levels are vacant.
- **Skill Gap and Mismatch Between Education and Employability:** Despite a rise in higher education enrollment, **many graduates struggle with employability due to a lack of practical skills**.
 - The curriculum frequently **fails to align with industry requirements**, leading to lower workforce productivity.
 - According to the [ILO \(2024\)](#), India's youth account for almost 83% of the unemployed workforce and the share of youngsters with secondary or **higher education in the total unemployed has almost doubled from 35.2% in 2000 to 65.7% in 2022**.
- **Barriers to Quality Education for PwDs:** Despite constitutional guarantees and schemes like [Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan](#) and [Samagra Shiksha](#), children with disabilities (PwD) continue to face significant barriers in accessing quality education.
 - These challenges include a lack of accessible infrastructure, inadequate training for teachers, and limited availability of **specialized resources and support**.
 - According to the **76th National Sample Survey (NSS)**, the literacy rate among persons with disabilities aged 7 and above is only 52.2%.
 - Despite efforts to promote inclusivity, **many schools still lack the necessary accommodations**, and there is insufficient awareness and understanding of the specific needs of students with disabilities.
- **Corruption and Leakages in Education Delivery:** Corruption and inefficiencies in India's education system are significant barriers to quality education.
 - Issues such as **ghost schools and universities, which exist only on paper**, and the **prevalence of fake degrees**, especially in higher education, undermine the credibility of the system.
 - The [University Grants Commission \(UGC\)](#) in 2023 identified **over 20 fake universities operating across the country**, highlighting the extent of fraudulent practices in higher education.
 - These issues result in wasted public resources, **compromised educational outcomes**, and a **loss of trust in the system**, affecting both students and employers.

Government's Key Initiatives Related to Education



What Measures can be Taken to Transform and Improve India's Education System?

- **Infrastructure Development in Rural and Remote Areas:** A crucial step in transforming the educational landscape is a significant investment in upgrading infrastructure in rural and underdeveloped regions.
 - This **includes ensuring access to essential facilities** such as clean water, electricity, functional toilets, and digital learning resources in schools.
 - Furthermore, **creating student-friendly environments**, such as safe playgrounds and well-equipped classrooms, will improve the learning experience and help reduce dropout rates.
 - These improvements will foster a **conducive atmosphere for learning** and contribute to better educational outcomes.
- **Enhancing Access to Technology in Education:** India should invest in improving **broadband connectivity and ensuring affordable access to digital tools** and resources for students and teachers.
 - **Public-private partnerships** can play a crucial role in providing technology-enabled education solutions, such as low-cost devices and e-learning platforms.
 - Additionally, **integrating digital education into the mainstream curriculum** from the early stages will help reduce disparities and ensure equal access to quality education for all.
 - **Expanding BharatNet and PM e-Vidya initiatives** to provide high-speed internet to rural schools can further bridge the digital divide.
- **Expanding Vocational and Skill-Based Education:** India should prioritize

expanding **vocational and skill-based education** to better equip students with practical skills that meet industry demands.

- By **integrating vocational training into mainstream education**, starting from the school level, the country can create a more diverse and employable workforce.
- Additionally, **collaboration between educational institutions, industry stakeholders**, and government agencies is crucial to ensure that curricula are aligned with current job market requirements.
 - Increased investment in infrastructure, training programs, and certification systems can further **enhance the reach and impact of vocational education**, particularly in rural and underserved regions.

▪ **Enhancing Teacher Training and Professional Development:** Integrate modern teaching methodologies, including **competency-based learning**, into teacher training programs.

- Continuous professional development opportunities should be provided, especially in rural areas, to **ensure teachers are equipped with the necessary skills** to adapt to evolving educational standards.
- Collaborations between educational institutions, the government, and private organizations can help in **delivering high-quality training and resources**.
 - Furthermore, introducing a **clear framework for regular assessments of teaching effectiveness** and student feedback can further enhance the quality of instruction.
 - The **DIKSHA platform** should be expanded with **AI-driven personalized training modules**.

▪ **Shifting Towards Competency-Based Education:** To improve the quality of education, India should focus on reducing the reliance on rote learning and shift towards competency-based education, **incorporating methods such as the PARAKH**.

- This can be achieved by revising the curriculum to emphasize **critical thinking, problem-solving, and practical application** of knowledge.
- Schools and universities should integrate project-based learning, peer evaluations, and real-world applications into assessments.
 - The **National Curriculum Framework (NCF) 2023** must be implemented effectively, emphasizing experiential learning and multidisciplinary studies.

▪ **Strengthening Women's Education and Promoting Gender Equality:** India should prioritize strengthening **women's education by ensuring equal access to quality education at all levels**.

- This can be achieved by **offering scholarships, financial support, and safety measures** to encourage female enrollment, particularly in rural and marginalized communities.
- Additionally, **promoting gender-sensitive curricula and teaching methods** can help challenge stereotypes and foster an inclusive environment.
 - Scholarships and financial incentives for female students, **especially in STEM fields**, should be expanded.
- Government initiatives like **Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas** and **Beti Bachao Beti Padhao** should be further expanded to reduce gender disparities in education.
 - Strengthening women's education will not only empower women but also **drive broader societal change** towards greater gender equality.

▪ **Strengthening Public-Private Collaboration:** Building stronger public-private partnerships can play a vital role in **bridging resource and infrastructure gaps within the education system**.

- By **tapping into the expertise of private organizations** in areas such as technology, curriculum design, and teacher training, public schools can gain access to essential resources.
- These collaborations can also support the introduction of **advanced tools and innovative teaching methods**, ensuring that education stays relevant and adaptive to the rapidly evolving global landscape.

▪ **Enhancing Public Investment in Education:** The government must increase education **spending to at least 6% of GDP, as outlined in NEP 2020**, to drive significant improvements in quality.

- Funding should be performance-based, rewarding states that demonstrate better learning outcomes with additional resources.

- Furthermore, **Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) funds** should be directed more towards education, particularly for underprivileged students.
 - A **transparent system to track fund utilization** should also be established to ensure efficient and effective spending.
- **Inclusive Education for Children with Disabilities:** India must focus on improving accessibility and support within mainstream schools.
 - This includes **enhancing infrastructure to accommodate PwD**, such as ramps, accessible toilets, and learning materials in alternative formats. Teacher training programs should be expanded to include specialized training in inclusive teaching practices.
 - Additionally, **increasing awareness among parents, teachers, and the community** about the rights and needs of children with disabilities can foster a more supportive environment.
 - The government should also **ensure better implementation of policies and encourage collaboration with NGOs** to provide necessary resources and support.

Conclusion

To achieve long-term success in the **Education system**, the focus must shift towards **fostering innovation and aligning educational outcomes with market needs**. These efforts directly contribute to achieving **SDG 4 - ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education** and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all. As India continues to **make strides towards becoming a global leader in education**, it must ensure that every child, regardless of background, has access to the resources and opportunities necessary to thrive in an ever-changing world.

Drishti Mains Question

Q. Discuss the key developments in India's education reforms and suggest measures to address these challenges to ensure inclusive and quality education for all, in line with SDG 4.

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)

Mains

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

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

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