



Agenda for sustainable development: Inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong opportunities for all - Indian experience

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Abstract

Sustainable Development of an economy is not possible without considering the quality education and it is very obvious to observe that the 2030 SDG agenda, it has become clear that achieving the SDGs is far from possible without the education sector's significant involvement in the cause. Education for Sustainable Development has been recognized as an integral contributor to achieving several SDGs. This has been particularly evident in the fourth SDG, which advocates for: "inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong opportunities for all." In this context the present paper tries to study the incidence of Gender Inequalities in Education and its Solutions at macro level. Education for Sustainable Development can help change our future. From the scanning of the SDGs, the Seven Targets of the SDG 4 viz, Universal primary and secondary education; Early childhood development and universal pre-primary education; Equal success to technical/ vocational and higher education; Relevant skills for decent work; Gender equality and inclusion; Universal Youth Literacy; and. Education for sustainable development and global citizenship can facilitate for reaching sustainable development in general and ensuring equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university; and eliminating gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations. It is fond hope that continued support from authorities, appropriate policies and laws, responsible action by individuals and communities, and above all a deep compassion for our planet will together bring Sustainable development in the economy. The present paper makes an attempt to have a descriptive analysis on the enrolment Pattern in general and particularly, in terms of Level wise and Social Group wise Enrolments, Efficiency indicators, Disparity and Expenditure on Education in India during 2020-21 - 2024-25; to analyse the extent of inequalities in education in India; and to offer possible strategies for strengthening the education in India. This paper concludes that to achieve SDG 4 by 2030, the government needs to invest more in education, particularly in early childhood education, teacher training and development, and digital infrastructure. Private sector partnerships can also play a crucial role in improving access to quality education. As education is a comprehensive issue that also constitutes an individual goal, it necessitates concerted efforts spanning various sectors, as well as continuous supervision and implementation of adequate resource allotment for supporting educational requirements.

Keywords: SDGs, gross enrolment ratio, efficiency indicators, gender parity index

Introduction

Education plays an important role in building self-confidence among women it also enables to change she/her status in the society. Education enables and builds confidence to take decisions in a better way. A quality education is the foundation of sustainable development, and therefore of the Sustainable Development Goals. As a policy intervention, education is a force multiplier which enables self-reliance, boosts economic growth by enhancing skills, and improves people's lives by opening up opportunities for better livelihoods. The Sustainable Development targets for 2030 call for ensuring the completion of primary and secondary education by all boys and girls, and guaranteeing equal access to opportunities for access to quality technical and vocational education for everyone. Mahatma Gandhi, who once said that education not only moulds the new generation, but reflects a society's fundamental assumptions about itself and the individuals which compose it. The famous philosopher Einstein while discussing the need for education has projected the following fundamentals: To educate the individual as a free individual; to understand and use critical thinking skills; To educate the individual as

a part of society - virtually all our knowledge, our clothes, our food is produced by others in our society, thus, we owe Society and have responsibility to contribute back to Society; and through education, knowledge must continually be renewed by ceaseless effort, if it is not to be lost. It resembles a statute of marble which stands in the desert and is continually threatened with burial by the shifting sand. The hands of service must ever be at work, in order that the marble continue to lastingly shine in the sun. It is to be stated that schools have become the most important means of transforming wealth of knowledge and skills from one generation to another. However, the role of institutions becomes more challenging in the modern world.

Economic theories empirically proved that the participation of all human resources are highly inextricable for the process of development, and enhancing the multidimensional role of education and health will contribute to the development of the whole society. They can play a more important role in the world economy in bettering economic and social conditions of people considerable potential is realized. It can be underscored that enhancing the economic productivity of population will

promote their role in development, in the arenas of increasing economic efficiency and growth, contributing to family welfare, poverty removal, preserving and conserving the valuable enriched environment and bringing economic stability. Importance of improvement in education, health and access to the labour force, and underlined that deliberate effort, is required to participate effectively in the development process. There is need for laying stress on designing of programme for the advancement of the specific circumstances of each country /region in terms of the country's stage of development and its socio-Cultural, regions, political and economic characteristics. Hence, investment in education and educational institutions should be viewed as an investment for economic prosperity. Investment in human capital, lifelong learning and quality education help in the development of society and nation.

Thus, it is needless to say that education is the pre-requisite for the development of a society. Among the various resources, the importance of education in human resource development has been recognized worldwide by all the sections of the society and it is an important component of development process.

Goal 4 of the Sustainable Development centers on quality education, which is composed of seven outcome targets and three means of implementation to create action to ensure quality education. The major objective of SDG 4 is to ensure that everyone has access to high-quality education in all countries and the opportunity to learn throughout their lives. This objective is not only to increase enrolment ratio of children in education system but also to ensure that they must achieve proper academic success with help of properly tread educators and adequate school infrastructures which will lead to positive educational outcomes. It is a fact that in India, despite significant progress in recent years, the education system still faces significant infrastructure challenges, particularly in rural areas. Lack of basic amenities such as classrooms, furniture, toilets, and drinking water facilities, remains a significant barrier to education in many parts of the country. Although education is a fundamental right, millions of children in the country are still not enrolled in schools. Low enrolment rates are especially prevalent among girls and marginalized communities, who often face discrimination and other socioeconomic barriers to education. The quality of education based on the curriculum does not always align with the needs of the job market or the changing world, and the traditional methods of teaching often fail to promote critical thinking, creativity, and innovation. Gender disparities remain a significant issue in the Indian education system, with girls often facing discrimination and violence in and around schools. They are also more likely to drop out of school early and have fewer opportunities to pursue higher education. Through the growth of educational facilities has been tremendously improved, yet the rate of improvement is not found impressive to improve the quality and reduce the disparity in gender literacy. Based on the context, the present paper mainly aims to explore the SDGs perception of educational development in India over the period of time.

Earlier Studies

Education in India has been quite an extensively discussed topic throughout the nation's six and a half decade history. Over the past few decades, the literature has covered the

entire gamut of possible topics, including comparing India to other nations, examining relevant trends in urban and rural areas, and studying the role of social services such as health care and education in human development. Economists such as Becker, Schultz, Denison and others emphasized the importance of investing in education in order to contribute to economic growth and its acceleration in the 50s and 60s of the 20th century. Understanding the varying experiences of Indian states in strengthening education has been an important topic. Education levels have been a major concern of economists when trying to encourage growth in developing countries. A number of very influential endogenous growth models advocated by Romer (1986); Lucas (1988) and Barro and Sala-i- Martin (1995) have highlighted education as a key component and emphasized the importance of human capital accumulation for economic growth. Additionally, a large number of the studies including Barro (1991); Mankiw, Romer, and Weil (1992); Levine and Renelt (1992); Barro and Lee (1993); Klenow and Rodriguez-Clare (1997); Sala-i-Martin (1997); have been performed using values of education to predict growth in years to come, and have shown that the impact of education on growth is indeed substantial. Recent literature has focused on understanding how economic growth best strengthen the educational status, reducing the disparities in education, paying special attention to post-reform trends. There have a number of studies on education status, Rural Urban disparities, Gender disparities, Drop Out Status, Educational infrastructure, Developmental Programmes-Kothari R(1970); Pittman & Haughwout (1987); Cairns, Cairns & Neckerman (1989); Fetler (1989); Gupta D, (1991); Valler and Bissonnette (1992); Fortier & Guay (1993); Dreze J, Sen A. (1995)^[3]; Hymel *et al* (1996); Rumberger and Larson (1998); Dreze & Kingdon (1999); Bayly S. (1999); Sharma KL, (1999); Sara *et al.* (2000); Anitha BK.(2000); Hasan M. (2001). Hannum E. (2002); Kulkarni PM. (2002)^[1, 8, 9, 15]; Thorat S, Aryama, Negi P. (2005). Desai S, Adams CD, Dubey A. (2006)^[2]; Sabha & Gauri (2012); Mondal & Majumder (2013); Josheph (2014); Karthikeyan, R. and S.Ramasamy (2017)^[10]; Karthikeyan, R., S.Dharmaraj and B.Kumutha (2025)^[11]; Karthikeyan, R., M.Sulthana Barvin and V.Nalini (2025)^[12]; Karthikeyan, R., V.Nalini and B.Sumathi (2025)^[13]; and Karthikeyan, R. and V. Nalini (2025)^[12]; to mention a few.

Objectives

The present paper makes an attempt to have a descriptive analysis on the enrolment Pattern in general and particularly, in terms of Level wise and Social Group wise Enrolments, Efficiency indicators, Disparity and Expenditure on Education in India during 2020-21 -2024-25; to analyse the extent of inequalities in education in India; and to offer possible strategies for strengthening the education in India.

Materials and Method

The study is a descriptive study based on secondary data only. The data relating to year wise and level wise m social group wise enrolment rate, dropout rate, transition rate, retention rate, GPI and expenditure on education have been gathered from Various Issues of Educational Statistics - At a Glance, published by Government of India, Ministry of Human Resource Development, Bureau of Planning,

Monitoring & Statistics, New Delhi, Economic Survey, etc. Further, data retrieved from the official website of the Ministry of Human Resource & Development, Govt., of India. Further, most of the data have been gathered from the report, The Unified District Information System for Education Plus (UDISE Plus) published by the Department of School Education & Literacy, Ministry of Education, Govt of India.

Analysis and Discussion

Gross Enrolment Ratio

The level wise GER infers that at the primary-level a downward trend is registered, it has declined from 103.3% in 2020-21 to 90.9 % in 2024-25 This significant drop suggests a reduction in system capacity or participation at this foundational level, which is particularly concerning given that universalization at the primary level had previously been considered primarily achieved. From 2020-21 to 2024-25, enrolment at the primary level (Grades I to V) fabulously declined. The Upper primary GER showed a brief improvement from 92.2% (2020-21) to 94.7% (2021-22), followed by a decline to 90.3 % by 2024-25. The

overall decrease of 1.9 percentage points, while less dramatic than at the primary level, still indicates challenges in maintaining enrolment momentum at this transitional stage. With regard to Elementary Level the combined elementary GER rose to 100.1% in 2021-22, suggesting momentary achievement of theoretical universal capacity before declining substantially to 90.6% by 2024-25. This pattern suggests a post-pandemic recovery followed by systemic challenges that eroded earlier gains. Further, the Secondary Level GER has steadily declined GER from 79.8% to 78.7% over the five years. The relatively consistent but persistently lower GER compared to elementary levels highlights the ongoing challenge of transitioning students to secondary education and the Higher secondary GER initially witnessed the most positive trend, increasing from 53.8% to 57.6% between 2020-21 and 2021-22, before declining marginally to 56.2% by 2023-24 and further increased to 58.4 % in 2024-25. Despite this partial recovery, the substantially lower GER at these level compared to earlier stages underscores the significant bottleneck in educational progression at higher levels.

Table 1: Level Wise and Social Group Wise Enrolment Distribution (in Crs)

Sl.No	Description	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
1	Total Number of Enrolments (Pre-Primary to Higher Secondary- in Crs)	26.45	26.52	25.18	24.80	24.69
2	Total Number of Enrolments (Primary to Higher Secondary- in Crs.)	25.38	25.57	24.16	23.50	23.29
3	Enrolment in Pre-Primary	1.06	0.95	1.02	1.31	1.40
4	Enrolment in Primary (in Crs.)	12.20	12.18	11.24	10.78	10.44
5	Enrolment in Upper Primary	6.59	6.68	6.35	6.31	6.37
6	Enrolment in Secondary	3.90	3.85	3.79	3.69	3.72
7	Enrolment in Higher Secondary	2.69	2.86	2.78	2.71	2.76
8	Number of Female students (in Crs.)	12.21	12.29	11.62	11.32	11.93
9	Number of Boys students (in Crs.)	13.17	13.28	12.54	12.17	12.76
10	Number of SC Students	4.78	4.83	4.44	4.28	4.39
11	Number of ST Students	2.49	2.51	2.40	2.34	2.44
12	Number of OBC students (in Crs.)	11.35	11.49	11.04	10.66	11.17
13	Number of Muslims Enrolments	3.62	3.66	3.76	3.70	3.94
14	Total Number of Minority Enrolments (in Crs.)	4.55	4.54	4.73	4.65	4.98
15	Number of CWSN students (in Lakhs)	21.91	22.67	21.07	21.14	21.50

Source: Reports of UDISE+, Department of School Education & Literacy, Ministry of Education, GoI, New Delhi

Net Enrolment Ratio Analysis

With regard to the NER, at the Primary-level NER decreased from 92.7% in 2020-21 to 88.6% in 2021-22. This decline is particularly troubling as it indicates a reduction in age-appropriate enrolment at the foundational level of education. The significant gap between GER and NER about 15 percentage points in 2021-22 suggests substantial over-age or under-age enrolment at this level. NER stands at 76.9 percent in 2024-25. At the Upper primary level, the NER has declined from 74.1% to 71.3% over the two years compared to 64.8 percent in 2022-23 compared to 67.3 percent in 2024-25. The lower NER compared to GER (67.3 % versus 89.7% in 2024-25) indicates significant enrolment of non-age-appropriate students at this level, potentially reflecting grade repetition or delayed entry. The Elementary level NER has also decreased from 92.1% in 2020-21 to 82.8% in 2024-25, showing greater resilience than individual primary and

upper primary levels. However, the decline still indicates worsening age-appropriate participation in basic education. In the latest year, 2023-24, NER at the elementary level stands at 82.8 percent, thus indicating that a significant percentage of children aged 6 to 13 years were unenrolled in the corresponding Grades I to VIII. At the Secondary level education showed a substantial NER has declined from 52.5% to 47.5 %, indicating that less than half of the relevant age group was enrolled at the appropriate level by 2024-25, about 40% percentage point gap between GER (79.2%) and NER (47.5%) in 2021-22 reveals extensive over-age enrolment at this level. Further, at the Higher secondary level, the NER has decreased marginally from 34.7% in 2020-21 to 35.8% in 2024-25, with the low figure indicating that only about one-third of the age-appropriate population was enrolled at this level. The substantial gap between GER and NER again indicates significant over-age enrolment.

Table 2: School Type wise Total Number of Enrolment Distribution - (Primary to Higher Secondary- in Millions)

Sl.No	Description	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
1	In Kendriya Vidyalaya	13.23	13.75	13.23	13.71	13.49
2	In Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya	2.71	2.87	2.64	2.76	2.91
3	In Other Central Government Schools	1.80	1.71	1.21	1.16	1.21
4	In State Government Schools	130.65	138.66	134.49	122.49	119.83
5	In Government Schools	132.42	140.49	136.20	124.26	121.58
6	In Government Aided schools	26.44	26.64	26.23	25.20	24.76
7	In Private Unaided Recognized Schools	88.08	82.45	84.16	80.88	95.85
8	In Other Schools	6.84	6.14	5.19	4.62	4.72

Source: Reports of UDISE+, Department of School Education & Literacy, Ministry of Education, GoI, New Delhi

Adjusted Net Enrolment Ratio

The Adjusted Net Enrolment Ratio (ANER) at the Primary level has slightly increased from 98.6% to 99.1% in 2021-22, dropping drastically to 83.2% by 2024-25. This concerning decline suggests that fewer age-appropriate children were participating in any level of education, pointing to increased educational exclusion. Similarly, the Upper primary ANER improved from 84.4% to 87.3% in 2021-22 and significantly declined to 77.9% by 2024-25. The substantial gap between ANER and NER indicates that many age-appropriate children were enrolled at higher levels, reflecting early advancement; these children entered the education system much earlier than the prescribed age. The Elementary level ANER has also showed greater instability, declined from 96.0% to 86.8 % by 2024-25 which reflects serious challenges in maintaining educational participation among the 6-13 age group, which is crucial because of the goal of attaining universal school education by 2030. At the Secondary Level the ANER has declined slightly from 61.8% to 59.8 % by 2024-25. From this it is observed that the significant gap between ANER and NER suggests considerable early advancement to higher secondary among the secondary school-age population.

Age-Specific Enrolment Ratio

Another important aspect of Enrolment is the Age-Specific Enrolment Ratio (ASER), The ASER for the 6-10 age group

(Primary Level) has also declined from 98.6% to 83.2 % in 2023-24, indicating that a significant percentage of children of this age group were not enrolled because of the steep decline in enrolment at this level of education since 2021-22 and thereafter, whereas in the 11-13 age group (Upper Primary Level) the ASER has marginally increased from 91.6% in 2020-21 to 92.7% in 2024-25, showing high but not universal participation, it indicates that about 7.3 % of children of this age group were not enrolled. The gap between this figure and elementary NER suggests that some children in this age group were enrolled at the primary rather than upper primary level. The combined 6-13 age group (Elementary Level) ASER improved marginally from 96.0% to 96.5%, reflecting overall high participation among school-age children during this period, but significantly declined to 86.8% in 2024-25, indicating that around 13.2 % of children of this age group were not enrolled. The Secondary Age Group (14-15 years) ASER witnessed a moderate increase from 73.4% in 2020-21 to 77.3 % in 2024-25, indicating that a little less than a quarter of children in this age group were not participating in education at any level. In contra, it is to be highly appreciated that at the Higher Secondary Level, the 16-17 age group experienced a significant ASER increased from 46.3% in 2020-21 to 77.2%, which beneficiaries recheck of enrolment figures at this level of education.

Table 3: Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER); Net Enrolment Ratio (NER); Adjusted-Net Enrolment Ratio, Adj-NER) and Age-specific Enrolment Ratio (ASER) Distribution

Sl.No	Description	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
1	GER- Primary Level	103.3	103.39	96.2	93.0	90.9
2	GER- Upper Primary Level	92.2	94.67	90.2	89.7	90.3
3	GER - Elementary Level	99.1	100.13	93.9	91.7	90.6
4	GER - Secondary Level	79.8	79.56	79.2	77.4	78.7
5	GER - Higher Secondary Level	53.8	57.56	56.8	56.2	58.4
6	NER - Primary Level	92.7	88.6	80.6	79.0	76.9
7	NER - Upper Primary Level	74.1	71.3	64.8	66.0	67.3
8	NER - Elementary Level	92.1	90.5	85.5	83.3	82.8
9	NER - Secondary Level	52.5	47.9	47.6	48.3	47.5
10	NER - Higher Secondary Level	34.7	34.2	33.8	33.8	35.8
11	Adj-NER - Primary Level	98.6	99.1	89.1	85.9	83.2
12	Adj-NER - Upper Primary Level	84.4	87.3	77.8	76.2	77.9
13	Adj-NER - Elementary Level	96.0	96.5	89.4	87.2	86.8
14	Adj-NER - Secondary Level	61.8	64.7	60.9	60.5	59.8
15	ASER - Primary Level	98.6	99.1	89.1	85.3	83.2
16	ASER - Upper Primary Level	91.6	92.2	89.9	89.2	92.7
17	ASER - Elementary Level	96.0	96.5	89.4	86.7	86.8
18	ASER - Secondary Level	73.4	72.8	76.3	77.0	77.3
19	ASER - Higher Secondary Level	46.3	42.4	46.8	75.5	77.2

Source: Reports of UDISE+, Department of School Education & Literacy, Ministry of Education, GoI, New Delhi

Note: Primary (6 to 10 years); Upper Primary (11 to 13 years); Elementary (6 to 13 years); Secondary (14-15 years); Higher Secondary (16-17 years).

State-wise Analysis of Enrolment Ratio

Among the states in India, the states Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Tripura, and West Bengal have registered the NER of 100%, suggesting complete enrolment of age-appropriate children at the primary level; the territories Chandigarh (95.5%), Delhi (96.3%), Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Daman and Diu (96.8%), and Jammu and Kashmir (97.5%) have witnessed a near-universal age-appropriate enrolment. The states Goa, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir, Maharashtra, Punjab, and West Bengal have witnessed the ASER of 100%, indicate a complete participation of the 6-10 age group in education, i.e. high in both ANER and ASER. The states Himachal Pradesh (ANER: 110.3%), Chandigarh (ANER: 109.0%), and Arunachal Pradesh (ANER: 100.4%), and have shown exceptional coverage when accounting for early advancement; they are also required to recheck their input data on enrolment and child population. These states have effectively addressed fundamental access challenges at the primary level and serve as models for educational inclusion strategies. It is also noted that Uttar Pradesh (NER: 67.0%) shows that one-third of age-appropriate children are not enrolled at the primary level; Madhya Pradesh (NER: 64.3%) has registered the lowest NER among central states, with over 35% of age-appropriate children not enrolled at the correct level; and Jharkhand (NER: 69.1%) has witnessed significant challenges in enrolling children at the appropriate age. The enrolment level is not appreciable in the states Gujarat (ANER: 74.0%, ASER: 76.4%), Jharkhand (ANER: 70.0%, ASER: 70.3%), Bihar (ANER: 77.1%, ASER: 75.4%) where both the ANER and ASER have registered very low level. These states require urgent, targeted interventions to address fundamental barriers to primary education access, without which India is unlikely to attain the status of universal school education by 2030. The High GER with Moderate NER have registered in Meghalaya (GER: 178.4%, NER: 100.0%), Mizoram (GER: 151.8%, NER: 100.0%), Manipur (GER: 136.8%, NER: 100.0%): Moderate GER with Low NER, Maharashtra (GER: 103.3%, NER: 90.1%), and Karnataka (GER: 106.8%, NER: 92.9%).

Regional Pattern of Enrolment Ratio

There is a significant variation in the enrolment witnessed among the regions in India, with regard to the North-eastern States, Most north-eastern states show high GER values

(Often exceeding 100%) but more variable NER figures, suggesting high overall participation but challenges in age-appropriate enrolment. Meghalaya (GER: 178.4%), Mizoram (GER: 151.8%), and Manipur (GER: 136.8%) show exceptionally high GER values, indicating significant over-age enrolment. The Northern states have registered a mixed performance. Himachal Pradesh (GER: 106.1%, ANER: 110.3%) and Jammu and Kashmir (GER: 114.2%, NER: 97.5%) demonstrate strong outcomes, while Uttar Pradesh (GER: 82.9%, NER: 67.0%) faces significant challenges. The Western States have shown variable performance. Maharashtra performs relatively well (GER: 103.3%, NER: 90.1%), while Gujarat shows concerning gaps (GER: 80.4%, NER: 73.8%). In the Central states generally lower enrolment indicators are witnessed. Madhya Pradesh (GER: 78.9%, NER: 64.3%) indicates particularly concerning figures, suggesting fundamental access challenges. In the Southern States moderate trend is registered, Karnataka (GER: 106.8%, NER: 92.9%) and Telangana (GER: 111.2%, NER: 94.4%) show relatively strong indicators, while Kerala's figures (GER: 95.4%, NER: 83.2%) are surprisingly lower than might be expected given its historical educational advantage. Further, Most of the union territories show strong enrolment indicators, with Delhi (GER: 102.6%, NER: 96.3%), Chandigarh (GER: 100.6%, NER: 95.5%), and Puducherry (GER: 97.1%, NER: 92.4%) approaching universalization.

Dropout Rates Distribution

The dropout rate decreased significantly from 1.9% in 2023-24 to 0.8% in 2024-25, a marked improvement from the peak of 7.8% in 2022-23. Girls (0.3%) have a lower dropout rate than boys (0.0%), indicating better retention among girls, though the zero rate for boys suggests potential data reporting issues, which is also evident in primary enrolment, which is drastically declined in 2024-25 (17.46 million). At the Upper Primary level the dropout rate declined from 5.2% in 2023-24 to 4.1% in 2024-25, down from a high of 8.1% in 2022-23. Girls (3.5%) show a slightly higher dropout rate than boys (2.9%), reversing the minimal gender difference observed in 2023-24, whereas at the Secondary level the dropout rate improved from 14.1% in 2023-24 to 13.3% in 2024-25, down from 16.4% in 2022-23. Girls (11.5%) continue to have a lower dropout rate than boys (9.6%), reflecting a gender advantage in retention.

Table 4: Level Wise Drop outs Rate, Transition Rate and Retention Rate Distribution

Sl.No	Description	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
1	Dropout Rates - Primary Level	0.8	1.45	7.8	1.9	0.3
2	Dropout Rates - Upper Primary Level	1.9	3.02	8.1	5.2	3.5
3	Dropout Rates - Secondary Level	14.6	12.61	16.4	14.1	11.5
4	Transition Rates Primary to Upper Primary	92.1	93.18	87.9	88.8	92.2
5	Transition Rates Upper Primary to Secondary Level	91.3	88.81	86.7	83.3	86.6
6	Transition Rates Secondary to Higher Secondary Level	73.3	78.41	71.3	71.5	75.1
7	Retention Rate at Primary Level	95.3	95.4	90.9	85.4	92.4
8	Retention Rate at Elementary Level	80.9	81.2	75.8	78.0	82.8
9	Retention Rate at Secondary Level	64.5	64.7	65.5	63.8	62.9
10	Retention Rate at Higher Secondary Level	42.8	43.6	44.1	45.6	47.2

Source: Reports of UDISE+, Department of School Education & Literacy, Ministry of Education, GoI, New Delhi

Transition Rates

At the Primary level to Upper Primary level the transition rate witnessed a steady state, ie. from 92.1% in 2020-21 to 92.2% in 2024-25, with boys transitioning slightly higher

than girls indicating improved progression. It is declined from 91.3% to 86.6% in the case of Upper Primary level to Secondary level, further it is observed from the data that it has slightly increased from 83.3% in 2023-24 to 85.9% in

2024-25, with boys (87.3%) outperforming girls (86.6%). The transition rate from Secondary level to Higher Secondary level has witnessed a moderate increase, from 73.3% to 75.1%, further a higher transition rate with boys (77.9%) than girls (75.1%), reflecting better male progression during the period.

Retention Rates

With regard to the Retention Rate, for the Primary Level, it has slightly declined from 95.3 % in 2020-21 to 92.4 % in 2024-25, with boys (93.4%) slightly outperforming girls (92.4%), indicating stronger retention; at the Elementary level it has also slightly risen from 80.9 % to 82.8 % in 2024-25, with boys (84.2%) retaining better than girls (82.8%), at the Secondary level it has declined slightly from 64.5 % to 62.9% with boys (64.2%) retaining better than girls (62.9%), but at the Higher Secondary level it has increased from 42.8% to 47.2 % with boys (49.6%) outperforming girls (47.2%) during the period.

Expenditure

The educational expenditure in India witnessed that the amount of expenditure incurred by the Dept of School Education and Literacy has increased from Rs.52520 crs in 2020-21 to Rs.78572 Crs in 2025-26 while it was increased from Rs.36916 crs to Rs.50578 for Dept. of Higher Education during the same period. It is appreciable to note that from 92% to 97 % of the allocated amount was utilized over the period of time. It is also observed from the Budget statement that The actual expenditure of the Ministry of Education in 2021-22 is Rs.80,352 crores, thus indicating the budgeted allocation of 2023-24 is more by a hoping Rs.32,548 crores, an increase of 40.51 percent. It may also be observed that an amount of Rs.93,224 crores was allocated in the Union Budget 2021-22 for the Education Sector. However, the budgeted allocation was later revised to Rs.88,002 crores which is Rs.5,222 crores, less than the actual budgeted allocation or 5.60 percent lower than the original allocation.

Table 5: Expenditure on Education Distribution MoHRD Allocation Rs.in Crs)

Year	Expenditures			Allocations			Funds Utilised (in %)		
	DoSEL	DoHE	Total	DoSEL	DoHE	Total	DoSEL	DoHE	Total
19-20	52520	36916	89437	56537	38,317	94854	93	96	95
20-21	51842	32378	84219	52189	32900	85089	99	98	99
21-22	46822	33531	80352	51970	36032	88002	90	93	92
22-23	58640	38557	97196	59053	40828	99881	99	94	97
23-24	67972	55393	123365	72474	44095	116569	94	97	97
24-25	67571	46483	114054	73498	47620	121118	NA	NA	NA
25-26	78572	50578	128650	78572	50078	128650	NA	NA	NA

Source: Education at a Glance -Ministry of Human Resource Development, Govt of India

Table 6: Expenditure on Education and GDP Relations

Years	GDP (Rs. in Lakh Crs)	Expenditure on Education* (Rs. in Crs)	% of GDP	Expenditure on Education** (Rs. in Crs)	% of GDP
2010-11	72.48	233510	3.22	293478	4.05
2011-12	87.36	270092	3.09	333930	3.82
2012-13	92.13	299213	3.01	368133	3.70
2013-14	98.01	333232	2.97	430879	3.84
2014-15	105.28	361312	2.90	506849	4.07
2015-16	113.69	387155	2.81	577793	4.20
2020-21	136.95	584826	2.95	864452	4.36
2021-22	150.22	645333	2.75	967177	4.12
2022-23	161.65	769712	2.86	1098580	4.06

Source: Education at a Glance -Ministry of Human Resource Development, Govt of India

Gender Parity and Equality

The Gender Parity Index (GPI) in education is a socioeconomic ratio measuring the relative access of girls/women compared to boys/men to education. Ranging from 0 to over 1, a value of 1 indicates perfect equality. It is a key indicator for monitoring SDG 4, helping identify where interventions are needed to ensure equal opportunities. There has also been impressive progress towards bridging gender gap in enrolment and retention in elementary education. The Gender Parity Index (GPI) for Gross Enrolment Rate in primary, upper primary and elementary Education has been improving steadily over the period. The Gender parity Index for Gross Enrolment Rate

in primary education, upper primary education, elementary education, Secondary and Higher Secondary level found a positive move. Based on the UDISEPlus report it is observed that The GPI for primary education in India stands at 1.03, indicating a slight favorability towards girls. Several states and union territories show encouraging numbers, such as Andaman and Nicobar Islands (1.05), Arunachal Pradesh (1.01), Bihar (1.03), and Delhi (1.07). These regions demonstrate a relatively higher enrollment ratio for girls at the primary level, contributing to gender parity in early education. At the Upper Primary level, the Gender Parity Index for India is 1, indicating equal participation of girls and boys.

Table 7: Gender Parity Index Distribution

Years	Primary	Upper Primary	Elementary	Secondary	Higher Secondary
2010-11	1.01	0.95	0.99	0.88	0.87
2011-12	1.01	0.99	1.00	0.93	0.93

2012-13	1.02	1.05	1.03	0.96	0.99
2013-14	1.03	1.08	1.04	1.00	1.00
2014-15	1.03	1.09	1.05	1.01	1.01
2015-16	1.01	1.04	1.02	1.00	1.00
2020-21	1.02	1.01	1.02	0.99	1.03
2021-22	1.03	1.00	1.02	1.00	1.02
2022-23	1.05	1.03	1.04	1.02	1.07
2023-24	1.03	1.02	1.02	1.02	1.07
2024-25	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00

Source: Reports of UDISE+, Department of School Education & Literacy, Ministry of Education, GoI, New Delhi

However, variations can be observed among states and union territories. Noteworthy examples include Andaman and Nicobar Islands (1.02), Arunachal Pradesh (1.07), Assam (1.1), Chandigarh (1.13), and Goa (1.03), where girls display higher enrollment ratios compared to boys, fostering gender equality in this stage of education. Considering the general elementary education, which includes primary and upper primary levels, the GPI in India stands at 1.02. This indicates a marginal favorability towards girls in terms of enrollment. States & Union Territories like Andaman & Nicobar Islands (1.04), Arunachal Pradesh (1.03), Assam (1.07), Chandigarh (1.12), and Daman and Diu (1.05) exhibit a more pronounced gender parity, with higher enrollment ratios for girls. The GPI for secondary education in India is 1, suggesting equal participation of both girls and boys. While the national level reflects gender parity, certain regions show disparities. For instance, Andaman and Nicobar Islands (1.12), Assam (1.2), Chandigarh (1.12), Daman and Diu (1.1), and Kerala (0.99) showcase variations in enrollment ratios, requiring targeted efforts to bridge the gender gap in secondary education. At the higher secondary level, the GPI for India stands at 1.02, indicating a slight favorability towards girls. States and union territories like Chandigarh (1.17), Daman and Diu (1.58), Goa (1.07), and Lakshadweep (0.92) demonstrate notable variations in enrollment ratios, emphasizing the need for inclusive policies and interventions to ensure equal access to higher secondary education.

Issues and Challenges

Despite substantial progress towards the goal of Education for All, education sector in India faces several challenges. Some of the issues which need increased attention include: (i) quality-related deficiencies in general education; (ii) lower enrolment rates in upper primary and secondary/higher secondary education; (iii) higher drop-out rates in elementary and secondary education, especially among children belonging to socially and economically disadvantaged population groups; (iv) lower level of student attendance rate at primary and upper primary stages of education in some of the educationally backward States; (v) lower level of participation in education of children with special needs; (vi) unsatisfactory level of student learning; (vii) deficiencies relating to teacher quality and teaching-learning process; (viii) difficulty in sustaining the involvement of the volunteer teachers in adult education programmes and in creating sustainable demand for literacy; (ix) inadequate vocational education and training facilities; and (x) shortage of funding for some of the education sector development programmes.

Hence, the main education development priorities include: (i) ensuring universal access to quality ECCE services with equity and inclusion; (ii) ensuring equitable access to quality elementary, secondary, higher secondary and tertiary education; (iii) bridging gender and social category gaps and

inequalities in access to education, teaching-learning process and learning outcomes; (iv) significantly improving the quality of education to ensure improved student learning at all levels; (v) improving teacher quality and performance; (vi) effective use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) for education; (vii) expanding opportunities for skill development and vocational education and training; (viii) raising literacy level among youth and adults and building a system that support continuing education and lifelong learning; (ix) Ensuring increased and well-targeted financing of education programmes in conformity with the policy consensus that investment on education be gradually increased to reach a level of six per cent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP); (x) institutionalizing a responsive, participatory and accountable systems for governance of education sector; and (xi) professionalising and improving school leadership along with introduction of sound quality management systems.

A major development relating to education sector in India in the past few years has been the establishment of Constitutional and legal underpinnings for achieving universal elementary education. The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act, 2009, which became operative on 1 April 2010, has laid a solid foundation on which future policies and programmes relating to elementary education could be built. Aligning the policies and practices with the objectives of the RTE Act and achieving the goal of providing good quality free and compulsory education to all children in the age group 6-14 years will continue to be one of the key education development priorities.

Conclusion

Education is the key to achieving all the SDGs and therefore interconnectedness is a must, this needs to be kept in view by the government while chalking out any plan. The findings indicate an urgent need for targeted policy interventions. Strengthening early childhood education, improving transition rates from primary to secondary levels, addressing regional disparities, and ensuring data accuracy must be prioritized. Without these measures, achieving the objectives of universal school education and ensuring equitable access to quality learning opportunities will remain a distant goal. Overarching recommendations, Adequate allocations, as per the national and global commitments, must be made to education and mechanisms to check the under utilisation must be put in place. Strong rules to regulate private education providers must be in place and further policies to curb the privatisation of education must be developed. - There should be more engagement of various stakeholders in education in the process of policy making as well as its implementation. To achieve SDG 4 by 2030, the government needs to invest

more in education, particularly in early childhood education, teacher training and development, and digital infrastructure. Private sector partnerships can also play a crucial role in improving access to quality education. As education is a comprehensive issue that also constitutes an individual goal, it necessitates concerted efforts spanning various sectors, as well as continuous supervision and implementation of adequate resource allotment for supporting educational requirements.

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