

Unfinished Agenda:

Strategies Adopted in Reshaping India's
Education Landscape



Edited by:

Meena Galliara & Sayantan Khanra

School of Business Management

SVKM's Narsee Monjee Institute of Management Studies

(NMIMS) Deemed-to-be University



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ISBN: **978-93-91044-65-7**

Price Rs. 1550.00

US \$ 125.00

Published By :

Imperial Publications

304 De Elmas Sonawala Cross Rd 2

Goregaon E Mumbai-400063, Maharashtra India

info@imperialpublications.com, www.imperialpublications.com

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Designed, Layout, Typeset Printed by : **VPS DIGITAL PRINT**

A-1/18, Ambedkar Nagar, Baprola Vihar, New Delhi-110043

Cover Page Designed by : **VPS DIGITAL PRINT**

Preface

Education plays a transformative role in promoting the socio-economic development of the Nation. Over the last few decades, India's educational system has undergone significant changes. The Economic Survey of 2022-23 reports a marked increase in enrolments at all levels of education in India. Despite the promising rise in enrolment figures, the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2023 reports a decline in learning levels. It portrays alarming disparities in developing abilities of reading and mathematical proficiency among students across various States. Concurrent reports by NGOs also indicate that despite educational reforms like the implementation of the Right to Education Act 2009, Sarva Shikshan Abhiyaan, and a couple of other schemes, millions of children are left out of the formal education system.

One important focus area of Sustainable Development Goal 4 is ensuring quality education, which is the necessary Foundation for seeking sustainable livelihoods and leading healthy lifestyles. India's education landscape is evolving, with strategies like digital learning platforms, skill development programs, and a focus on inclusive education. However, challenges like unequal access and quality disparities still need attention for a comprehensive transformation.

This edited book provides a comprehensive review of contemporary School Education in India. The first three chapters concentrate on describing the transformations in school education, their impact, and the strategies deployed to address inequities in school education. The ensuing five chapters are based on interesting case studies that describe the innovative models deployed by NGOs to provide quality education to marginalized communities.

Chapter One provides an overview of school education in India and offers a perspective on India's academic achievements. It briefly captures the evolution of the Indian Education system, presents an overview of the governance structure, and enlists key statistics to familiarize the reader with the school education landscape in India.

In India, education is a fundamental right, and in alignment with SDG Goal 4, both Central and State governments strive to achieve equitable quality primary education. Chapter Two analyzes the role of the government in transforming primary education through its strategy, policy, and schemes. The author asserts that primary education and learning outcomes have come under intense scrutiny, and a need for transforming primary education has been felt.

Chapter Three describes India's journey in designing innovative approaches for making school education more inclusive, relevant, and aligned with the needs of a changing society. The chapter highlights the availability of innovative financing mechanisms and the relevance of the public-private partnership (PPP) model in attaining inclusive and quality education for all.

Chapter Four presents the case of the Edyouth Learning Foundation (ELF), which strategically addresses the gaps in the educational ecosystem among underprivileged youth of Mumbai slums by offering quality education, mentorship, and career guidance. Aligned with the National Education Policy (NEP), ELF embodies empowerment, equity, and educational excellence, ensuring a strategic fit to bridge the educational divide prevalent in the ecosystem and nurture the aspirations of the underprivileged youth.

The case study of Akanksha Foundation's journey in attaining its mission to address the educational inequities of poor resource children is discussed in Chapter Five. The authors deliberate on the strategies adopted by the Foundation in building a sustainable model of education for equipping students with the quality education, skills, and character for leading empowered lives. The chapter maps the transformative impact created by the Foundation on communities and makes a few recommendations to address the organization's challenges.

Chapter Six presents the case study of the Bharti Foundation in promoting the education of underprivileged children with a special focus on girl children. The study undertaken by the authors analyzes school truancy

among girls in government schools in India. Findings indicate that factors like poor health, parental attitude, cultural barriers, distance to school, etc impact school attendance. To address the issue of absenteeism, the authors suggest addressing personal health issues, enhancing academic quality, appointing mentors, offering career guidance, and engaging parents and several other support services.

People's well-being, particularly in the underserved and poorest communities, is threatened by a lack of financial literacy. It is an important pillar, especially for empowering adolescents from underprivileged communities who aspire to improve their quality of life. Chapter Seven highlights the strategy adopted by Salaam Bombay Foundation in embedding the financial literacy module in its skill@school program to transform the lives of young, underprivileged adolescents attending government-aided and municipal schools in several parts of the country.

The case study on Able Disabled All People Together (ADAPT) is illustrated in Chapter Eight. It describes the efforts taken by ADAPT to provide equal educational opportunities for persons with disability. According to the authors, the advocacy role played by ADAPT at micro, mezzo, and macro levels to facilitate inclusive education has been crucial in improving educational access for people with disabilities.

The book contains eight chapters authored by academicians and practitioners in the field. We believe the book will serve as a reference book for orienting readers to understand the Indian education system and appreciate the role played by cross sectors in deploying innovative models to address the Unfinished Agenda of reducing the various disparities in the education system. We hope that the readers will find the book both insightful and interesting.

Meena Galliard & Sayantan Khanra

Editors

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Chapter-1

**A PERSPECTIVE ON SCHOOL EDUCATION IN
INDIA**

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Abstract

School education lays the foundation stone for building life. The knowledge, skills, and attitudes developed over years of rigor, resilience, opportunities, and tasks offered by the school manifest the student's strengths and shortcomings, giving the students a glimpse of the future they can create for themselves. Thus, schools play a pivotal role in the life of every individual, irrespective of gender, race, or religion. So the next big question is, 'What is the structure of school education, and what does it look like in India?'

This Chapter provides an overview of school education in India. It highlights India's educational achievements with a thrust on examining and evaluating students' performance. It offers a perspective on India's academic achievements. It looks at schooling access in terms of enrolment and attendance rates and schooling quality regarding literacy rates, learning achievement levels, school resources, and teacher inputs. Further, some

prominent public education initiatives are highlighted, along with an overview of the role of private schooling in India and the relative effectiveness of private and public schools.

Introduction

Education is a powerful tool that empowers individuals in every aspect of their lives. It broadens their knowledge, hones their skills and techniques, and expands their worldview. Education is crucial for social, economic, and political transformation and vital to an equitable society. It lays the foundation for building values and character in a student and, over time, with the accumulation of knowledge and skills, defines the individual's personality. A well-educated population, supported with relevant knowledge, attitudes, and abilities, is essential for economic and social development in the twenty-first century.

Education also acts as an integrative force in society, imparting values that foster social cohesion and national identity¹. Before 1976, education was the exclusive responsibility of the States. The Constitutional Amendment of 1976 included education in the Concurrent List.

1. Education: An Outlook

India has a rich tradition of imparting knowledge. The '*Gurukul*' was an education system in ancient India with *Shishya* (students) living with the guru in the same house. Many branches of the knowledge system had their origin in India. In ancient India, Education was considered a high virtue. Nalanda was the world's oldest university system of education in the modern sense of university. The medium of instruction was the Pali language. With the advent of the British rule, the medium of language became English. Certain vernacular schools taught in their mother tongue and used English as a second language.

Post-Independence: At independence, India inherited a legacy of large-scale illiteracy and lack of proper provision for education. At the first post-independence census of 1951, only 9 percent of women and 27 percent of men were literate. The framers of the constitution resolved that the new Indian

state would endeavour to provide free and compulsory education to all children up to age 14 by 1960. On the downside, India has 22 percent of the world's population but 46 percent of the world's illiterates and is home to a high proportion of the world's out-of-school children and youth. On the positive side, it has made encouraging recent progress in raising schooling participation.

Educational Structure: The education structure is the national level pattern with three years of preschool education between the ages of 3 to 6, 5 years of primary education, three years of middle school education, two years of Secondary and two years of Higher secondary education. The entry age in standard one, which was around 5.5 years, has now been revised to 6 years. The students appear for a board exam in Std. X and XII, and these mark sheets and certificates help them gain entry into colleges for higher education in general streams like Arts, Commerce, and Science or vocational streams like photography, fashion designing, and other technical and professional programs like Medicine, Engineering, or Management.

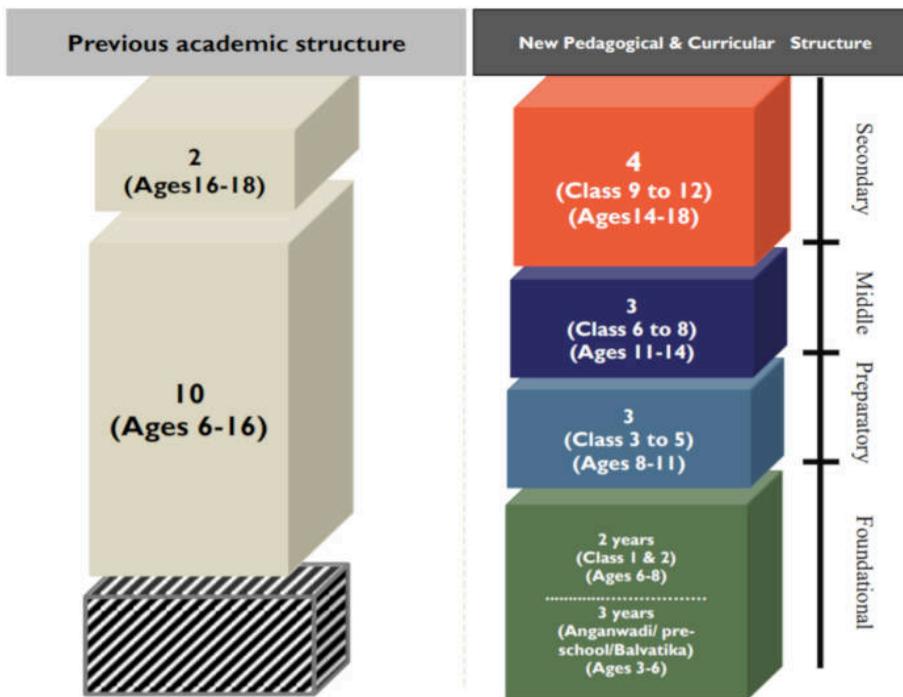
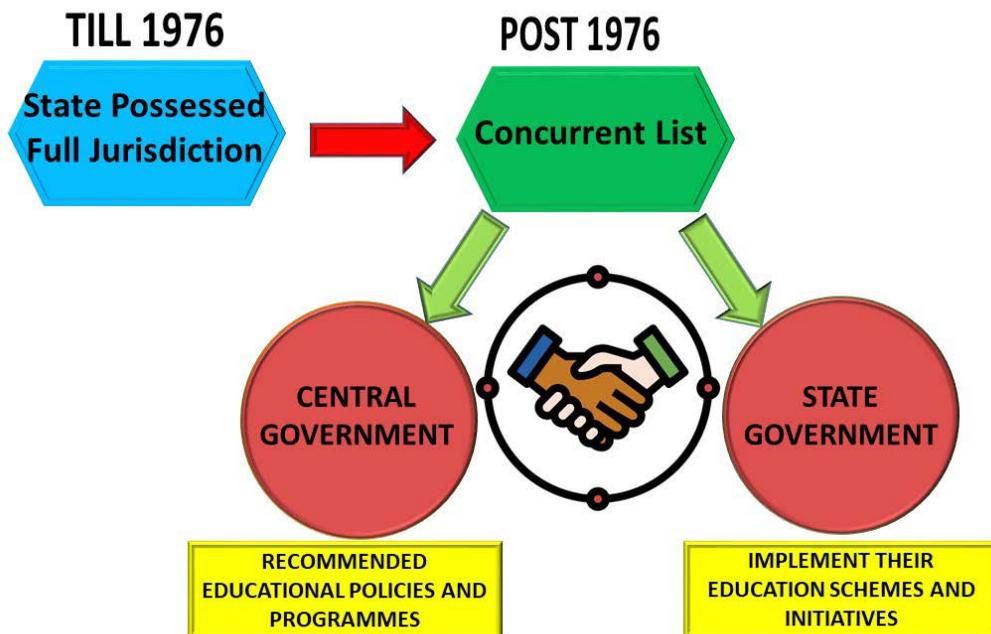


Diagram: Source <https://shikshan.org/img/nep-5334.jpg>

Till 1976, school education was in the state list, as per provisions made in the Constitution of India. The 42nd Amendment of the Constitution of India, passed in 1976, shifted education to the concurrent list. As education belonged to the concurrent list, it enabled the collaboration process between the central government and the state government departments of education. The central government recommended education policies and programs with provision for autonomy to the state governments to implement their education schemes and initiatives.



2. Governance of Schools:

School education is governed at the state level with a regulated approach to managing public and private institutions providing education at various levels. There is a steady increase in the number of private schools in the country across states. Of those schools managed privately, one-third are 'aided' and two-thirds are 'unaided.' Enrolment in Grades 1-8 is shared between government and privately operated schools in the ratio of 73:27. However, in rural areas, this ratio is higher (80:20), and in urban areas much lower (36:66).

There are vast differences in educational policies and programs across states and Union territories in India. National Policies are created to provide visionary direction and support to state policies regularly. National Education Policy 2020 is a forward-looking policy with a clear agenda for inclusive education and plans for rural reach and adopting technology to augment the learning process.

The percentage of people aged seven and older who are literate is known as the literacy rate. Literacy is the ability to read and write a simple message with understanding in any language.

According to the National Family Health Survey 2019–21 (NFHS-5), adult women (15–49 years) have a literacy rate of 71.5%, while adult men (15–49 years) have an 87.4% rate. According to the 2011 Census, there are 763,498,517 (76.34 billion) literate people in the nation. Of these, 328,814,738 (32.88 Crore) are women and 434,683,779 (43.46 Crore) are men. While the nation's total literacy rate is 72.9%, the gender gap at the national level is 16.25 percentage points, with males having a literacy rate of 80.89% and females having a rate of 64.64%.

TABLE 1 Literacy Rate in India

Variables	Literate Population 2011	Literacy Rate 2011	Literacy Rate 2021
Persons	763498517	72.99	77.70
Males	434683779	80.89	84.70
Females	328814738	64.64	70.30

Source: Census 2011 and 2022, National Family health Survey (NFHS-5) & National Statistical Office (NSO) data 2022.

3. Sustainable Development Goals -Education

SDG-4 'Quality Education': The Goal SDG-4.1 states, "By 2030, ensure that all boys and girls complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes". Further, SDG 4.5 states that "By

A Perspective On School Education In India

2030, eliminate 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".

India is one among the several countries that adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It lays thrust on SDG 4, 'Quality Education,' which ensures inclusive and equitable quality education and promotes lifelong learning opportunities for all. Through government, varied examination Boards, NGOs, ambassadors, educators, and print and digital media, these goals were embraced by every school that they connected.



Source: The 17 Goals, United Nations <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>

Image

source: <https://ntep.in/sites/default/files/h5p/content/838/images/file-641ae7924df73.png>

Text Box 1.

At SVKM's CNM School, these goals are integrated within the curriculum at the onset of the academic year so that they become part and parcel of a student's life. For example, when students are taught the topic of air and water pollution, Goal 13, 'Climate Action,' is embedded in the lesson plan and discussed within the classroom. Through consistent experimentation, students are expected to learn the impact of pollution on salinity and the presence of microplastics in seas and oceans.

They are to research and compare the air quality of different cities across India and explain the differences. Further, every month, a group of students collect seawater, record the salinity and presence of microplastics, and compare it with the previous month's record.

Over a while, they have noticed an increase in the values. They connect with the NGOs in this area and organize regular beach clean-up drives and other mechanisms to overcome the problems. The concern is genuine, and the impact is grave. Another manner in which SDGs are embedded is through class or school events.

The school has an in-house STEAM curriculum called 'Global Outlook,' where students research, explore, and experiment in Std. IV, students are taught 'Laundry,' where they carry unwashed clothes in the class and segregate them according to fabric and colour.

They try different reagents to remove stains and research how laundry is conducted worldwide. While doing this task, they realize that laundry is not gender defined. It is everybody's task. SDG goal 5, 'Gender Equality,' is emphasized but effectively.

If we wish to create an India that is 100% literate, offering both equity and equality in school education, then SDGs are to be the foundation of curriculum transaction.

4. The Structure of Education in India

Demand for private schools has been growing over the years; this is also due to the desire to study at English medium schools and the low level of

satisfaction with the quality of public *schools*. The private schools have the authority to offer a curriculum choice, i.e., State/ National/International or Private. It also has permission to design its curriculum from Std. I to VIII embedding various curricular and co-curricular programs to support quality education. Due to the increase in middle-income groups, people can afford higher fees charged by private schools. After adopting the Right to Education (RTE) Act 2009, private schools were required to be 'government-recognised'. A private school would be eligible for government recognition when it fulfils regulatory requirements like receiving NOC [No objection Certificate] from the State. At the primary and secondary level, India has an extensive private school system complementing the government-run schools.

Pre-primary Education: Children spend their foundation years in Primary school. These years provide a base for acquiring knowledge, skills, and behaviour. There are very few primary schools in villages. In contrast, towns and cities have several options for primary schools. In cities, one observes parents' behaviour vividly, analysing the services/activities offered by premier schools and showing high aspirations to admit their children to these schools to firm up their professional education in the future.

Most parents placing a lot of importance on side activities like phonetics classes, general knowledge classes, and a variety of skill and sports classes after the preschool classes, so the student's diary is packed with one type after another. This drive is catching up with the smaller towns and cities, but only one percent (1%) of the population under age six is enrolled in preschool education.

The curriculum in the preschool focuses more on the basics of language and literacy, numeracy and logic, emotional and social development, and gross and fine motor development. All this is transacted through the play way method and a range of activities where students explore, engage, and experiment. Through this sensory experience, they connect concepts to daily life and build their vocabulary and communication skills. LKG and UKG stages prepare and help children emotionally, mentally, socially, and

physically to grasp knowledge quickly in the later stages of school and college life.

Primary education: Primary education in India is divided into two parts: Lower Primary (Class I-V) and Upper Primary (Middle school, Class VI-VIII). The Indian government emphasizes primary education (Class I-VIII) for children aged 6 to 14. In primary school, the emphasis is on building students' fundamental knowledge. They are introduced to formal schooling through languages, social sciences, and mathematics in Std. I and II, the four skills that every subject focuses on are reading, writing, speaking, and listening. A more interdisciplinary approach is often seen at the primary level. Slowly and steadily, students are motivated to conduct primary research and seek responses to various questions in Std. III to V, the students are introduced to more subjects like Sciences, History, Geography, and Digital literacy. They are exposed to project work, assignments, and assessments.

Secondary Education: Secondary education covers children aged 14 to 18. Secondary education in India is examination-oriented and not course-based: students register for and take classes primarily to prepare for one of the centrally administered examinations. In the Secondary Section, students have a choice of subjects. For example, students in CBSE and CISCE can drop Math and Science and take up other issues like Economics, commercial studies, foreign languages, classical languages, environmental sciences, and many more subjects in Std. XII, students once again appear for a Board exam and also appear for national entrance tests or institution-level tests to seek admission to the undergraduate college of their choice. Many schools and colleges offer career fairs or opportunities to attend career talks out of school campuses to support the selection of courses.

5. Type of Schools

Government schools: Education is free socially and economically for children until the age of 14. An Education Ministry data from 2017 showed that 65.2% (113 million) of all school students in 20 states attend government schools (c. 2017). These include schools run by the state, local, and central governments. The government started the *Kendriya Vidyalaya* project in 1965 to provide

uniform education in institutions following the same syllabus at the same pace.

Government-aided private schools: Government-aided private Schools are usually charitable trust-run schools with some funding from the government. The fees are affordable, and the school generally follows the State curriculum. The Trusts attempts to offer more amenities apart from the standard regulations in some schools. The Trust has a huge sports ground, so they ensure that more sporting activities like cricket, basketball, and football are provided to students.

Private schools (unaided) : Private schools have been established since the British Rule in India. St George's School in Chennai is the oldest private school in India. At such schools, the medium of education is often English. Still, Hindi, the state's official language, is also taught as a compulsory subject. Pre-school education is mainly limited to organized neighbourhood nursery schools with some organized chains. Montessori education is also popular due to Maria Montessori's stay in India.

International schools: The International Schools Consultancy (ISC) defines an 'international school' in the following terms: "ISC includes an international school if the school delivers a curriculum to any combination of pre-school, primary or secondary students, wholly or partly in English outside an English-speaking country, or if a school in a country where English is one of the official languages, offers an English-medium curriculum other than the country's national curriculum and is international in its orientation." The International curriculum has caught momentum in the past few years. The boards focus more on skill development, and the assessments centre around critical thinking, problem-solving, and creativity. The strength per class is a maximum of 30 students, so teachers can often provide individual attention.

Home-schooling: Home-schooling in India is legal, though it is the least explored option and is often debated by educators. The Indian Government believes that parents can teach their children at home if they wish to and have the means.

“In the past years, I have observed many parents take up home schooling vigorously in the initial years but then shift back to public schools as students are deprived of social-emotional interaction, which plays a significant role in the development of the personality of the student. Some parents put their wards in many noncurricular classes post-home schooling to give opportunities for social interaction”. A Principal of a High School in Mumbai.

6. Method of Education

Many primary schools follow the Montessori Method of education, which is based on the principles of respect for the child, sensitive periods for learning, a prepared environment, and interdependence and discovery. It encourages children to experience 'freedom with limits.' Some private schools follow the Waldorf education that focuses on holistic education, i.e., the head, hands, and heart.

Most private schools follow the State, National, or International curriculum based on the general population's region, socioeconomic status, culture, and background. For example, a school in an elite area of a metropolitan city like Mumbai may offer IB, CAIE, or National curriculum all within one campus or separately as it has the resources and infrastructure to tender well-trained teachers, hi-tech digital technology, a range of diverse activities and opportunities for international collaboration. The strength per class of the students is comparatively lower than in public schools, and thus, more personalized attention is given. The parents are willing to pay enormous school fees, and management is in a position to offer excellent pay packets to recruit the best in the industry. A school in a Tier 3 city may offer a State or national curriculum based on the available resources, the position of parents to pay fees, and the quality of trained teachers available for its stakeholders.

Apart from following the Board's regulation and curriculum, all private schools add their individuality, making it their institution's USP. For example, some schools have a "Havan" every week for the students to participate mandatorily, some schools have tie-ups with NGOs serving villages where students have to offer service, some schools begin the day with circle time for

students and teachers, some schools have their curriculum designed in-house focussing either on Art integrated or STEM integrated curriculum.

7. Institutional Support to Improve Education in India

The Constitution (Eighty-sixth Amendment) Act, 2002 inserted Article 21-A in the Constitution of India to provide free and compulsory education to all children aged six to fourteen years as a Fundamental Right in such a manner as the State may, by law, determine. The RTE Act, 2009, which represents the consequential legislation envisaged under Article 21-A, became effective on 1 April 2010. This act provides a justiciable legal framework that entitles all children between the ages of 6 and 14 to free and compulsory admission, attendance, and completion of elementary education. Most importantly, it provides for children's right to an education free from fear, stress, and anxiety.

The Government of India has launched several initiatives in recent years to improve the country's primary, secondary, and tertiary education. These initiatives aim to increase access to education, improve the quality of education, and make education more relevant to the needs of the 21st century. Some of the key government initiatives are Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA), National Skills Development Mission, Digital India, Rashtriya Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA), Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan, Pradhan Mantri Innovative Learning Program, National Education Policy 2020, Skill India, National Scholarship Portal, Mid-Day Meal Scheme, Digital India and National Programme on Technology Enhanced Learning (NPTEL).

8. The Samagra Shiksha:

Samagra Shiksha Scheme is implemented as a Centrally Sponsored Scheme by the Department through single State Implementation Societies (SIS) at the State/UT level. At the National level, there is a Governing Council (GC) headed by the Minister of Education and a Project Approval Board (PAB) headed by the Secretary Department of School Education and Literacy. The Governing Council has the authority to approve guidelines for implementation of educational schemes. The Department is assisted by a Technical Support Group (TSG) provided by Educational Consultants of India

Limited (EdCIL) to provide technical support in functional areas about access, equity, and quality education and for planning and monitoring the implementation of Samagra Shiksha.

9. Conclusion

India's education system faces several challenges, including inadequate infrastructure, low teacher-student ratios, and inequitable access to education, outdated curricula, and high dropout rates. However, there are also significant opportunities for improvement, including the use of technology in education, the promotion of vocational education, and the implementation of government initiatives to improve access and quality of education. The country has made significant progress in recent years, but there is still much work to be done to ensure every child has access to a quality education. India can continue to improve its education system and prepare its young people for a bright future, through planned interventions and availing new opportunities by adopting technology.

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Chapter - II

**ROLE OF GOVERNMENT IN TRANSFORMING
SCHOOL EDUCATION: REVIEW OF THE
STRATEGY, POLICIES AND SCHEMES**

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Abstract

Education is a ladder for upward economic and social mobility across economies and societies. Historically, as economies migrated from the primary to the secondary and later tertiary sectors, education and skill development made this migration easier and improved individuals' social and economic conditions. In India, education is considered the utmost priority, with school education considered a cornerstone of equitable growth. Quality education empowers individuals, especially women, to improve health and well-being and bring economic prosperity. In India, education is considered a fundamental right. Being on the concurrent list under the Constitution of India, the central and state governments have designed policies and implemented various schemes towards universal and quality school education. While universalizing school education is the most significant achievement with complete enrollment, quality concerns, mainly learning outcomes, still need to be more satisfactory. With rapid social, cultural,

economic, and industrial changes, education, especially school education and learning outcomes, has come under intense scrutiny, and a need to transform education has been felt. In this context, this chapter investigates the role of the government through strategy, policy, and schemes in transforming school education towards future social, cultural, and economic realities.

Keywords: School Education, Government, Development

1.0 Introduction

Education plays a vital role in a nation's growth and development. It is well known that quality education, besides driving economic growth, positively impacts health, nutrition, women's empowerment, and general well-being. With the strategic objective - *Amrit Kaal* to grow rapidly over the next two decades, the government has prioritized education. School education has been given the highest priority. School education in India is considered a fundamental right under the constitution. The government is expected to ensure fair and equitable education for all. In alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals (Goal No 4-Quality Education), the centre and state governments strive to ensure free, equitable, and quality school education.

Many schemes are being implemented by the central and state governments targeting universal school education with quality educational outcomes. The current scheme-*Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan*, one of the largest schemes launched by the central government in 2018, aims to ensure every child in the age group (5-14) is in school, improve school effectiveness in terms of equal opportunities for schooling, and attain equitable learning outcomes.

2.0 School Education Over the Years

Since independence, for a few decades, the focus of educational policy has been more inclined towards higher education (Basu, 2013). This was more aligned with the economic development policies, which focused on agricultural self-sufficiency and import substitution, especially manufacturing and industrial development, both from the public and the private sector. A qualified workforce was considered essential to achieve this development objective. The central government focused on building educational institutes

of eminence such as the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Indian Institute of Science (IISc), Indian Statistical Institute (ISI), Indian Institute of Management (IIM) and Agricultural Universities. Although free and compulsory education for all children up to 14 years was in the Directive Principles of the State Policy, school education needed more attention. Directive Principles are seen as fundamental directives for governance, and the State must apply these principles in policy making. This neglect of school education is reflected in the number of illiterates, increasing from 294 million in 1950 to 376 million in 1971 (Basu, 2013).

In the mid-1960s, there was a realization of the lack of attention to school education and its ill effect on social and economic growth. In 1968, the National Policy on Education (NPE) was released to improve the quality of school education. The policy emphasized creating equal learning opportunities for all, focusing on poor, rural, and marginal communities. NPE was framed based on the recommendations of the Kothari Commission, which was set up in 1966 to revamp the school system. The central government realized the poor education infrastructure and learning in some states was a grave concern. To ensure focused uniform efforts towards developing educational ecosystem across all states, in 1976 education was transferred from State to the Concurrent List in the Constitution. With this, education became an explicit responsibility of both the central and state governments.

Table No 1: Important Acts/Policies on School Education

Year	Act/Policy	Brief Discussion
1968	National Policy on Education (NPE)	Framed based on the recommendations of the Kothari Commission in 1966, it focused on developing the common schooling system to promote social cohesion and national integration. The policy emphasized the need for equalizing educational opportunities

Role of Government in Transforming School Education: Review of ... Schemes

Year	Act/Policy	Brief Discussion
1976	Education transferred from the State to the Concurrent List in the Constitution	This made education an explicit responsibility of both the Central and the State Governments
1986	New Policy on Education	The Policy focused on reducing learning disparities and providing equal opportunities for education to all, especially the women, Scheduled Tribes (STs), and Scheduled Castes (SCs) communities
1992	Revised New Policy on Education	The revised policy had a focused Programme of Action emphasizing the increase of physical access to reach out to the poor and marginalized
1993	Right to Education	The Supreme Court recognized the right to education as a fundamental right by expanding the scope of Article 21 of the Constitution
2000	Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan	The most prominent centrally sponsored Scheme since independence. The Scheme focused on ensuring universal enrolment, especially for out-of-school children, retention of children, and improvement of learning outcomes.
2009	Right to Education Act	This Act enabled the right to free and compulsory education for children aged 6-14. The Act also ensured that private, unaided schools provide a quota of 25% for children from economically weaker sections. The Act also ensured schools are child-friendly

Year	Act/Policy	Brief Discussion
2018	Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan	The Scheme promotes holistic education extending from preschool to class 12, emphasizing schooling and learning outcomes. This subsumed the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan
2020	National Education Policy (NEP)	The Policy aims to revamp all aspects of the education sector, including elementary and higher education. The objective is to realize the full potential of the country's human resources in the backdrop of India's economic growth and global leadership.

Many issues were preventing the Indian education system from changing. Low teacher status and motivation, discrimination at schools, corporal punishment, outdated curriculum, rigid examination system, lack of accountability, and low investment in education (Brinkmann 2020). In the 1980s, the political leadership acknowledged the need to bring reforms and improve school education (Basu, 2013). The New Policy on Education (NPE) was introduced in 1986, and the National Curriculum Framework followed the NPE. The NPE 1986 mandated that every child to be provided with a child-centred and activity-based learning environment (Brinkmann, 2020). NPE 1986 also focused on bringing equity by providing equal educational opportunities to women, Scheduled Tribes (STs), and Scheduled Castes (SCs) communities.

1993 was the landmark year for educational reforms. The Supreme Court of India recognized education as a fundamental right, further to the cases *Mohini Jain vs State of Karnataka* (1992) and *Unnikrishnan J.P. vs State of Andhra Pradesh* (Table No 2), the Supreme Court of India considered education to be an integral part of life. Further, Article 21 A was incorporated to emphasize education as a fundamental right. This had a significant impact, with the government taking up the responsibility to provide inclusive education through increased enrollment and infrastructure development.

Table No 2: High Court Judgements on the Right to Education

Mohini Jain vs State of Karnataka (1992).	Every citizen has a right to education under the constitution. Although it falls under the Directive Principles of State Policy, only if this right is made a reality will the fundamental rights remain beyond the reach of most of the population. The State must provide this right through state-owned or recognized educational institutions.
Unnikrishnan J.P vs State of Andhra Pradesh (1993).	The citizens have a fundamental right to education, which flows from Article 21 (right to life). But it is not an absolute right and applies only to children up to the age of 14 years.

Source: Madhavan and Sanyal (2013)

In 2000, the Central came up with the most ambitious school education programme, the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA). SSA is a centrally sponsored scheme to universalise elementary education (children aged 6-14). The programme aimed to improve the curriculum, infrastructure development, teacher training, education planning, and management. Further, the Right to Education Act in 2009 enabled the right to free and compulsory education of children aged 6-14. To ensure equality, the Act also ensures that private, unaided schools reserve 25% of their seats for children from low-income families. Under RTE 2009, all schools must establish a school management committee (SMC) with representation from parents, females, and weaker sections of society (Chatterjee & Robitaille, 2023).

In 2018, Samagra Shiksha Aahiyan was launched to promote holistic education from preschool to class 12. The Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan was launched by merging the Sarva Shikha Abhiyan and the Rashtriya Madhyamik Abhiyan. In 2020, the National Education Policy (NEP) was launched. NEP restructured all the aspects of the education structure with an emphasis on universal coverage and inclusivity.

3.0 School Education Development Strategy and National Education Policy

To transform school education, considering New India's aspirations, the Government in 2018, through its strategic advisory organization NITI Aayog, came up with an *Education Strategy for New India* (NITI Aayog 2018). The objective of the strategy is to (i) achieve 100 per cent enrolment and retention at elementary and secondary education, (ii) achieve zero dropouts until the 10th standard, (iii) improve learning outcomes, learning outcomes being measured through the National Achievement Surveys, (iv) promoting equity and social inclusion and, (v) providing a viable path for vocational educational to improve employability-this being achieved through introducing vocational education at the secondary level (NITI Aayog 2018).

NITI Aayog (undated), in its report on the *Systemic Transformation of School Education*, highlights the need to

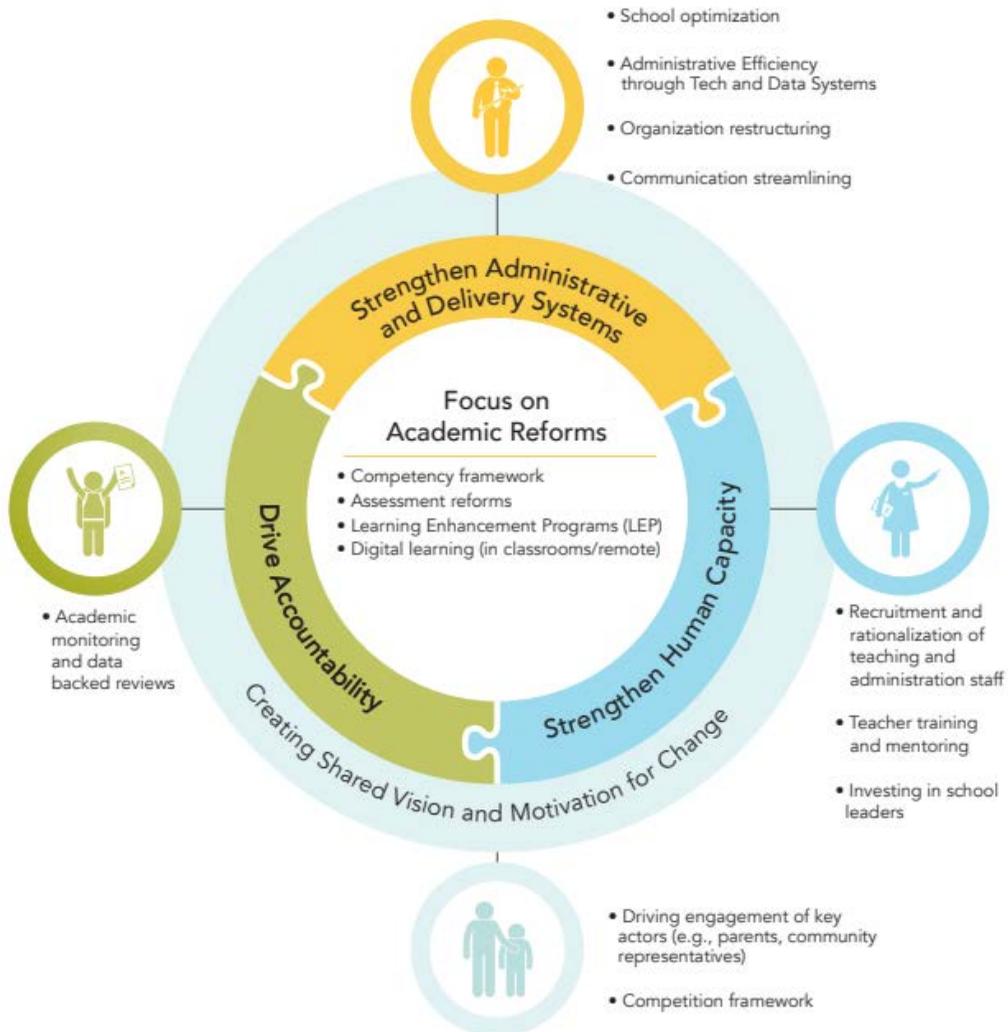
- Enhance human capacity by recruiting and rationalizing teaching and administrative staff, teacher training and mentoring, and identifying school leaders who can drive change and investing in them.
- Strengthening administrative and delivery systems by school optimization, bringing efficiency in school operations using technology and data systems, organization restructuring, and streamlining communication
- Driving accountability by academic monitoring and data-based reviews

3.1 Constraints

While the strategy for developing school education is in the right direction, several constraints exist. The first constraint is the budgetary allocation. Budgetary allocation currently stands close to 3 per cent of total GDP. There is a need to increase the allocation, and the NEP 2020 affirms the increase in the allocation to at least 6% of total GDP (NITI Aayog undated). The second constraint is the primary focus on creating school infrastructure with limited efforts toward improving learning outcomes. The third constraint is the high number of teacher vacancies, as many state governments are reluctant to fill the vacancies due to budgetary constraints. Also, teacher absenteeism and teaching quality is a concern. The fourth key constraint is accountability in

government schools and challenges in monitoring learning outcomes (NITI Aayog, undated).

Figure 1: Framework for Transformation of Education



Source: NITI Aayog (undated)

Table No 3: Expenditure on education (combined Centre and States) in Rs.
Crore

Year	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2022-23
Education	391,881	434,974	483,481	526,481	579,575	575,834	681,396
As a per cent of GDP	2.8	2.8	2.8	2.8	2.9	2.9	2.9

Source: Economic Survey 2022-23, Govt of India

3.2 National Educational Policy 2020

To overcome the constraints, further to the NITI Aayog report and based on the recommendations of the Dr. K. Kasturirangan Committee Report, the government came up with the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. NEP replaced the National Policy on Education in 1986. NEP 2020 focuses on bringing reforms to the curriculum. The curriculum focuses on critical thinking, discussion, and analysis-based learning (PRS Legislative Research 2020).

NEP 2020 is designed to have a robust education system by 2040 with equitable access to good quality education for all, regardless of social and economic background (GoI, 2020). NEP 2020 proposes revamping all aspects of the education structure, including regulation and governance, aligning with India's aspirational goals and Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4, building upon India's traditions and value system (GoI, 2020).

The National Education Policy 2020 has been founded on the five guiding pillars of Access, Equity, Quality, Affordability, and Accountability to prepare our youth to meet the diverse national and global challenges of the present and the future (GoI, 2023b). The NEP envisages implementing its objectives by emphasizing the ten themes: (i) planning and preparing roadmaps, (ii) access and retention, (iii) frameworks and guidelines, (iv) improvement in quality of teachers, (v) development of resources, (vi) capacity building of teachers, (vii) innovative pedagogies, (viii) standards, (ix) assessment and evaluation and (x)

cross-cutting themes-integration of various themes (GoI, 2023b). The policy modified the academic structure of school education from 10+2 to 5+3+3+4, covering ages 3-18. The policy aims to nurture all-round development and skills acquisition in an inclusive, accessible, multilingual setting (GoI, 2023b).

4.0 Government Schemes

A well-established good education helps promote scientific prowess and economic growth and ensures equity. The key objective of government policy is to ensure the universalization of quality education. The government, through its autonomous and statutory bodies such as Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE), Kendriya Vidyalaya Sangathan (KVS), Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya (JNV), National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS) and National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE) promote education. Samagra Shiksha, PM Poshan, National Means cum Merit Scholarships, New India Literacy Programme, Vidyanjali, PMSHRI are the important schemes under implementation. Also, inclusive education has been considered as a priority. Samagra Shiksha emphasizes improving learning among children with special needs.

Table No 4: Current Operational Schemes by the Central Government

Sr. No	Scheme	Brief Description
1	Samagra Shiksha	The Scheme replaced the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan. It covers all classes from pre-primary to senior secondary aligned with National Education Policy (NEP) 2020
2	Pradhan Mantri Poshan Shakti Nirman (PM POSHAN) Scheme	The Scheme is targeted towards improving the nutritional status of children studying in kindergarten-Bal Vatika in both government and government-aided schools
3	National Means-cum-Merit Scholarship Scheme (NMMSS)	The Scheme provides scholarships for meritorious students of economically weaker sections in classes 9 to 12.
4	New India Literacy	The Scheme is a revised version of adult

Sr. No	Scheme	Brief Description
	Programme (Adult Education)	education schemes targeting non-literates ages 15 and above
5	Vidyanjali-School Volunteer Initiative	Vidyanjali is an online portal that facilitates connecting volunteers directly to the schools. The objective is to tap the human resources from civil society to support school initiatives. As of Dec 2022, 3.92 lakh schools are onboarded, and 1.1 lakh volunteers have been registered.
6	PM Schools for Rising India (PMSHRI)	Selected schools will be equipped with modern infrastructure and showcase the implementation of the NEP 2020. The Scheme aims to set up about 14,500 schools over the five years (2023-27). These schools will be equipped with modern infrastructure such as smart classrooms, science labs, libraries, art rooms, and sports equipment. These would be green schools with energy-efficient infrastructure, water conservation, and waste recycling. PMSHRI schools will also emerge as exemplary schools over time and offer leadership to other nearby schools.

Source: GoI (2023b)

4.1 Initiatives by States

While the Centre provides policy framework and funding through its flagship schemes, States in India take the lead in providing school education. State governments have recognized the learning crisis and taken various initiatives to overcome it. At the state level, states like Delhi, Rajasthan, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, and Tamil Nadu have taken the lead in designing and implementing their interventions in areas like pedagogy, organizational strengthening, governance and capacity building and some of these interventions have catalyzed change on the ground (NITI

Aayog, undated). Some of the noteworthy schemes and initiatives are mentioned in the table below.

Table No 4: Initiatives and Schemes by States

State and Scheme	Description
Madhya Pradesh, Election Guarantee Scheme-1997	The objective of the Scheme was to increase enrolment. Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRI) were central to the scheme. Under the Scheme, Panchayats would forward to the state government a list of at least 40 children without access to school within walking distance, and the state would ensure a functioning school in 90 days. The Panchayats conducted a door-to-door campaign to collect household data on children out of school and promote enrollment. Even the teacher management was decentralized to Panchayats. The Panchayats were given the power to withhold salary payments for non-attendance of primary school teachers. Implementation of the Scheme led to significant improvement in educational outcomes (Clarke, 2003)
Tamil Nadu-Mid Day Meal Scheme-1956	The idea, first mooted by the Justice Party and later introduced in 1956, provided nutritious free meals to children and led to more than doubling the enrollment of children in schools. Today, Mid Day Meal is a national program, and every state has implemented the Scheme. The Scheme promoted both enrolment of children in schools and ensured nutrition to the children, especially children from economically weaker sections.
Government of Delhi-Happiness Curriculum, 2018	In 2018, the Government of Delhi introduced the Happiness Curriculum across all government schools in Delhi. Through a compulsory 45 minutes daily lesson, the objective was to develop mindfulness, critical thinking, reflection, and social-emotional skills among students (Khanna & Peterson 2023)

5.0 Discussion

Since independence, quality universal education has been the goal. Despite all the above-discussed policy initiatives and schemes, challenges exist in ensuring quality universal education. A few critical challenges are discussed in this section.

- ***Poor Quality of Education and Marginalization of Poor Children:*** The education policies and schemes have increased physical access to schools for most of the population. While RTE 2009 has resulted in limited progress in providing sufficient educational infrastructure, the quality aspects, such as the learning environment, are more than satisfactory (Chatterjee & Robitaille, 2023). The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) focused on educating the marginalized and economically weaker sections. However, the poor quality of education it delivers adds to the burden of inequality (Bhatty, 2014). This is leading to the marginalization of the poor. Parents who can afford it are moving their children to private schools, and poor children continue at public schools. In addition, private tutoring has become a common phenomenon, which is out of the reach of the poor, thereby worsening the educational attainment of poor children (Chatterjee & Robitaille, 2023).
- ***Gender Parity in Schools:*** Gender parity is an area of concern. This is observed to be higher in higher classes as the girl child drops out due to the demand to do field and household chores. It is also observed that private schools see more enrolment of boys than girls (Gazta & Jadhav, 2023)
- ***Inclusive Education for Children with Special Needs:*** There is a greater need and awareness about educating children with special needs. This requires enhanced training of teachers on teaching methods and creating awareness among parents regarding the need to school children with special needs. While government schemes consider this aspect, engagement with NGOs can bring in improvements and increase the reach.

- ***Hierarchies within the Schooling System:*** The poor quality of government schools, primarily in terms of learning outcomes, has contributed to the discrediting of the public school system (Bhatty, 2014). Parents are reluctant to send their children to public schools; even poor parents aspire to send their children to private convent education. In response, the government has developed model schools such as Sarvodaya, Navodaya, Kendriya Vidyalayas, and PM Schools for Rising India (PMSHRI). This has created a hierarchy within the public schooling system, with more resources made available to model schools than regular public schools (Bhatty, 2014)
- ***Student-Teacher Ratio and Multi-grade Classrooms:*** Multi-grade classrooms are classrooms where students from two or more grades sit together. Between 2010 and 2022, multigrade classrooms have steadily increased from 54.8% in 2010 to 65.5% in 2022 (Gazta & Jadhav, 2013). This phenomenon is more common in rural schools with inadequate classrooms, low enrolment rates, and unbalanced pupil-teacher ratio
- ***Quality of Teachers:*** Quality of teachers, low teacher motivation, and teacher absenteeism are seen as one of the most important reasons for poor learning outcomes.
- ***Privatization of School Education:*** The poor quality of education in public schools has made parents move their children to private schools. There is an exponentially rising enrolment of students in private schools compared to public schools (Raina, 2020). There is an increased burden on the cost of schooling on parents, putting stress on finances, especially for parents with lower affordability. The trend reversed during the Covid 19, and parents withdrew children from private schools and enrolled them in public schools mainly due to the unaffordability of private education.

6.0 Conclusion

School is the basic foundation of knowledge being imparted to a child. Given the challenges in ensuring good quality education, there is a growing need to

reconsider existing strategies and look at alternative approaches to achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4- *ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education*. Achieving SDG 4 calls for developing cost-effective new and non-linear approaches to help reach marginalized children and youth, achieve better learning outcomes, and impart 21st-century skills.

To chart the way ahead, the strategic direction would be to ensure universal access to quality education by increasing enrolment and reducing dropout rates among marginalized and economically disadvantaged children. To improve retention rates and educational performance at all levels, it will be prudent to collaborate with NGOs and CSR departments of private companies to strengthen the educational ecosystem, promote student-centred pedagogies, upgrade teacher training, supply educational resources, and activate community engagement to appreciate the value of education.

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Chapter - III

**SOCIAL INNOVATION IN SCHOOL
EDUCATION**

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Abstract

The chapter describes India's journey in designing innovative approaches for making school education more inclusive, relevant, and aligned with the needs of a changing society. In its attempt to reach out to marginalized and vulnerable populations, the government has partnered with NGOs, social enterprises, and corporations to develop innovative approaches to improve the quality of education across the country. Further, to provide affordable education to resource-poor communities, the chapter highlights the availability of innovative financing mechanisms like impact bonds, venture capital funds, school vouchers, and CSR funds. The chapter also discusses the relevance of the public-private partnership (PPP) model and the role of corporations in attaining inclusive and quality education for all (SDG 4).

1. Introduction

Quality education is one of the most powerful tools for attaining sustainable development (Singh, 2017). Formal education develops children's critical life skills and abilities to make informed choices. According to UNICEF evidence, each additional year of education boosts a person's income by 10 per cent and increases a country's GDP by 18 per cent (Debétaz, 2022). Access to quality

education is the root of solving many challenging problems today. Despite India's economic growth, many rural and underprivileged communities are still dealing with inadequate access, poor quality of education, and inefficiencies in the schooling system. With the government having failed to deliver quality education, Development Organizations (NGOs/Social Enterprises) have discharged "a very important role in delivering direct and supplementary quality education to the public through their innovative models" (Mehta, Education World 2023).

2. Social Innovation

Social innovation is the "successful implementation of activities, such as ideas, practices, or objects, through new collaborations and partnerships, in ways that positively impact society by improving the delivery of public services" (O'Byrne et al., 2013, p. 54). The emergence of social innovations has been stimulated by gaps in public services offered by the Government (Varadarajan, 2014) and often emerges at or across the boundaries of two or more sectors, i.e., between market, State, and civil society. Social innovation in Development Organizations can be for developing new or improved demand-oriented services, improved forms of advocacy, or more effective use of existing resources (Schröer, 2021).

Social innovations can occur and impact at the macro (societal/systemic), meso (organizational/community), and micro (individual) levels (Furmanska-Maruszak & Sudolska, 2016). For example, macro-level innovations typically involve large-scale policies or frameworks that impact the entire education system. For example, the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 is a macro-level innovation aiming to transform the entire education system in India. It focuses on holistic learning, skill development, and flexibility in the curriculum. The policy aims to make education more inclusive and aligned with the global trends of the 21st century. At the Meso level, the innovative approach of improving school attendance and learning and addressing malnutrition was addressed by introducing the mid-day meal program, which is implemented at the state level with the support of various NGOs. At the micro level, Pratham's Read India program focuses on foundational learning. It operates through community-driven initiatives, engaging with individual

students to enhance their reading and mathematical abilities. Similarly, the Teach For India (TFI) Fellowship strategy of on-boarding talented graduates as full-time teachers in Municipal schools has helped to improve the quality of learning in schools and address challenges faced by individual students (TFI,n.d).

Social innovation is crucial in achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4 by fostering new ideas and approaches to enhance education accessibility, quality, and inclusivity. It encourages innovative solutions to address challenges in education, ultimately contributing to the overall goal of ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education for all.

3. Indian Context: Social Innovation in Education

The literature reviewed indicates that India has a history of innovative models in education. "In 1920, Gijubhai Badheka, a pioneer educationist of India, brought the Montessori education system to India. His ideas behind how a young child's mind develops in the pre-school or formative years are of immense relevance" (India Today Webdesk, 2021). Mahatma Gandhi's 'Buniyadi Shiksha' or 'Nai Talim stressed imparting education through handicrafts, especially through the use of spindles. He believed that physical work makes children more efficient in grasping knowledge, and hence, primary schools should engage children in spinning cotton to make yarn for khadi products (Gandhi, 1953). Seer-visionaries like Sri Aurobindo and J. Krishnamurti devised holistic, nature-friendly school education systems that are being practiced today.

In the early years of post-independence, the government made efforts to expand access to education. Initiatives focused on building schools, increasing enrolment, and enhancing basic infrastructure. The National Policy on Education (NPE), initiated in 1986, aimed to promote a national education system and laid the foundation for innovations in curriculum, teacher training, and technology integration. The 1990s saw the introduction of computer education in schools. This marked a shift toward integrating technology into the education system.

3.1 Universalizing Elementary Education

Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) was initiated in 2001 with the aim of universalizing elementary education and improving the quality of education. It brought about innovations in school infrastructure, teacher training, and community involvement (Kapur 2013). The Right to Education Act (RTE), enacted in 2009, made elementary education a fundamental right for children aged 6 to 14. It brought changes in school infrastructure, teacher-student ratios, and inclusive education (Sharma, 2021).

3.2 Innovative Curriculum & Pedagogies

The National Curriculum Framework (NCF) 2005 and 2015 aimed to revamp the curriculum to make it more student-centric, focusing on holistic development rather than rote learning. The revised framework in 2015 further emphasized critical thinking and skill development. The Digital India campaign initiated in 2010 has influenced the education sector with initiatives like the Digital Literacy Mission, e-learning platforms, and smart classrooms. In recent years, there's been an emphasis on Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) education. Various programs aim to make learning in these fields more engaging and practical. There is a growing recognition of the importance of skill-based education. Initiatives are being introduced to integrate vocational skills and practical learning into the school curriculum. With the rise of alternative education models, there's increased experimentation with pedagogies such as Montessori, Waldorf, and experiential learning methods.

3.3 National Education Policy (NEP) 2020

The NEP 2020 is based on "five guiding pillars of Access, Quality, Equity, Affordability, and Accountability" (Ministry of Education, 2023). It advocates adopting pedagogical practices and developing learner-centric approaches at schools to promote student creativity and innovation. The policy promotes experiential learning, life skills, and critical thinking skills, aiming to cultivate socially responsible individuals. It emphasizes integrating social, environmental, and ethical dimensions into the curriculum to foster holistic development and social consciousness among students.

Social innovation in education entails examining the root causes of obstacles that prevent students from attending the formal education system and designing solutions to address them. Innovative education models include introducing new pedagogical practices, curricula integrating technologies, and partnerships that aim to increase learning outcomes, equity, and inclusion in educational systems. "Observed through the lens of the education researcher, there seems to be a close correlation between learning, creativity, and innovation" (Fahrenwald et al., 2021).

It can be surmised from the above discussion that the Government of India, through its policy measures, has made efforts to improve the educational system. The government has partnered with NGOs, social enterprises, and corporations to reach the last mile in providing quality education. The ensuing sections provide a brief discussion on the same.

4. NGO-Government Partnerships

The Indian education landscape is replete with several central and state-level education schemes aimed at helping the country attain the desired educational goals. Schemes like Samagra Shiksha (subsuming Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan, and Teacher Education), the Mid-Day Meal Scheme, Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) Rashtriya Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA), centrally sponsored scheme for Teacher Education and several others aim at achieving specific SDG 4 targets corresponding to early childhood, school education. Special schemes undertaken by respective State governments further support them. While these schemes are helping India in its journey toward providing equitable access to quality education, there are challenges in accessing education, equity, quality, and efficiency. The State faces several limitations in reaching out to children residing in remote locations and socially deprived groups like the urban poor, child workers, or street children. Coupled with these, schools face issues of teaching quality, teacher vacancies, and poor physical and digital infrastructure maintenance, which impacts the learning environment.

An exemplary classroom education experience and innovative pedagogical practices are essential to inspire students and trigger their interest in formal

education. Establishing a well-rounded educational experience keeps students engaged, promotes joy in learning, and builds various critical skills for world readiness. Governments have partnered with NGOs to bridge the gap in providing educational services to ensure no child is denied access to school.

Though the data on the exact number of NGOs in India is not available, the NITI Aayog's NGO-DARPAN platform has listed 1,75,743 NGOs. From these, 1,01,332 NGOs are engaged in education and literacy (Darpan 2023). NGOs, foundations, and social entrepreneurs have provided education opportunities to marginalized communities.

4.1 Localised Solutions

NGOs have played a crucial role in identifying local education needs and implementing innovative solutions tailored to specific regions and communities. For instance, to ensure fulfillment of SDG Target 4.2: '*Ensure that all children have access to quality early childhood development, care, and pre-primary education*' (United Nations, n.d); anganwadis are required to have good physical infrastructure, relevant, age-appropriate, contextual curriculum, and learning materials to deliver early childhood education. In this context, with the support of NGOs, the Aurangabad district in Maharashtra has come to fame by becoming one of the very few districts in India having Anganwadis with an 'ISO certified and high tech' tag (Akef, 2014). Sudiksha Knowledge Systems, a Hyderabad-based social enterprise, provides affordable early childhood education by setting up low-cost pre-schools in low-income urban and semi-urban regions of Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, and Madhya Pradesh. Around 300 community women are being trained to run the pre-schools and work as teachers.

4.2 Improving Quality of Education

Through innovative public-private partnership models, NGOs have played a key role in the improvement of the quality of education, both by coercing the government to improve quality and upscaling the innovative models. For instance, Eklavya, working in Madhya Pradesh, has focused on developing relevant curricula, interesting learning materials, and an innovative methodology for teacher training. They have effectively mainstreamed their

work in state-run schools. Innovative teaching methods based on the activity-based learning model introduced in Tamil Nadu have been institutionalized at the policy level and scaled up (Madhavan, 2012).

Pratham, a leading NGO's methodology of Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL), has proved effective in improving learning outcomes in primary-school children in government-managed schools and has been adopted by several states in India. Pratham's nationwide Read India campaign, operational in 240 districts in 19 states, ensured that children could read fluently and do basic math confidently (Dutt et al., 2015). Pratham has been developing new reading materials, training, and teaching methods that are designed to be more accessible and effective in current conditions in India's education system.

Sikshana Foundation, a Karnataka-based NGO's model to improve the quality of education delivered by public schools and improve learning outcomes through its planned behavioural change and structured learning model has been adopted by the Karnataka Education Department (Chowdhury, 2017).

Teach For India(TFI) has designed an innovative approach to improve the quality of teaching in underprivileged schools. It recruits and trains young professionals to teach in Municipal Schools for two years. The TFI fellows are high-performing and have demonstrated a visible impact on student's academic and holistic outcomes. TFI's website highlights that 900 TFI fellows are currently working in 260 under-resourced schools spread across eight cities of India, impacting 32000 students (TFI, n.d). Similarly, the Akanksha Foundation has created a scalable school model within the government system that drives wider systemic reform in education. Akanksha's network has grown to 26 schools in Mumbai, Pune, and Nagpur (The Akanksha Foundation, n.d).

Gyan Shala, a Gujarat-based NGO's robust alternative education model, is recognized as exemplary for providing quality education to poor children on par with what is available to high-income or elite social groups (Government of India, 2016). Gyan Shala centers provide education like any formal school

system, where classes are held within the community premises where children stay. Classrooms have furniture suitable for children and functional lighting and ventilation (Singh, 2016). Teachers belong to local communities, which helps them to build rapport with the students and their parents.

Ekal Vidyalaya focuses on rural and tribal education. They operate single-teacher schools in remote areas, bringing education to those who would not otherwise have access. Schools are located in informal, accessible places that are central to the village. Ekal's teachers have a minimum of a 10th-grade education. They undergo intense training to serve the pedagogy of the schools. 80% of Ekal's teachers are women. This influences families to educate girls. As per data reported till June 2023, there are 83,395 Ekal Schools in India, and 10 million children have gained literacy since 1986 (Ekal Vidyalaya, n.d). Quite a few of its alumni have become high-caliber teachers, District Officers, company administrators, and technocrats (Waghmare, 2019).

In alignment with SDG Target 4.7: '*Ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles*' (United Nations, n.d), NGOs like Sweccha, Teach for Green, Goonj, Teach for India, Deepalaya, and others are engaged in teaching children about conservation of environment. Inputs are given on environmental issues, their impact, solar energy usage, water conservation, waste management, and health. Students execute practical projects like making solar lamps, kitchen gardens, waste recycling, etc. Education on sustainable lifestyles at an early age helps children to understand how an individual's daily choices can impact the environment and their role in environmental conservation (Smile Foundation, 2023).

Innovative education models designed by leading NGOs/Social Enterprises have demonstrated the power of grassroots action to enhance access and improve the quality of basic education. According to Jagannathan (2020), the quality of education as perceived by NGOs extends beyond students' learning achievements. Acquisition of cognitive and non-cognitive abilities by children, a strong school-community link, relevance and contextuality of education are also considered to be important indicators of quality." The social impact

created by the innovative models deployed by NGOs has also influenced mainstream education by replicating their models through policy dialogue with the government.

5. Introduction of Semi-English Schools

To reduce the dropout rate from vernacular medium schools and meet the increasing demand from parents who aspired to send their children to English medium schools, many State Governments like Maharashtra, Punjab, Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, and a few others designed innovative approaches to convert regional schools to 'semi-English' schools. In such schools, few subjects like science and mathematics are taught in English, while the rest are taught in the local languages (Sardhana 2020). The Government of Maharashtra has introduced English as a subject from the first standard in Marathi-medium schools in 2000 (Aulakh & Bhosale, 2010).

6. STEM Education

To keep up with the technology-enabled world, it is essential to strengthen science, innovation, and technological knowledge and skills among school students. The Government of India has initiated the Atal Tinkering Lab (ATL) at the schools to promote scientific temperament, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills among students. The ATLs are working towards providing a flexible environment for school students to learn innovation skills and sculpt ideas through activities. The ATLs provide hands-on learning experiences and enable young students to create innovative solutions to real-world problems (PTI, 2022). There are currently 10,000 ATLs across 35 States in India (AIM (2023).

NGOs like the Society for Promotion of Science & Technology in India (SPSTI) and Agastya International Foundation (AIF) play crucial roles. AIF is popularizing science and technology through its outreach educational programs. AIF's state-of-the-art science labs in Kuppam provide 750 rural children and teachers with high-quality, hands-on learning programs in science, art, and ecology. It has scaled its reach to 22 States and established 95+ subsidiary science centers to provide lab and experiential learning facilities for government schools. To reach out to schools in remote locations, under-

resourced urban schools, and night schools, it has set up 160+ mobile science labs and 75+ labs on bikes. AIF also trains government school teachers in new science pedagogies

Experifun, a Bangalore-based social enterprise, has developed hands-on, innovative STEM products for K-12 in seven languages. Their services include setting up STEM Labs in schools and designing various STEM programs to drive learning outcomes among children through their EduVahini platform.

7. Technology based Innovations

The widespread use of digital technologies and internet penetration has enabled the creation of digital learning systems, digital resources, and educational technology solutions. This has contributed to advancing education delivery and reduced the impediments to equal access to education. Initiatives like "Digital India" and the development of digital learning platforms have expanded access to educational resources, especially in remote areas (Alam, 2020). Under the Digital India campaign, NCERT launched e-pathshala. This user-friendly portal provides digital textbooks, video content, grade learning content, audiobooks, and other educational resources to parents, teachers, and educators (Sajumon, 2023).

The COVID-19 pandemic prompted the shift to e-learning in India. It enabled state governments to rapidly implement technology-based solutions like the DIKSHA (Digital Infrastructure for Knowledge Sharing) platform for providing quality e-content for school education. QR-coded Energized Textbooks for all grades (PIB, 2020). Technology has enabled teachers both in rural and urban areas to provide education through online mode with the help of virtual whiteboards, virtual chemistry labs, math labs, problem-solving tools, digital tabs, and pens to reach out to learners. It is interesting to note that Ranjitsinh Disale, a government teacher from rural Maharashtra and winner of the Global Teacher Prize in 2020, used the edutainment technique to create a conducive learning environment. His efforts to embed quick-response (QR) code to textbooks of primary classes and provide links to audio poems, video lectures, stories, and assignments enthused the students. This resulted in achieving 100% attendance and retaining girls at school (Agrawal, 2022).

Open Educational Resources (OER), such as the National Repository of Open Educational Resources (NROER), has made quality educational materials freely available to teachers and students. Initiatives like the Teacher Education through Digital Content (TEDC) program aim to enhance teacher training through digital resources (Deivam, 2022). The Tamarind Tree School in Dahanu Taluka, Maharashtra, uses an open education model to facilitate learning among rural students. The school has set up its learning management system on Moodle (an open-source platform). Students from primary and secondary grades and their facilitators can log on to the platform to reference material for online and offline activities (Chawla, 2018).

The use of tech has opened newer ways to improve the learning and productivity of learners and teachers. For instance, the Pune-based Kahani Project aims to shape and mold children, including the visually impaired, by bringing stories within the reach of every child. The project uses crowd-sourcing to generate audio material. Then, it distributes them through its website or mp3 players given to visually impaired children in various institutes for the blind (Talreja, 2013). Technology has facilitated inclusion in schools (Shutaleva et al., 2023). Devices like Tarang, a digital programmable hearing device; Acoustic Torch, a navigation tool for the visually challenged; personal tutoring system for the hearing impaired; tactile devices, magnifiers, and screen readers have aided the specially-abled to access education (Syed, 2022).

NGOs have used innovative approaches to facilitate children's retention in the formal education system. (See Table 1)

Table 1
Innovative Approaches in School Education

Area	Organization	Description
Prevention of Child Marriage &	Institute of Health Management (IHMP), Pachod	To develop confidence and assertiveness, IHMP provides life skills education to unmarried adolescent girls

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Area	Organization	Description
Life Skills Education	(Aurangabad)	in rural and urban areas of Maharashtra. Girls are encouraged to develop their ability to negotiate with their parents and relatives the rationale for continuing their education and delaying marriage.
Night School	Masoom	Masoom is presently working in 95-night schools in Mumbai, Pune, and other districts of Maharashtra. Masoom plans to reach 120-night schools by 2025, impacting 25,000 students in Maharashtra.
Mobile School for Migrant Children	All India Citizens' Alliance for Progress & Development (AICAPD) (New Delhi & Haryana)	AICAPD mobile schools are set up where migrant families temporarily reside. This helps children to continue their education.
	TEJASASIA (New Delhi)	Operates four Mobile Schools in Delhi
Mobile Science Labs	Project Vigyan mobile science lab	The Gadchiroli District Administration of Maharashtra, through its Mobile Science Lab- Project Vigyan, is facilitating children's learning in chemistry, physics, and biology.
	Tech Mahindra Foundation	The foundation has designed a Mobile Lab that reaches various government schools in Delhi. The Mobile Lab provides hands-on lessons on environmental science and enables

Area	Organization	Description
		students to learn.
Vocational Education in Schools	Salaam Bombay Foundation	To create an empowered future, SBF complements classroom education with high-quality, contemporary vocational training. The training offered by SBF opens up opportunities for internships, self-employment, and entrepreneurship.
Teacher Training	Jnana Prabodhini's Educational Activity Research Centre (EARC)	EARC works under three domains - Nurturance of Intelligence, Teachers' Training, Research, and Resource Development.
Teaching Fellows	Teach for India	Engaging the brightest and most promising young graduates and professionals to drive social change and personal transformation
Sports & Education	Oscar Foundation	It uses football as a mechanism to encourage children to stay in school. The foundation equips them with educational and sports skills to make them future-ready.

Collated by Author from Multiple Secondary Sources

8. Support for Girl Child Education

Education for girls in India depends on a multitude of factors. Factors like safety, transportation, child marriage, migration, social stigmas, and

perceptions all play a role in determining whether or not a girl gets educated. To retain girls in formal education government has initiated various central schemes like Samgra Shiksha Abhiyan, Beti Bachao Beti Padho (BBBP), Balika Samriddhi Yojana, Pradhan Mantri Sukanya Yojana (PMKSY), and Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas (KGBV). State governments have initiated scholarship schemes and cycle schemes to enhance girls' enrollment and retention in schools. For example, the Maharashtra Government offers the Savitri Bai Phule Scholarship to female students belonging to Vimukta Jati Nomadic Tribes (VJNT) and Special Backward Classes (SBC) studying in Class V to 10 to help them pursue education without any monetary hindrance (Sharma, 2023).

Due to the efforts taken by the Government and NGOs over the last four decades, the dropout rates of girls in primary education have substantially reduced. However, there is still a long way to go in retaining girls in secondary schools. As per UDISE+ 2021-22 data, the average dropout rate for girls in primary school is 1.4 percent; at the upper primary level, it is 3.3 per cent, and subsequently, it has risen to 12.3 percent; at the secondary level (Department of School Education and Literacy, 2022).

NGOs have adopted strategic approaches to promote the education of girls belonging to marginalized and resource-poor communities. To enable girls to complete their education, the KC Mahindra Trust's Nanhi Kali girl child support and sponsorship program ensures girls belonging to underprivileged communities complete ten years of schooling. Girls are provided with academic mentorship support and an annual school supplies kit. Nanhi Kali community champions act as a pressure group to ensure girls do not drop out. As per the information available on its website, the Nanhi Kali has spread across nine States and so far has benefitted 550000+ girls (Nanhi Kali, n.d). Room to Read India, through its Girls' Education Program (GEP), provides life skills education, resources, and mentorship support to girls from grades 6 to 12 belonging to economically disadvantaged communities (Banerjee, 2021). Educate Girls, an NGO operational in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, and Uttar Pradesh, aims to increase the enrollment and retention of girls in schools by

training community volunteers and mobilizing local communities (Educate Girls, 2022).

To ensure that girls earn their livelihood, continue their education, and develop vocational skills, Prerna Girls' School, Lucknow, has adopted a unique "earn while you learn" model where students are taught vocational skills and regular academics. They produce handicrafts, which are sold to fund their education (Jaffer, 2015).

Technology has helped girls to access high-quality curricular and extracurricular education. For instance, Girl Effect, a global nonprofit, has launched Bol Behen Chatbot, which delivers health education to adolescent girls through mobile phones. Microsoft's The Girls' Guide to 21st Century India, in partnership with Going To School in Bihar, aims at designing and delivering an offline to online skills challenge platform for girls to enable them to learn computational thinking and coding skills and leverage the same to address/resolve problems in their communities.

9. Public Private Partnership

The private sector's engagement with school education was accelerated since 2001 with the launch of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA). Over the years, various states have implemented PPP models involving private entities in school management, infrastructure development, and service delivery (FICCI, 2014). The Atal Innovation Mission (AIM) and the National Education Policy 2020 further highlighted the role of PPPs in fostering holistic education and innovation. Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) in school education take various forms, addressing different aspects of the education system (Ansary & Behera, 2018), as displayed in Table 2

Table 2
PPPs in School Education

Aspect	Role of the Private Sector
Infrastructure Development	Private entities collaborate with the government to build or upgrade school infrastructure, including classrooms, libraries, and laboratories.
School Management:	Private organizations like the Bharti Foundation manage public schools, bringing efficiency, innovation, and accountability. This involves hiring teachers, implementing curriculum changes, and overseeing day-to-day operations.
Curriculum Development	Private organizations like Jodo Gyan, Pratham, AID India, and many others contribute to developing educational curricula, aligning them with global standards and incorporating innovative teaching methods.
Teacher Training:	NGOs like Jodo Gyan, Gyan Prabhodini, Bal Raksha Bharat, and others offer teacher training programs to enhance the skills and effectiveness of educators, ensuring a high standard of teaching in schools.
Technology Integration:	Private companies like IBM and TCS partner with schools to introduce technology in education, providing digital resources, online learning platforms, or tech-based teaching tools.
Skill Development Programs	Organizations like Salaam Bombay Foundation, Yuva Parivartan, Tech Mahindra, and others enhance students' skills by introducing vocational training programs or extracurricular activities in schools.

Collated by Author from Multiple Secondary Sources

10. Innovative Financing Mechanisms

One major barrier to attaining SDG 4 "is a gap between funding requirements and existing funding availability" (Ramaswamy et al., 2019). Addressing this gap requires innovative financing mechanisms. In the context of providing affordable education for the resource communities, the finance options available in India are described below:

10.1 Venture Education Fund

The government's inability to provide affordable quality education has resulted in a pent-up demand in parents from lower middle-class families. Philanthropic funding is insufficient to cater to all public and aided schools. Banking institutions and investors refuse to provide loans to NGOs. To address this gap, NBFCs like the Indian School Finance Company and Varthana provide medium-term loans to affordable private schools (Rao, 2021). Unitus Ventures, GSV Ventures, and Westbridge also fund Indian startups to provide affordable schooling to low-income families.

10.2 Impact bonds:

Ramaswamy et al. (2019) highlight that "Impact bonds allow private investors to provide capital upfront to service providers to help achieve social outcomes. Impact bonds are often executed by service providers and are evaluated for outcome achievement by an independent agency". In 2015, "The Educate Girls' Development Impact Bond by UBS Optimus Foundation (capital of USD 2,70,000) was contracted to increase the enrolment of school girls and improve learning outcomes for girls in Rajasthan" (Dalberg Advisors, 2018). New impact bonds are being contracted in India, and the market is set to grow further (International Expert Report, 2012)

10.3 School Vouchers

Economic, social, and cultural factors often influence the demand for schooling. Free education does not always entice low-income families. Hence, demand-side financing through the introduction of School vouchers/ Education vouchers may be more efficient. For instance, the Government of Madhya Pradesh 2010 introduced the 'Paraspar Scheme' through which the government transferred Rs. 3000 to private schools instead of per-student

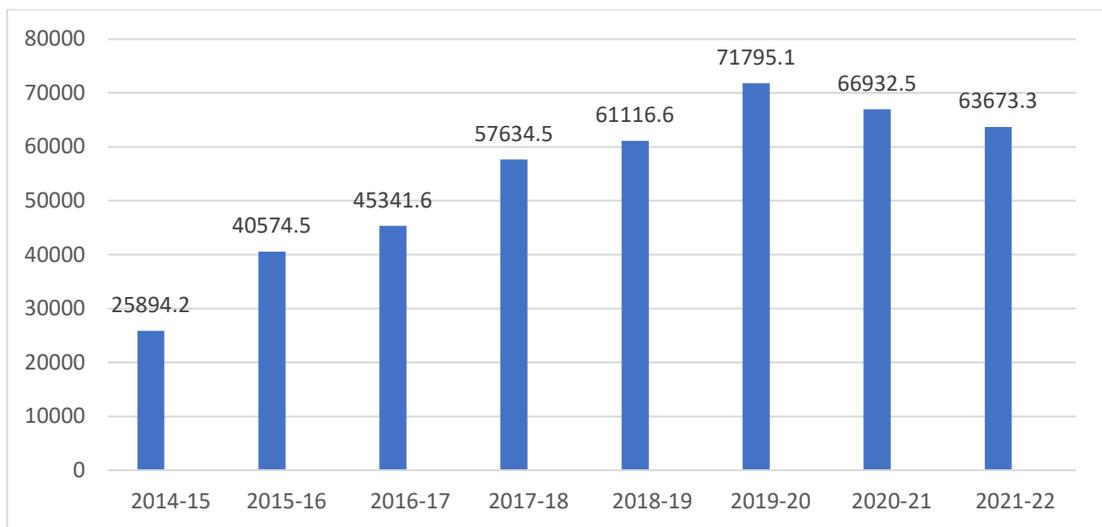
expenses (Fong et al., 2016). A few districts of Uttarakhand, Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh, and Gujarat have also introduced the Voucher system.

10.4 CSR Funding

Funding support through CSR has significantly facilitated a more equitable and accessible education environment for the underprivileged. The mandatory feature of CSR was introduced through Sec 135 in the Companies Act in 2013 and became effective in April 2014. Businesses with a net worth over INR 5000 million, sales over INR 1 billion, or net profit over INR 50 million are required to contribute a minimum of 2% of their net profit over the preceding three years as CSR. Schedule VII of the Companies Act 2013 notifies the types of community development activities corporations can take up (MCA, 2021).

As per the Ministry of Corporate Affairs data, from April 2014 to March 2022, the total CSR expenditure across all sectors amounted to INR 1,535.51 Billion; from this, 28.2 per cent (432.96 Billion INR) was allocated towards School Education (MCA, 2023). See Fig 1 for year-wise CSR spent in education- 2014-2022.

Fig 1 CSR Spent on Education 2014-2022(Amount in INR- Million)



Source: National Portal for CSR

11. Role of Corporates

Education is a national priority. It is a notified area for CSR spend under Schedule VII of Section 135 of the Companies Act. The relationship between education and business is symbiotic. Businesses realize that investment in education has the potential to create shared value. The lack of appropriate educational opportunities for children has far-reaching consequences. Companies cannot thrive in communities that are uneducated and unskilled. Many corporations have partnered with NGOs specializing in education to implement and scale their initiatives effectively.

In alignment with SDG' *Target 4. A: Build and upgrade education facilities that are child, disability, and gender-sensitive and provide safe, non-violent, inclusive, and effective learning environments* (United Nations, n.d); corporations like HUL, ONGC, Indian Oil, BPCL, and others have invested in building and renovating school infrastructure in economically disadvantaged areas. This includes constructing classrooms, providing clean water and sanitation facilities, and creating conducive learning environments. A study conducted by United Way Mumbai and CSR Box (2018) on 'Perspectives on Better Education through CSR, in India' highlights that 48 per cent of CSR spend is invested in strengthening the school infrastructure. Investment in Sanitation and WASH infrastructure is around 57 per cent of the CSR, and 60 per cent of companies have spent CSR funds on Digital and Computer education. According to the study, these investments may have been influenced to strengthen the Central and State Government's campaign for Swacch Bharat and Digital Education (United Way & CSR Box, 2018).

Various philanthropic foundations like the Azim Premji Foundation, Tata Trusts, Bharti Foundation, Reliance Foundation, and several others have made substantial investments in education-related projects, promoting innovation in teaching and learning. They have funded vocational training programs for underprivileged youth to equip them with skills for future employment.

Corporate foundations actively support educational and social innovations through their wide range of programs and initiatives (*See Table 3*). Corporations offer funding and in-kind support to schools and needy

students. To bridge the digital divide, many IT companies, such as Infosys, TCS, Wipro, and others, donate computers, tablets, and internet connectivity to schools in rural and remote areas. They fund various projects related to digital education, teacher training, and school infrastructure development. Nestle India, Lenovo India, Adobe Systems India, and a few others support STEM education.

Table 3

Corporate Foundation & Educational Activities

Corporate Foundations	Activities
Tata Trusts	Have been actively involved in education-related CSR initiatives. They have supported the construction of schools in remote areas, provided scholarships, and funded teacher training programs.
The Infosys Foundation	Has been involved in various educational initiatives, including setting up computer-aided learning centers in rural schools, sponsoring mid-day meal programs, and supporting underprivileged students through scholarships.
Ambuja Cement Foundation	Has worked on improving rural education by constructing classrooms, providing sanitation facilities, and offering teacher training programs in remote villages.
The Adani Foundation	Has established Adani Vidya Mandirs in underdeveloped regions, offering students free education, books, uniforms, and meals. They also run initiatives to enhance the quality of education.
Reliance Foundation	Has been active in promoting education. They have established schools and educational institutions, provided scholarships, and offered digital literacy programs for underprivileged communities.

HCL Foundation	Has undertaken various projects to promote digital education in rural areas. They have provided computer labs and digital learning materials to government schools.
Bharti Foundation	Development of Language and Computer Labs in Satya Bharti Senior Secondary Schools, Advanced Technology Labs in schools in Punjab, with a focus on robotics and game development. Construction of Digital classrooms in schools across Punjab and Haryana.
NASSCOM Foundation	Robotics corners are created in schools in Gurgaon to provide students with much-needed hands-on skills in emerging technologies.

Collated by Author from Multiple Secondary Sources

11.1 Employee Engagement

Employee Engagement in CSR has complemented the efforts of the NGOs by organizing fundraising events or donation drives within the company to support educational causes, such as providing textbooks, school supplies, or scholarships to underprivileged students in rural and underserved communities. Employees also organize charity events like marathons, fun runs, or charity auctions, with the proceeds going toward educational causes. Employees of Wipro, Tata Motors, Mahindra, Infosys, Tata Powers, and others have utilized their unique skills and expertise to mentor students and create workshops or training sessions for students, focusing on areas like technology, career guidance, or soft skills development. They have also implemented initiatives to enhance digital literacy and teacher training. (See Table 4)

Table 4
Employee Engagement to Strengthen School Education

Companies	Employee Engagement Activities
Tata Consultancy	TCS has implemented various education-focused CSR initiatives. The 'Literacy Program' encourages TCS

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Services (TCS)	employees to volunteer as literacy instructors at their learning centers in rural areas.
Infosys	Employee volunteers are engaged in developing the digital skills of students and teachers, enhancing the school's technical infrastructure, and bolstering pre-primary education in public schools.
Wipro	"Applying Thought in Schools" initiative focuses on improving school education. Employees are engaged in various volunteering activities, including teaching and mentoring students and providing scholarships to deserving students.
HCL Technologies	The "Power of One" program involves employees in multiple social causes, including education. Employees volunteer in government schools, teaching subjects like mathematics and computer literacy.
Microsoft India	It has initiatives like "Microsoft Educator Community" and "Microsoft YouthSpark" that engage employees in education-related projects. Employees volunteer their time and expertise to support students and teachers.
CISCO India	Cisco's "Cisco Networking Academy" offers courses on IT and networking. Employees often volunteer as instructors or mentors to help students develop IT skills.
Reliance Industries Limited	Employees volunteer through the "Reliance Education for All" program, which works on improving educational access.

Collated by Author from Multiple Secondary Sources

It can be inferred from the above discussion that corporations in India are getting engaged in addressing some of India's most intractable social problems, like improving access to quality education. The examples cited above testify that educational initiatives undertaken by corporations have a long-term perspective and ensure the creation of shared value.

12. Summing Up

The Government of India acknowledges that access to quality education is a prerequisite for reducing poverty (SDG 1) and social inequities (SDG 10), promoting gender quality (SDG 3), and attaining sustainable development. NGOs, social enterprises, and corporations have collaborated with the government to expand educational opportunities to resource-poor communities. While there has been substantial progress in educational attainments, "we still have to tackle the unfinished business of the Education for All Agenda" (Tang, 2015). There is an increased demand for learners and teachers to build new competencies and abilities that align with the global trends of a technologically dominated world. In this context, NEP 2020 proposes a major transformation in delivering education to make students future-ready. The aspirations set by NEP 2020 can be fulfilled through strong political will and the commitment of various stakeholders of the educational ecosystem.

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Chapter - IV

**MENTORING FOR QUALITY EDUCATION:
CASE OF EDYOUTH LEARNING
FOUNDATION**

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Abstract

EDYOUTH LEARNING FOUNDATION (ELF) strategically addresses gaps in India's educational ecosystem among underprivileged youth by offering quality education, mentorship, and career guidance. Stemming from the challenges seen during the founder's volunteer work, ELF tackles issues like dissatisfaction with tuition classes and the lack of career guidance. Concentrating on Mumbai's urban slums, ELF's strategic intent extends beyond academics, focusing extensively on personal counseling. Aligned with the National Education Policy (NEP), ELF embodies empowerment, equity and educational excellence, ensuring a strategic fit to bridge the educational divide prevalent in the ecosystem and nurture the aspirations of the underprivileged youth.

1. Introduction

The lack of quality education and orientation is a widespread issue globally, particularly pronounced in emerging market economies (EMEs) like India. The challenge is exacerbated by the significant size of the bottom-of-the-pyramid (BOP) population in India. The United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 4 emphasizes the need for all countries, in line with the UN Charter, to empower the BOP population with quality education, recognized as a fundamental right in the Indian Constitution.

However, due to resource constraints, governments in such countries struggle to provide adequate educational services. This is where stakeholders from the solidarity economy, including Non-Government Organizations (NGOs), play a crucial role. India has seen the proliferation of NGOs addressing socio-economic issues, including education. The New Education Policy (NEP) 2020 in India underscores the importance of a comprehensive framework for education, with a particular focus on NGOs providing Value Based Education (VBE) to achieve UN SDG 4 targets by 2030 (Singh, n.d.).

While NEP 2020 advocates changes across all education levels, it prioritizes higher education, recognizing its role in social mobility, creativity, critical thinking, and employment skill development. Data from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) “reinforces the importance of higher education, with degree holders being more employable and earning substantially more than those with senior secondary education”. A university-inclusive education is seen as a means to address multiple Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including poverty reduction, hunger prevention, health and well-being, gender equality, decent work, economic growth, and reducing inequalities (Jesiah, 2023).

However, the unfortunate reality in India is that quality education has become an exclusive right of the privileged, leading to a widening gap in the education system—an institutional gap. In response to this gap, *Edyouth Learning Foundation (ELF)* was established in Juhu, Mumbai, with a mission to cater to the distinctive needs of college-going youths from underprivileged sections.

ELF's mission originated from the founders' experiences during volunteer work from 2014 to 2020, where they witnessed educational disparities in the Juhu slums. Dissatisfaction among youths with available tuition classes and a lack of guidance and mentorship became apparent issues. The COVID-19 pandemic further aggravated the institutional gap, forcing institutions to transition to online learning, disproportionately affecting students from underprivileged sections.

In response, ELF began its mission during the pandemic, realizing the need for a comprehensive solution combining quality education with mentorship. The foundation emerged as a response to the pressing need to fill voids in educational opportunities and guidance, particularly for those already facing socio-economic challenges. ELF was born as a catalyst for change, driven by a commitment to addressing the evolving needs of the students they sought to empower.

1.1 State of Education in Urban Slums - Tuition Classes

Education is important for any country's economic prosperity. With rise in urbanization, there has been a steep growth in the number of urban slums. "The majority of the urban poor are unskilled or semi-skilled workers. The plight of the urban poor in slum regions stems mostly from their inability to keep up with the skilled workforce and afford a respectable level of living. To ensure higher economic growth, it is essential to raise the educational levels of the urban poor. The access to quality education for youths in slums in India is still at subliminal levels." An analysis of National Statistical Organisation (NSO) 2021 data shows that affordable education is a larger problem that needs to be seriously discussed (Importance of Education in Slums in India., 2022).

"The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act, 2009, has a mandatory no-detention provision, under which students up to class VIII cannot fail. The order was meant to check the drop-out rate, but major fallout was that more parents began to send their children to private tuition to ensure that their education didn't suffer. Parents of very young children began to look to private tuition as an alternative and, more importantly, a channel of

learning. Never before have more students attended private tuition in India. A 2013 survey by the Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry of India (ASSOCHAM) pegged the private tuition industry at ₹ 1.6 trillion, a 35% increase since 2008". This is estimated to be atleast close to ₹ 3 trillion in today's times (Ratnam, 2016).

As per a 2016 survey by the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO), *'one out of every four students takes private tuition'*, close to 71 million students. Interestingly, the report pointed out that *"children from lower-income-group families access private tuitions as much as children from higher-income groups"* (Ratnam, 2016). Ms. Sethulakshmi, Managing Director of Sethu Foundation in *'Slum children struggle with resource deficits in education'*, highlighted, *"In urban slums, tuitions are offered by low-quality private centers manned by untrained and unqualified people in slum communities. Families are forced to spend an average of Rs. 1000/- to Rs. 1500/-a month on tuition fees, as they see no improvement in their academic performance. Parents are daily wage earners who want to see their children do well and build a different, more promising future for themselves"* (TNN,2023).

The underprivileged & marginalized sections of society must be enabled to realize their full potential. They have to be empowered to have equal representation in professional services and niche sectors in the country. *"Special attention should be given to gifted students who live in every corner of the country by giving them access to the education and support that their more privileged counterparts already have in their homes, schools, and communities."* This can be achieved through career guidance and mentorship to all the students (Goyal, 2020).

1.2 Career Guidance & Mentorship

Prateek Bhargava, founder of Edtech startup Mindler in *'The growing importance of career guidance'*, validates *"Career guidance can help students understand their strengths, weaknesses, and interests, and provide them with a clearer picture of the career paths available to them. This can include information on different industries, job roles, and the skills and qualifications required to succeed in a given field"* (Bhargava, 2023). He further highlights,

“Career guidance also provides students with practical support in areas such as resume writing, interview skills, and job search strategies. This can help students make a successful transition into the workforce and achieve their career goals. When they are made aware of options, they are better aware and can make informed decisions. We have witnessed a pandemic, a war, and literally a global crisis.

Education has had its own set of challenges. From online to hybrid or both, we are still making sense of what is there to come next. In all this uncertainty, it has been very difficult for students, to navigate a smooth career trajectory or even plan their higher education” (Bhargava, 2023). Informed decisions for career growth are only possible through proper mentorship of the slum youths. There is a need for adequate & credible mentorship, which requires perseverance and commitment from the service provider. Hence, mentoring is an ongoing process that can provide the best possible outcome to the mentee (Majumdar, 2023).

College going youths from marginalized backgrounds, have a comparative disadvantage vis-à-vis their privileged counterparts. “Challenging home environments, under-resourced schools and colleges, the lack of funds to enroll in coaching institutes/ tuition classes, and *the absence of trained mentors*” – all play a role in the adverse condition of the slum youths. A failure to address these challenges ensures that inequity and lack of representation will persist, inhibiting the development and economic growth of India. (Goyal, 2020)

2. About EDYOUTH LEARNING FOUNDATION (ELF)

ELF, a visionary initiative conceived by Vidur Dhabaria, took shape when he delved into volunteer work at the age of sixteen years. His passion for teaching blossomed as he engaged with students ranging from grades seven to twelve in the Juhu slums. With a remarkable ability to simplify complex concepts, Vidur emerged as an inspirational figure and mentor for underprivileged students. The challenges faced by these students were multifaceted, including poor English speaking skills, difficulty in understanding concepts taught in tuition classes, parental pressure, and a lack of resources.

Expanding his teaching endeavors to the slums of Malad, Vidur encountered similar challenges. Conducting personal interviews with twenty children in grades nine and ten provided deeper insights into their struggles. It became clear that these students were dissatisfied with the quality of tuition classes, grappling to comprehend fundamental concepts, and lacked clarity on the academic stream to pursue post-grade ten.

Recognizing the urgency of addressing these issues, Vidur made a pivotal decision to initiate a pilot project focused on teaching and mentoring college-bound youths, with a specialization in the field of Commerce. Encouraging feedback from the pilot program laid the foundation for "edYouth." Following the advice of his parents and aunt, Vidur chose to name the initiative "edYouth Learning," symbolizing "education for the youth." His confidence in the demand for a learning center, at multiple locations in Mumbai, was a driving force behind this decision, aiming to provide quality education.

The founder's vision extended beyond conventional education. He aspired to establish a contemporary, physical learning center designed "for the youth, by the youth." This unique approach aimed to address educational disparities among underprivileged youth holistically. It went beyond imparting quality education, encompassing mentorship and career guidance to bridge educational gaps and empower the younger generation. The logo of ELF, with the tagline "knowledge kindles light," encapsulated the dream that every youth should pursue and complete their higher education.

In July 2021, ELF was formally registered as a Section 8 Company under the Companies Act, 2013 known as "EDYOUTH LEARNING FOUNDATION (ELF)". The Board of Directors comprised Vidur Dhabaria, an MBA in Social Entrepreneurship with over 8 years of experience in social work mainly related to education and tutoring and guiding college going youth, and his aunt, Jayshree Dhabaria, a Trustee of Vivekananda Youth Forum with over 15 years of experience in education and an MBA in Finance. *To date, the foundation has provided quality education, career guidance, and mentorship to 160 youths, solidifying its commitment to illuminating the educational journey of underprivileged youth.*

3. About the Model – Quality Education

Much like traditional tuition classes, ELF consciously identifies itself as a "learning center". Since its inception, ELF initially operated from three distinct locations across Mumbai – Juhu, Malad, and Virar. However, in a strategic move to enhance operational efficiency, the organization narrowed its focus and started focusing exclusively on its Juhu operations, where it boasts of two learning centers coexisting within the same premises. These centers were meticulously designed to provide an optimal learning environment, featuring amenities such as air-conditioning, modern benches, and inspirational wall art, catering specifically to students hailing from nearby slums.

Taking an inclusive approach to education, ELF offers classes across all three major streams – Commerce, Science, and Arts – designed to support youths pursuing higher secondary education and graduation. Students are required to pay monthly fees based on their chosen subjects, contributing to the sustainability of the learning initiative. The individuals who selflessly dedicate their time to teaching these students are referred to as "mentors" by ELF. Before each academic year, the organization collaborates with its partners and employs social media channels to recruit mentors. The selection process involves demo classes, with student feedback playing a pivotal role in determining the acceptance or rejection of mentors. To further bolster their effectiveness, mentors undergo comprehensive training to equip them with the necessary skills to engage, educate, and guide youths from low-income communities. The founders contribute their insights, sharing special tips and tricks to ensure the delivery of high-quality education.

The learning process is systematically organized, with batches formed according to academic streams and grades, each allocated a fixed time slot of 1.5 hours. At the commencement of the academic year, ELF provides students with new textbooks and easy-to-understand notes, eliminating barriers to access. Classes are conducted rigorously, operating in the mornings, afternoons, and evenings for six days a week. On Sundays, students engage in the invaluable practice of writing test papers, allowing ELF to gauge their academic progress and comprehension of the material. To maintain

accountability and transparency, attendance records for both students and mentors are diligently recorded using Google Forms and Google Sheets.

Two months before the Final examinations, ELF introduces an additional layer of preparation. The organization conducts a comprehensive series of full portion tests and preliminary examinations at a reputable school near the ELF premises. This strategic initiative serves as a crucial measure to assess the student's readiness for their final examinations, providing valuable insights into areas that require additional focus and refinement. By integrating this meticulous examination process, ELF not only imparts knowledge but also fine-tunes the academic journey of underprivileged youths, ensuring a holistic and well-rounded educational experience. ELF strives not only to fill educational gaps but to empower and uplift the future generations it touches, fostering an environment where every young mind has the opportunity to thrive despite systemic challenges.

Continuing the narrative, to celebrate the outstanding achievements of deserving students, ELF annually orchestrates a distinguished event known as ELFA - EDYOUTH LEARNING FOUNDATION AWARDS. During this ceremonious occasion, students are felicitated with certificates, trophies, and books by Swami Vivekananda. The palpable joy radiating from the faces of these students is particularly poignant, as many of them had never encountered such profound recognition and acknowledgment before. This annual awards ceremony stands as a testament to ELF's unwavering commitment to not only provide quality education but also to uplift and celebrate the successes of underprivileged youth, fostering a sense of achievement and motivation for their future endeavors.

3.1 Career Guidance and Mentorship

Following the students' completion of their Board examinations, ELF extends its commitment to their holistic development by collaborating with a robust partner who shares a deep belief in the mission of ELF. In a strategic move to guide these youths toward well-informed academic and career decisions, a comprehensive process unfolds over two days. Aptitude tests and personality

assessments, conducted with precision, delve into the individual strengths, aptitudes, and personalities of the students.

These crucial evaluations go beyond conventional examinations, providing a nuanced understanding of the student's intellectual capacities, personality traits, and areas of academic interest. The results of these assessments are shared not only with the students but also with a family member, recognizing the integral role of familial support in shaping a student's educational journey.

The detailed reports include insights into the students' IQ levels, and personality characteristics, and suggest academic fields that align with their inherent strengths. Additionally, the reports guide them toward specific courses that would be a natural fit for their abilities and inclinations. This personalized approach ensures that the educational path chosen is not only academically rewarding but also resonates with the individual's unique attributes.

Complementing these assessments, ELF conducts workshops aimed at facilitating informed decisions regarding graduation courses. These workshops leverage the insights gleaned from the aptitude and personality tests, providing a structured framework for students to choose courses that align seamlessly with their tested aptitudes and aspirations.

By offering this meticulous guidance, ELF not only addresses the immediate challenges of the students but also lays a robust foundation for their future academic and professional pursuits. The two-day process becomes a pivotal moment in the student's educational journey, guiding them toward courses and careers that resonate with their inherent strengths, and setting the stage for a fulfilling and purpose-driven higher education experience. ELF goes beyond the traditional boundaries of education, fostering a supportive ecosystem that empowers students to make informed choices and navigate their future with confidence.

3.2 Personal Counselling

Navigating the critical age bracket of 16-20, the youths engaged with ELF often grapple with personal challenges stemming from family dynamics, friendships, and even relationships. Recognizing the nuanced nature of these concerns, the founders play an active role in offering not just academic support but also personal guidance. In instances involving minor issues, the founders personally intervene, taking the time to sit down with the students, understand their problems, and provide thoughtful solutions.

Given that these students hail from low-income communities, they frequently encounter difficulties in sharing their personal or teenage problems with their families. Trust becomes a paramount factor, and the founders, through their approachability and friendly demeanor, establish themselves as confidants. Consequently, the students find solace in confiding in the founders, seeking guidance and support as they navigate the complexities of adolescence.

Understanding the need for professional intervention in certain cases, ELF has appointed a dedicated counselor. This qualified professional visits the premises every month, equipped to handle extreme cases that may surpass the expertise and experience of the founders. The counselor provides a confidential and safe space for the students to express their concerns, offering expert insights and strategies to cope with and overcome personal challenges. This multifaceted approach emphasizes ELF's commitment to the holistic well-being of the youths it serves.

Beyond the realm of academics, the organization acknowledges and addresses the personal struggles of these students, ensuring that they have a supportive environment where they can navigate the intricacies of adolescence with guidance, understanding, and professional support. In doing so, ELF not only fulfills its mission to bridge educational gaps but also endeavors to empower the next generation on a personal and emotional level, fostering resilience and well-rounded growth.

3.3 Workshops, Events, and Outings

In its commitment to providing a well-rounded educational experience, ELF

goes beyond academic support and personal guidance by actively organizing a diverse array of events, workshops, and outings, ensuring exposure to the outside world and a welcome break from studies. The frequency of at least one event, workshop, or outing each month creates a dynamic and engaging environment for the students, fostering a holistic approach to their development.

Festivals and important days hold a special place in ELF's calendar. The organization actively celebrates cultural events such as Navratri, Diwali, and Christmas, fostering a sense of shared joy among the students. Additionally, significant occasions like National Youth Day, which holds particular relevance to ELF's mission, are commemorated with enthusiasm and purpose.

The workshops curated by ELF are designed to impart practical skills that extend beyond the classroom. These include enhancing communication skills, interview techniques, and mental health well-being, among others. The objective is to equip the youths with skills that will help them in their academic and professional careers.

Beyond workshops, ELF arranges events and outings that offer students exposure to a spectrum of experiences. Visits to factories/corporate entities provide a tangible link between academic learning and real-world implementation, while attendance at football or cricket matches fosters a sense of camaraderie and sportsmanship. Impactful movie sessions are also incorporated into the agenda, providing a unique and engaging way to explore different perspectives and ideas. Each year in January, ELF students are also invited at one of Mumbai's most prestigious school - Dhirubhai Ambani International School, for their Annual Festival - "DAIS Fete" which is an annual carnival organized by the school students.

These diverse activities serve a dual purpose. Firstly, they offer a valuable respite from the routine of studies, infusing a sense of novelty and excitement. Secondly, these events and outings expose the students to experiences they might not have encountered otherwise, broadening their horizons and enriching their perspectives.

By integrating these elements into the educational journey, ELF ensures that the youths not only excel academically but also develop into well-rounded individuals with a broader worldview and a diverse skill set. In essence, ELF's approach extends far beyond the confines of a traditional learning center, fostering an environment where each student can thrive academically, personally, and culturally.

3.4 Part-time Internships and Job Opportunities

Beyond the regular academic curriculum, career guidance, and mentorship, ELF has wisely identified the imperative to offer part-time internships and job opportunities to its students. Recognizing that some students are eager to learn and earn, while for others, contributing to the family income is a pressing necessity, the founders have seamlessly integrated real-world work experiences into the ELF framework.

The success of this initiative is evidenced by the placement of eight students in diverse workplaces, ranging from corporate offices to eateries, coffee joints, and even gyms. The tasks assigned to the students span a spectrum of responsibilities, including data entry, cash management, and food preparation. These part-time internships not only provide a valuable source of income for those in need but also instill a sense of responsibility and practical skills, contributing to the holistic development of the students.

By bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application, ELF ensures that its students are not just academically proficient but are also equipped with real-world skills and experiences that enhance their employability and broaden their perspectives. This multi-faceted approach underscores ELF's commitment to nurturing well-rounded individuals who are not only adept in their academic pursuits but are also prepared for the challenges and opportunities of the professional realm.

4. Social Impact Under Discussion

Vinayak Ahire embarked on his academic journey by pursuing a Bachelor's degree in Commerce and became one of the inaugural enrollees at ELF in its inception year of 2021. Fast forward to the present, at the age of 20, Vinayak

has not only successfully navigated his academic pursuits but has also ventured into the professional realm. For the past two years, he has been employed at a renowned specialty coffee joint in the bustling city of Mumbai, a placement facilitated by the founders of ELF through their extensive network.

Despite hailing from a disadvantaged background, Vinayak's motivation to achieve more remains unwavering. His childhood was full of adversity, with the passing of his father. His mother, operating a cobbler shop on the streets of Mumbai, has been reliant on Vinayak to manage the daily household expenses. In the face of these challenges, Vinayak's association with ELF has been transformative, describing it as a "once in a lifetime" experience.

What sets Vinayak's journey apart is not just his academic and professional accomplishments, but his ability to balance multiple responsibilities. Working diligently at the coffee joint, attending college, and actively participating in ELF classes, Vinayak exemplifies resilience and dedication. His favorite subject, Marketing, has fueled his aspirations to embark on an entrepreneurial venture.

Looking towards the future, Vinayak dreams of establishing his specialty coffee brand. Armed with a meticulously prepared business plan, he has leveraged the opportunities provided by ELF to present his visionary idea to a select group of High Net Worth Individuals (HNIs) from the creative space. Vinayak's journey is not only a testament to his personal grit but also underscores the transformative impact that education, mentorship, and a supportive community can have on the aspirations and achievements of individuals from underprivileged backgrounds. Vinayak's story embodies the ethos of ELF – not just closing educational gaps, but empowering young minds to dream big and turn those dreams into tangible successes.

5. Challenges faced by the Foundation:

Some of the challenges faced by ELF while implementing its diverse offerings have been discussed in detail below. The learnings and solutions have also been included to showcase how these challenges have been overcome.

5.1 Irregular attendance of some students in daily classes:

Attendance at ELF is not only a commitment but a discipline instilled to foster a dedicated learning environment. If a student misses a class, a message to the Founders is mandatory. Some students faltered with irregular attendance due to demotivation, involvement in household chores, or occasional lethargy. ELF emphasizes discipline, ensuring parents are promptly informed about their child's absence and the missed educational content. A proactive system now requires parents to call and notify the founders if their child is unable to attend class for any reason, creating a collaborative approach to maintain consistent attendance and academic engagement.

5.2 Recruiting dedicated and passionate Mentors:

In the initial stages, the founders of ELF faced a significant challenge in sourcing and onboarding dedicated mentors for their educational initiative. While leveraging personal networks and persuading friends to assist in emergency cases, finding passionate mentors remained a hurdle. Recognizing the need for a structured approach, ELF forged a valuable collaboration with a platform that connects volunteers with NGOs.

Through this collaboration and additional partnerships with social groups and colleges, ELF successfully addressed the mentorship gap for the current academic year. The collaboration facilitated the seamless onboarding of mentors who shared the vision of empowering underprivileged youth through education. The results have been fruitful, and this collaborative effort is slated to continue, ensuring a sustained and robust youth mentorship network for the students at ELF.

5.3 Fundraising to meet rising expenses and scale-up:

ELF embarked on its journey with the founders initially investing their capital. The vision for financial sustainability led ELF to primarily rely on income generated from student fees, prompting the organization to accommodate as many students as possible. However, to ensure the seamless continuation of operations and the fulfillment of their educational mission, additional funds were essential. These funds were allocated for acquiring study materials, compensating mentors, and supporting the education of deserving students.

In November 2021, ELF took a significant step towards securing its financial future by applying for 80G registration and offering tax benefits to the organization's donors. Since its inception, ELF has annually raised funds independently, drawing support from the founders' family and friends. Additionally, financial assistance has been received from partner organizations that share a commitment to bridging educational gaps for underprivileged youth. This collaborative effort highlights the dedication of the ELF community to ensuring continued access to quality education and mentorship for those who need it the most.

6. Conclusion

The trajectory of ELF encapsulates a powerful narrative of bridging educational divides within underserved communities. The National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020) has identified that students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds require encouragement and support to make a successful transition to higher education. The policy highlights that “effective learning requires a comprehensive approach that involves appropriate curriculum, engaging pedagogy, continuous formative assessment, and adequate student support. Thus, curriculum, pedagogy, continuous assessment, and student support are the cornerstones of quality learning. Along with providing suitable resources and infrastructure, several initiatives will be required to ensure that learning environments are engaging and supportive, and enable all students to succeed”. It also emphasized “the presence of outstanding and enthusiastic institutional leaders who cultivate excellence and innovation as the need of the hour”.

ELF's strategically chosen model of integrating quality education, mentorship, and career guidance, stands as an example of transformative impact. Despite the inevitable hurdles encountered, ELF's remarkable resilience and spirit of collaboration have not only weathered challenges but have propelled the foundation toward greater heights. More than merely filling educational gaps, ELF is a catalyst for the empowerment of young minds, instilling in them the belief that they can aspire to and achieve extraordinary success. Beyond academic triumphs, ELF becomes a force for societal change, challenging

deep-rooted structures and fostering a future marked by inclusivity and equity.

As ELF continues its journey, it stands not only as a beacon of hope but as a dynamic force driving positive and lasting change in the lives of the next generation, heralding a future characterized by empowerment, equality, and educational excellence.

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Chapter V

**SUSTAINABLE EDUCATION MODEL FOR
EMPOWERING UNDERPRIVILEGED
COMMUNITIES**

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Abstract

The Akanksha Foundation has completed more than thirty years of educating underprivileged children. The journey of The Akanksha Foundation is inspirational and its impact in transforming the educational landscape for marginalized communities has been profound. The organization has developed a scalable school model and supported the U.N.'s sustainable

development goals of no poverty, good health and well-being, quality education, and gender equality. This chapter discusses The Akanksha Foundation's journey so far, its transformative educational impact on underprivileged communities, and the challenges that it faces in the future. (Henceforth The Akanksha Foundation is referred as Akanksha Foundation)

INTRODUCTION

Akanksha Foundation is an NGO that started in 1991 with a vision of delivering high-quality education to every child, irrespective of his or her background. The first Akanksha center started with one classroom and 15 students, and today's Akanksha's network has grown to 26 schools. Akanksha Foundation fills an institutional void caused by the substantial educational and skill development obstacles experienced by underserved children. The foundation was founded more than three decades ago in response to the significant inequalities in formal education systems, particularly in marginalized groups. These gaps maintained poverty cycles and significantly limited the options accessible to underprivileged children, necessitating intervention.

The organization recognized early on that traditional formal education frequently fails to reach children in disadvantaged and economically constrained communities. To overcome this educational gap, Akanksha began with non-formal education, establishing centers to provide extra learning resources to children who did not have access to quality schooling. This stage of the foundation's journey attempted to address the urgent learning gaps in these communities by providing educational assistance in areas such as mathematics, language, and values.

On the other hand, understanding the long-term impact required a more strategic approach. The transition from non-formal to formal education represented a watershed moment in Akanksha's goal. The organization recognized that a complete and excellent English medium education that coincided with mainstream educational standards was required to break the cycle of poverty and empower underprivileged children. Akanksha conducted its first school intervention in government schools in 2003 and initiated The

School Project by adopting its first municipal school in 2007. This strategic decision represented Akanksha's dedication to offering a holistic learning experience to provide children with the skills and information required to compete on a larger social scale. This has resulted in Akanksha's network of 26 innovative schools in partnership with local municipal corporations to provide free, high-quality education to children from low-income communities in Pune, Mumbai, and Nagpur. For over twenty years now, Akanksha Foundation has successfully created pathways out of poverty for underprivileged children through transformative education, where students complete high school, go for higher education, and eventually get employed.

In India, more than 50 million primary school students still need to possess the Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN) skills necessary for success in upper grades. In alignment with the Government's New Education Policy, Akanksha Foundation is working with over 190 public schools in partnership with two municipal corporations to bridge this gap. The organization aims to impact more than 500 public schools, 5000 educators, and 80,000 students in the next five years. By addressing this educational gap, Akanksha hopes to break down the barriers that perpetuate poverty cycles, unlocking the full potential of these children and providing them with a path to a brighter future.

1. ABOUT AKANKSHA FOUNDATION

The first Akanksha center was started by the founder, Shaheen Mistri, with 15 students in a classroom donated by Holy Name High School in Colaba, with the realization that thousands of children did not have access to quality education. Slowly, Akanksha Foundation expanded its after-school centers, achieving milestones such as launching Art for Akanksha in 1996 and beginning operations in Pune in collaboration with Thermax Social Initiatives Foundation in 2000. By 16 years after its initiation, Akanksha established 60 after-school programs in underutilized venues to serve more than 3,000 underprivileged children. These programs are staffed by professional instructors, volunteers, and social workers. Since its beginnings, the Akanksha Foundation has been on a revolutionary journey led by the visionary Shaheen Mistri. The foundation's history, which began more than three decades ago,

illustrates a dynamic response to the educational problems that impoverished children face. Shaheen Mistri's involvement with Teach for India, a fellowship program aimed at ending educational inequality, demonstrates her dedication to bringing about positive change in the educational scene.

Akanksha initially focused on non-formal education, recognizing early interventions needed to overcome learning inequalities. This stage of the foundation's journey created the foundations for future endeavors by constructing centers that provided essential education in language, math, and values to children from underserved neighborhoods. In 2007-08, Akanksha entered into a public-private collaboration with Mumbai Public Schools, which was a watershed moment. The School Project was started by Akanksha in 2007 in association with the Municipal Corporations of Pune and Mumbai. The project aimed to develop a scalable school model inside the government system that promotes more extensive educational system change. With the foundation taking on the role of running English medium schools, a paradigm shift occurred. This change was manageable, particularly in shared spaces and in opposition to the traditional school model. However, Akanksha's perseverance and dedication to its objective enabled it to overcome these challenges, constructing nine schools in Mumbai, one in Navi Mumbai, and ten in Pune. Today, Akanksha expanded its footprint by opening 26 schools throughout five municipal corporations in significant urban centers such as Mumbai, Navi Mumbai, Pune, and Nagpur, reaching nearly 12000 students. This geographical diversity demonstrates Akanksha's dedication to reaching and strengthening poor children in many places, regardless of the socioeconomic hurdles unique to each locale.

Not only during the school years, Akanksha Foundation also impacts the life of the alumni through its alumni support program named Akanksha Community. The vision for this community is to create an ecosystem of support for all alumni to fulfill their life goals. On the other hand, Akanksha Foundation launched project Setu to bridge the gap in India's foundational literacy and numeracy skills for elementary-grade students.

The impact of Akanksha Foundation's education model has been substantial. In terms of numbers, all students in Akanksha complete high school, and 96% go on to further their education. Moreover, the community participation and parent involvement approach of Akanksha fosters an environment in which many alumni are inspired to give back as they pursue success in life. They keep ending the generational poverty cycle in this way.

Akanksha Foundation's past and present trajectory is distinguished by strategic alliances, innovative solutions, and an uncompromising devotion to its objective. From its beginnings in non-formal education to the construction of English medium schools, the foundation has proven its ability to evolve, aligning its approach with the changing needs of the communities it serves. The dedication to excellent education and skill development has consistently established Akanksha as a dynamic force in the world of non-profit organizations dedicated to uplifting disadvantaged parts of society.

2. INITIATIVES TRANSFORMING EDUCATION AT THE GRASSROOTS

The activities of the Akanksha Foundation are transformative interventions aimed at tackling the basic obstacles that poor students face in their schooling. The foundation's transition from non-formal education to the founding and operation of English medium schools demonstrates its dedication to providing high-quality education and supporting comprehensive growth among its recipients. For nearly the first 20 years, Akanksha was about the non-formal space, where students would come to Akanksha for two and a half hours before or after school, depending on what time space is available at the municipal corporation schools. Teachers would take in batches of 30 kids each, and each center would have a maximum of 60 kids, two teachers, and a helper. Akanksha developed a language, math, and values curriculum that helped these children bridge their learning gaps in school. In addition to that, they had sports and art, and follow-ups to those would happen regularly. In 1996, Akanksha Foundation launched Art for Akanksha, a robust art program to empower children with a strong creative education and provide art-related career opportunities.

In 2007-08, Akanksha Foundation started with the formal school model in the public-private partnership framework. Akanksha has developed a scalable school model within the government system that promotes systemic improvement rather than a one-time initiative. For example, The D.N. Nagar School, founded in 2012 as an Akanksha school in Mumbai, India, completed ten years of education in 2022. 457 kids from the adjacent communities of Indira Nagar, Kapaswadi, and Ganesh Nagar are enrolled at D.N. Nagar. A 34-person school team comprising administrative and support staff, social workers, counselors, school and teacher leaders, and other professionals supports kindergarten through tenth-grade students.

Similarly in 2012, Mahalaxmi Mumbai Public School started as an Akanksha school in Mumbai's Bhulabhai Desai Road area, running classes for Kindergarten students. Likewise, Akanksha Foundation now runs 26 English medium schools in Mumbai and Pune. As the largest network of public-private partnership schools in India, Akanksha redefines what is possible for students from low-income communities. The Akanksha Education Fund supports all Akanksha schools through donor contributions in the U.S.

The ability of Akanksha to navigate public-private partnerships (PPPs) is critical to its success. These relationships have been critical in overcoming infrastructures, familial acceptance, and attaining government expectations. The foundation's capacity to successfully engage in PPPs demonstrates its ability to use resources and experience from both categories, leading to a substantial and sustainable approach.

Akanksha Foundation realized that parents are important stakeholders and partners in this journey. The four main community involvement objectives that Akanksha schools hold themselves accountable for are fostering whole-family well-being, developing family economic resilience, and including parents as participants in students' socioemotional development. Diverse avenues of engagement exist, such as participation in School Management Committees (SMCs), parent education initiatives, chances for in-school partnerships, and personalized psychosocial assistance from social workers. Through activities like quarterly home visits and annual goal-setting sessions

that center on raising children who can effectively impact society, parents are urged to participate in their child's education routinely. In the SMCs, families actively participate. Including parents as partners is ingrained in the community's culture and goes beyond specialized programming. Furthermore, to provide their kids with safe areas in their surroundings, Akanksha schools have worked with parents. The emphasis has been on collaborating with the parent-led school administration to promote the value of physical safety, provide parents with the tools they need to establish safe places and foster an encouraging and nurturing environment for students.

The educational strategy of the foundation focuses on fundamental principles such as employability, collaboration, analytical thinking, and emotional and social growth. This strategic focus aims to provide poor children with academic knowledge and the necessary skills and traits for a well-rounded and empowered future. Akanksha goes beyond standard education paradigms by fostering traits such as analytical thinking and socioemotional intelligence, preparing young students for the complexities of the real world.

Akanksha Foundation has partnerships with multiple organizations that collaborate with Akanksha to achieve its educational and developmental goals at various levels. For instance, Akanksha partners with organizations in the social sector and works in the areas of children with disabilities, talking to kids about sexual health and opening up conversations about gender and identity. Other types of partnerships would be where organizations such as Apple would collaborate with Akanksha where Apple piloted using iPads in one of their municipal corporation schools. In a recent Apple store launch, Apple CEO Tim Cook visited an Akanksha Foundation school. Akanksha has been trying to integrate technology very seriously into teaching and learning to enhance the process, and now all their K-2 spaces have iPads given to them. Other than this, Akanksha Foundation has launched a project called Project Setu in collaboration with Municipal Corporations in which the key areas of intervention include Driving School Readiness and Early Childhood Education, Teacher Development and Support, Field Officer Capacity Building, Community Engagement through Headmaster Development and Developing appropriate student and teacher resources to teach English as a

second language. These initiatives were taken to bridge the Foundational Literacy and Numeracy gap for elementary-grade students.

Additionally, Akanksha's endeavors go beyond traditional academics. In order to provide a holistic approach to child development, the foundation has merged art, athletics, and social-emotional learning into its educational framework. Recognizing that a child's development is multifaceted, these additional elements contribute to a more thorough and fulfilling educational experience. This approach is consistent with the belief that a well-rounded education includes developing innovation, physical wellness, emotional resilience, and academic performance.

In conclusion, the Akanksha Foundation's projects are distinguished by a forward-thinking and holistic approach to education. Akanksha's revolutionary initiatives have greatly contributed to ending the downward spiral of educational unfairness for disadvantaged children, from strategic adjustments in educational paradigms through effective PPPs and dedication to holistic development.

3. SOCIAL IMPACT OF TRANSFORMATIVE EDUCATION

Akanksha Foundation has successfully demonstrated the ability of social entrepreneurship models to develop ingenious strategies for working around resource constraints and social hardships. Apart from the direct impact on the targeted beneficiary, i.e., children deprived of education, the societal influence of Akanksha Foundation activities goes far beyond academic accomplishments, manifesting in the beneficial change of individuals and communities. The foundation has provided replicable models of partnerships and crafted creative solutions for operational challenges. The broad heads under which its impact can be assessed are outlined below.

Happy Childhoods

Akanksha Foundation has provided an enabling platform for happy childhoods despite deprivation and the debilitating impact of impoverished socioeconomic backgrounds. Akanksha centers are safe and enriching spaces with children laughing, talking, playing, and learning. Many of them witness

verbal, emotional, and physical abuse at home and in neighborhoods. They often face situations when there is no food at home or medicine when needed. They grow up amid cases of alcoholism, drug addiction, crime, and community feuds. However, the Akanksha teachers and counselors find them joyful in classes, happily studying, or participating enthusiastically in art and sports activities. This is a stellar contribution, as happy childhoods hold the promise of raising well-adjusted and sensitive adults. The commitment of Akanksha to holistic development is seen in its child protection policy, counselling initiatives, and community programs. Adopting a child protection policy demonstrates the foundation's dedication to providing children with an enjoyable and secure atmosphere. Akanksha goes beyond the typical duty of an educational institution by focusing on community issues, including violence, abuse, and poverty. The foundation recognizes that factors outside of the classroom influence a child's well-being and actively tries to lessen the impact of external problems on their educational and psychological development.

Scholastic Achievement of Beneficiary Students

The foundation's dedication to comprehensive education solutions has resulted in many success stories, notably among its alumni, demonstrating the significant and long-lasting impact of Akanksha's initiatives. The enrolment of Akanksha's alumni in famous universities worldwide is one notable part of the societal impact. The foundation's emphasis on academic success and developing important life skills has enabled its alumni to seek higher study at prestigious institutions. These accomplishments, whether at United World College, Ashoka, or other prestigious universities abroad, demonstrate the success of Akanksha's activities in breaking down barriers and opening doors to previously inconceivable opportunities for underprivileged students. Some of their alumni have graduated with engineering, medicine, and MBA degrees. One of their students could also crack the extremely difficult entrance examination to join the prestigious Indian Institute of Technology.

Community Development

Akanksha Foundation's work has gone far beyond its intended target of providing access to education to poor children. It has not only succeeded in

educating children but has also positively impacted the communities the children come from. Akanksha's involvement with marginalized populations is critical to its social impact. Akanksha amplifies good change in these communities by providing a nurturing and secure atmosphere for children to develop. Individual students benefit from the foundation's efforts, but the foundation also contributes to the general development and resilience of the communities it serves. Akanksha develops a sense of empowerment among its recipients through frequent community engagement programs, awareness campaigns, and joint initiatives, enabling people to participate in their personal development and growth actively. The family and the entire community thus become stakeholders, and a beautiful relationship emerges. The community acknowledges the positive impact of Akanksha and contributes in whatever way it can to ensure the continuity of Akanksha's work. The immediate opportunity cost of letting a child study instead of taking up some economic activity like selling is very high for low-income families where any earning supplements family income. In these conditions, the fact that families realize the importance of education and invest in their child's future speaks volumes of the work done by Akanksha's teachers and social workers.

Voice and Agency

Akanksha Foundation has ensured that the children it serves are empowered to vocalize their thoughts and concerns as stakeholders in their development. Most of these children come from backgrounds characterized by emotional repression, sexual vulnerability, and physical violence. Thanks to the openness and empathy the teachers and counselors nurtured, the children have developed the confidence to speak out and share their fears and problems. Beyond the regular discussions on communal harmony and social sensitivity, Akanksha centers also have sessions on inclusion and identity, which help the students recognize and be comfortable with their choices. Akanksha Foundation has equipped the students with the vocabulary and ability to have difficult conversations surrounding violence, abuse, and sexual identity. They have the maturity to ignore communal problems between their families and continue to be friends inside the classrooms. In essence, Akanksha Foundation's programs have a multidimensional social impact,

influencing the livelihoods of individuals and communities in important ways. Akanksha's projects highlight the paradigm-shifting impact of education in disrupting the spiral of poverty and giving a bridge to a brighter future, from academic success tales to establishing a safe and empowered atmosphere.

Sustainable Resource Utilisation

Shaheen Mistri, the visionary founder of the Akanksha Foundation, came up with the innovative solution of using shared spaces to roll out its informal education models. The foundation developed a strong English, Maths, and Value Education curriculum, which supplemented the formal education the children received in their municipal schools. The students were given these inputs by Akanksha teachers daily for two and a half hours, before or after school hours. Any free space like schools after school hours, offices beyond the formal hours even office basements were reimagined and used as pop-up classrooms. When these spaces were unavailable, as the original school wanted to organize some after-school activity, Team Akanksha would meet in some nearby garden or park, under some trees, and so on. Akanksha Foundation never spent money renting out spaces to conduct their classes. This offered an element of sustainability to their model and allowed them to enjoy scale through several centers in Mumbai and Pune. Thus, many more students and local communities were able to receive benefits from their interventions. What distinguishes Akanksha Foundation is their continuing to mentor their students long after they complete their eleventh and twelfth grades. Entry into a college can be daunting for a student from a protected environment where help is always available. Akanksha Foundation continues to offer counseling services to its alumni to ease their journeys and ensure their comfort in an environment that expects them to do everything independently and offers little empathy and guidance. There are regular meetings that help the young adults to seek help and make sense of the world around them. This is a commendable service that even mainstream schools do not offer to their alumni.

4. CHALLENGES FACED BY AKANKSHA FOUNDATION

While the Akanksha Foundation has greatly succeeded in its objective, it faces several inherent problems in delivering vocational training and education to less fortunate parts of society.

Social Challenges

Akanksha Foundation works with communities characterized by socioeconomic deprivations. With sustenance being the major immediate concern of families, persuading them to send their children to schools takes work. The families must be convinced of the need for education and the possibility of education altering the life paths of their children. Even if the child is enrolled in the school, there are instances of pulling them out to use as extra hands selling food or other items during festivals. It takes great persuasion skills from Akanksha teachers and social workers to ensure regular attendance. Once in class, the teachers have to work very hard to bridge the gap in vocabulary and skills between these children and other children. Coming from deprived families with parents busy with income earning, these children need to have early childhood experiences being sung to, read to, or spoken to. This impacts their early years' learning abilities, for which Akanksha teachers have to go beyond the government-mandated syllabus and frame their activity-based curriculum and pedagogy.

Partnership Challenges

Akanksha Foundation runs some schools for municipal corporations in Mumbai, Pune, and Nagpur, under the 3P model of Public Private Partnership. This provides them with government infrastructure and frees them from the need to scout for free spaces, which they did in their initial years. Further, this partnership has brought them into formal education and strengthened their role from providers of informal learning to respected players in formal education; it has come with its challenges. Balancing Practicality with mandated requirements is a continuous process fraught with troubles. Meeting government expectations, abiding by test guidelines, and adhering to specified textbooks are constant issues for Akanksha. It might not be easy to balance practical, innovative teaching methods that have proven successful and adhering to the mandatory curriculum. An institution must

navigate these expectations to continue its commitment to providing quality education while conforming to regulatory standards.

Operational Challenges

One of Akanksha's key problems is a need for more qualified teachers, especially as the organization expands into new geographies. Establishing schools necessitates a team of motivated and skilled educators, and the foundation recognizes the difficulty in locating such professionals. The process becomes even more difficult because it necessitates not only the recruitment of instructors but also the development of the essential competence to ensure the smooth operation of schools. The foundation understands that the efficacy of its schools is inextricably linked to the quality of its teaching staff.

Financial Challenges

Financial Pressures Post-12th Grade: Students confront financial challenges after the 12th grade as they choose higher education or occupational choices. Akanksha understands the importance of exploring vocational choices to provide viable and sustainable professional routes for its alumni. This difficulty emphasizes the larger socioeconomic context that influences students' postsecondary education paths, leading the foundation to examine and change its assistance measures constantly.

Expansion Challenges

Maintaining Cultural Consistency in Newer Schools is a daunting task. When setting up schools in new regions, the problem of maintaining cultural uniformity becomes obvious. The lack of an existent Akanksha culture is a big impediment. Maintaining the foundation's influence requires cultivating a uniform ethos, values, and practices throughout all schools. This issue emphasizes the need to increase the number of institutions and ensure that the key concepts and principles that have been instrumental in Akanksha's success are smoothly integrated into each new institution.

Strategic planning, adaptability, and a consistent dedication to the foundation's objective are required to address these issues. Akanksha's

proactive approach to recognizing and overcoming these challenges demonstrates its commitment to delivering quality education and skill development opportunities to underprivileged children.

Conclusion

The success of Akanksha Foundation has provided a powerful replicable model for sustainable strategies for equity in access. Local government bodies like municipal corporations partnering with not-for-profit private organizations like Akanksha Foundation work like a win-win program whereby non-government bodies can run underutilized infrastructure created by the state with proven capabilities. As well documented and accepted, the government-run municipal schools have seen a persistent fall in enrolment over the years due to various factors including poor academics and local language being the medium of instruction. Even though attempts were made to revive these schools by re-branding them as Mumbai Public Schools and offering English as a medium of instruction, the municipal corporation realized that it could not run the schools as it failed to attract teachers with the requisite qualifications. At this point, it sought help from agencies like Akanksha Foundation, working in the informal education space. This augured well for all concerned parties. It freed the municipal corporation from the responsibility of managing the academics and helped Akanksha Foundation enter the formal education space. With well-trained and experienced teachers in its team, Akanksha Foundation ensured that it not only fulfilled the academic mandate of the government but also continued its counseling, mentoring, and community engagement activities. Besides, it strengthened Akanksha's traditional interventions as now, it was not just supplementing mainstreaming education but was the provider of state education board curriculum. Its pedagogy of using phonetics, not overloading children with homework, and incorporating art sessions, which were earlier doubted by parents, now got easily accepted.

Moreover, the ready availability of government school infrastructure freed Akanksha from the continuous hunt for free spaces and the insecurity of losing them. Despite these obvious advantages, Akanksha Foundation has yet to find expanding and taking over additional schools easy. A basic problem stated is

the non-availability of good teachers. Given Akanksha's robust in-house training provided to its teachers, Akanksha readily accepted the request from municipal corporations of Mumbai, Pune, and Nagpur to train headmasters, principals, and teachers under a project named Setu. However, given the sheer size of India's population and the number of children deprived of access to education, Akanksha Foundation's work needs to be replicated far and wide and additionally strengthened. Thus, several ideas can be explored as Akanksha Foundation navigates the hurdles and continues its efforts to fill educational gaps and empower underprivileged children:

- Online education can address the disparity in education access to India's vast underprivileged student population. As an established leader in providing mainstream education to poor students, Akanksha can explore delivering education online. This will require multilateral partnerships, another area where Akanksha has prior experience. It can leverage its existing relationships and forge more with organisations in the edutech space. Akanksha can manage the curriculum, delivery and assessment while supporting infrastructure for online delivery can be provided by its partners.
- Given the partnership's success with municipal schools in the offline space, the study recommends more such models with private schools nationwide.
- Akanksha can become a nodal agency for teacher training programs based on its experience with Project Setu and help bridge the nationwide scarcity of trained teachers.
- The study recommends that Akanksha Foundation explore some revenue-generating possibilities to help them fund their working capital as they expand their footprint. This could be in the form of selling some small items made by their students, like some arts and crafts products, given that Akanksha has a very strong art education program and some of its alumni are also working in this space. They can organize summer camps for regular children and charge them market prices. They can start a sponsor-a-child program for alumni members as a giving-back-to-the-society gesture. This will help them to expand their offering further.

- Akanasha Foundation can create alumni mentorship programs to provide current students with a vital support network. Connecting successful graduates with others still in school can provide counseling, motivation, and practical insights. This creates a positive empowerment loop in which alumni help to grow the next generation, establishing a feeling of belonging and consistency.
- Akanksha can further develop its Community Involvement and Awareness campaigns and continue to foster community involvement. The foundation's determination to promote holistic development is strengthened by strong links with the communities that it serves. Involving families, local leaders, and community members in the educational process develops a sense of ownership and guarantees that the foundation's projects receive ongoing support.

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Chapter - VI

**BHARTI FOUNDATION RESHAPING
EDUCATIONAL LANDSCAPE IN INDIA**

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Abstract

This case delves into the intricate issue of absenteeism and tardiness among female students in government schools in India, uncovering the diverse challenges impacting attendance. The case reveals key insights, emphasizing the pivotal role of health, nutrition, menstruation, caregiving responsibilities, travel, household chores, and parental attitudes in shaping attendance patterns. Detailing the Bharti Foundation's impactful initiatives including skill development, soft skills, health programs, and teacher training workshops, the case highlights challenges faced by organizations like Bharti in supporting government schools. Recommendations for improvement span enhancing educational quality, introducing female mentors, providing psychological

support, offering career counselling, promoting parent-teacher engagement, and instituting a "Zero Period" for meaningful activities.

1. Introduction

In the realm of Development Economics, the question of whether population is a boon or a bane has persisted, and the answer is often a nuanced "it depends." India currently boasts a median age of 28.2 years (Jha, 2023), slightly below the world median of 30.5 years. This demographic statistic could be advantageous if this population is adequately educated and employed in sectors with decent incomes, leading to what is known as the demographic dividend. However, if this population remains uneducated, unskilled, and unemployed, it could lead India down a path of demographic disaster.

India faces a significant gender disparity in labour force participation. While male labour force participation stands at 73.6%, the female counterpart is alarmingly low at 24% (World Bank, 2022), significantly lower than the global figures of 72.5% for males and 47.3% for females. With women constituting 48.8% of the Indian population, increasing their participation in the workforce can have a direct positive impact on economic growth. Curiously, the low female labour force participation persists even during times of economic growth and rising incomes (Verick, 2014). Economists suggest that as household incomes increase, women, especially in rural areas, feel less compelled to work, often leaving the labour force when economic conditions improve. This indicates that, especially for women at the lower end of the economic spectrum, work is seen more as a necessity than a path to financial independence.

To foster genuine economic development, it is crucial to not only bring women into the labour force but also to ensure their participation is instrumental in adding maximum value to their lives, families, and the nation. Investment in education and skill development is a critical component of this process. Education has a long-term indirect benefit, particularly for women in the labour force. Children with mothers who have received formal education are more likely to attend school and perform well. Each additional year of

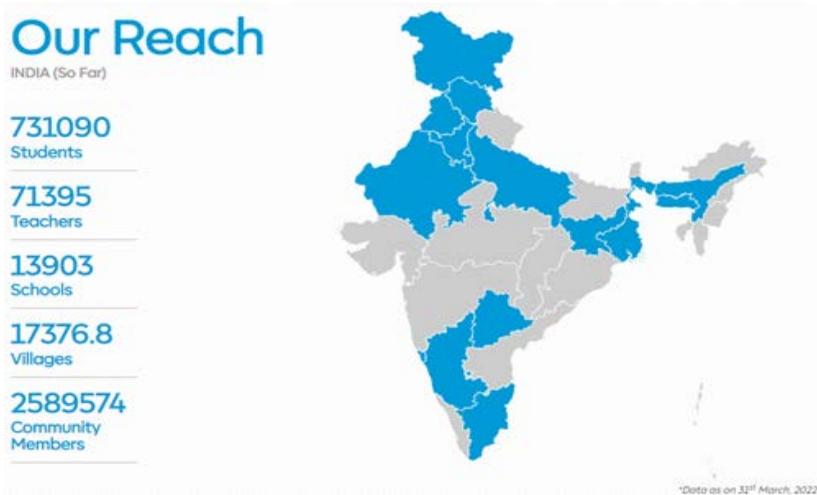
formal education for a mother can lead to an additional one-third to one-half year of schooling for her children (Karam, 2014). Empowering women with education thus creates value for the next generation.

Education also plays a crucial role in curbing child and early marriages. In India, girls with secondary schooling are 70% less likely to marry as children than their illiterate counterparts. Additionally, girls with higher levels of education are less likely to experience early and unintended pregnancies. Educating girls can have significant spill over effects on the healthcare sector by reducing pregnancy and childbirth complications, a leading cause of death among adolescents (UN News, 2017). Bharti Foundation, the philanthropic arm of Bharti Enterprises, has significant experience in educating underprivileged segments and contributing to the skill development efforts of government schools. This chapter presents ground realities in one of the government girls' schools associated with Bharti's education efforts.

2. About Bharti Foundation

Bharti Foundation, which initially started as a grant-making organization, has evolved significantly, shifting its focus towards its own educational programs. The primary objective of the foundation is to support underprivileged children in realizing their inherent potential, with a particular emphasis on education. The foundation's journey began with the establishment of the Bharti School of Telecommunication Technology and Management in collaboration with the Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi. Their involvement with education began in 2000 when they started sponsoring visually impaired children. Subsequently, they expanded their support to orthopedically challenged children and initiated a partnership with Udayan to assist orphans and abused children. In 2003, they embarked on a mission to establish libraries and activity centres for underserved individuals while also introducing various sponsorship schemes for children in need (see Figure 1). By 2014, Bharti Foundation recognized the need for a long-term perspective in education, focusing on improving the quality of education in schools.

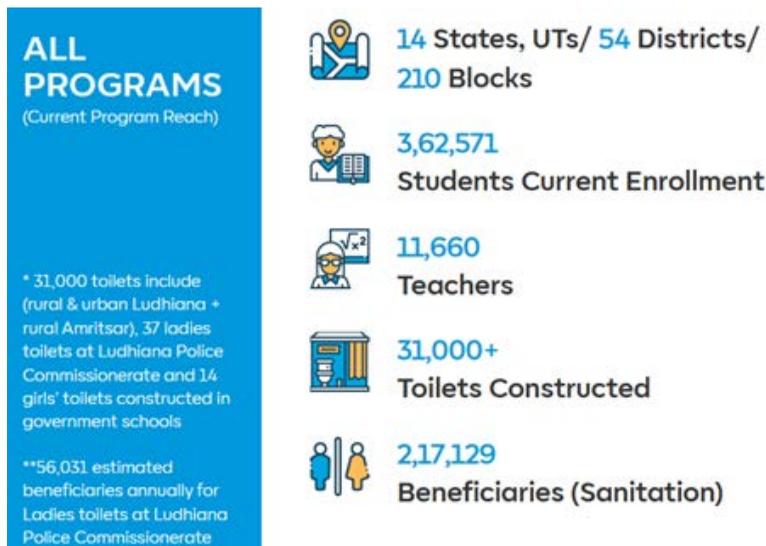
Figure 1: Reach of Bharti Foundation



2.1. Notable Programs of Bharti Foundation

One of the standout initiatives of Bharti Foundation is the "Satya Bharti School Program," launched in 2006. This flagship program involves the establishment of Bharti Foundation-run schools in rural areas, offering free, high-quality education. The program's mission is to install life skills and confidence in children, promoting holistic development and self-reliance. Presently, Bharti operates 173 schools across five states, providing education to over 38,000 students (see Figure 2). Another significant program is the "Satya Bharti Quality Support Program," which collaborates with State Government Schools. This initiative provides material support and infrastructure enhancement and introduces co-curricular activities, including clubs for Art & Culture and Science & Exploration. While it doesn't influence education policies, its goal is to create joyful learning environments within government schools. Bharti collaborates with 808 government schools in 11 states, reaching over 3,08,600 students. The "Satya Bharti Learning Centre Program," initiated in 2013, offers remedial and bridge courses to "Out of School Children" in rural areas. These children, who had either never attended school or dropped out, receive remedial education to bridge learning gaps and bring them to age-appropriate grades.

Figure 2: Programs of Bharti Foundation



2.2. Impact Driven by Bharti Foundation

Bharti Foundation's impact is substantial, having touched the lives of over 7,31,000 students across 17,000 villages. The foundation actively seeks collaborations to amplify its impact, including partnerships with Avaya for 'Digital Classrooms' in Satya Bharti Schools and NITI Aayog for the launch of 'Convoke 2021-22.' The foundation's remarkable work has not gone unnoticed, as evidenced by numerous accolades, including the India CSR Awards for the "Best Education Support Initiative of the Year." Bharti Foundation's dedication to education and empowerment has left a profound imprint on the lives of countless underprivileged children and communities.

3. A Study on Girls' Absenteeism in Government Schools

Bharti Foundation delved into the complex issue of absenteeism among female students in government schools, with a focus on a girls' government school in South Delhi. They conducted an ethnographic research involving in-depth interviews with students and teachers. Preliminary findings from students highlighted the pervasive problem of lenient disciplinary measures contributed to a culture of frequent late arrivals and early departures. Field studies involved a combination of direct interactions with students and teachers, individual one-on-one sessions, and activity-based responses to gain

comprehensive insights into the factors influencing student absenteeism. Initially, open questions were posed to students in classrooms. However, this method revealed that some students hesitated to express their true feelings in a classroom setting, possibly providing socially desirable responses. Consequently, individual interactions with students and teachers were conducted, fostering a more open and candid dialogue. Drawing exercises were also used as elicitation tools, inspired by prior secondary research (Martin, 2019).

Insights from teachers and administrators provided a broader perspective, uncovering both conscious and subconscious contributors to absenteeism. This Study on Girls' absenteeism and tardiness in Delhi Government Schools uncovered a troubling rise in absenteeism associated with undernutrition and susceptibility to health issues, particularly among students residing in unsanitary conditions in nearby slum areas. Additionally, menstruation emerged as a significant contributor to absenteeism, driven by social and psychological discomfort, exacerbated by the lack of proper facilities. Girls serving as caregivers for family members, travel to native places, performing household chores, and the influence of household situations and parental attitudes were identified as other noteworthy factors impacting student attendance.

4. Pull and Push Factors for Attendance

A nuanced exploration of the pull and push factors influencing student attendance aids in devising effective strategies for improving overall educational experiences. Among the pull factors encouraging attendance are the genuine willingness to learn, aspirations for a better future, the social interaction provided by schools, and the appeal of various facilities and activities. On the flip side, push factors driven by parents include the belief in education as a pathway to a better life and future income source, the role of schools as day-care centres, and the provision of midday meals. Understanding and leveraging these factors are essential in the continuous effort to elevate attendance rates and contribute positively to the overall educational landscape.

In the context of pull and push factors for attendance in schools, the impact of Bharti Foundation's Quality Support Program on over 3,08,600 students is undeniable. In collaboration with State Government Schools, the program focuses on enhancing infrastructure and introducing co-curricular activities, fostering skill development and honing soft skills. The initiative extends beyond technical expertise, contributing to students' overall development. Notably, the program addresses health and nutrition concerns, offering impactful solutions such as school-based distribution of deworming pills. Additionally, Teachers' Training Workshops play a crucial role in fostering mentorship and strong relationships between teachers, students, and parents, thereby positively influencing attendance and educational outcomes.

5. Challenges and Way Forwards

The journey with Bharti Foundation has illuminated the intricacies of the educational landscape and the myriad challenges encountered in supporting government schools. The scope of work under the Quality Support Program, while integral, was inherently limited, posing challenges in driving policy-level changes. The acceptance of academic mentors varied, and leadership within schools significantly influenced program effectiveness. Frequent changes in administration and issues related to the sincerity of students and parents added layers of complexity. The discomfort associated with menstruation, exacerbated by the lack of proper facilities, contributes to emotional distress and leads to girls missing school (Vashisht et al., 2018). Furthermore, the burden of household chores emerges as a distinct factor affecting attendance, especially among adolescent girls. A prior study emphasizes the increased time spent on household tasks, with the pandemic intensifying this issue and girls spending an average of over 3.5 hours per day on such chores (Sethi, 2022). Acknowledging these challenges emphasizes the necessity for adaptive and nuanced approaches to navigate the diverse educational terrain.

To address the multifaceted challenges contributing to low attendance in girls' government schools, several way forwards are brainstormed to create a more conducive environment for education and personal growth. Strategies include enhancing educational quality and skill development, introducing female

mentors in girls' schools, incorporating psychologists for emotional support, implementing career counselling sessions, fostering effective communication through parent-teacher meetings and workshops, and introducing a Zero Period for meaningful educational activities. These recommendations aim to create a holistic approach to improve attendance rates and the overall educational experience for girls in government schools. Furthermore, the relevance of health and well-being is highlighted by the Abdul Lateef Jameel Poverty Action Lab (2018), which discusses the impact of deworming on school attendance, addressing one of the critical reasons for student absenteeism. The National Deworming Day initiative aligns with this perspective, emphasizing the importance of school-based deworming programs to improve health and attendance rates (National Deworming Day, 2015).

6. Conclusion

Education stands as a cornerstone of a nation's progress, profoundly influencing its future trajectory. Thus, it becomes crucial to promptly identify and address any deficiencies in this foundational institution. This case study illuminates significant gaps within the education sector and innovative strategies employed by entities like the Bharti Foundation to effectively tackle these issues. Despite commendable progress, there persist certain administrative hurdles that warrant attention, as detailed in the subsequent section. The overarching aim of reshaping entrenched mind-sets and attitudes towards education undoubtedly demands prolonged effort and time. In the interim, these short-term objectives act as guiding lights, channelling our collective national energy and resources towards sustainable development. Recognizing both the strides made and the persisting challenges, collaborative efforts are essential to ensure that education continues to be a transformative force in our society, securing a brighter future for all.

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Chapter - VII

**FINANCIAL LITERACY FOR ADOLESCENT
STUDENTS FROM UNDERPRIVILEGED
COMMUNITIES: CASE STUDY OF SALAAM
BOMBAY FOUNDATION**

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Abstract

Financial literacy is a critical life skill that governments across the globe and the United Nations recognize as a major goal. Underprivileged students face a multitude of challenges in gaining basic financial literacy levels. The initiatives of the Salaam Bombay Foundation showcase how nonprofit organizations in collaboration with large corporations are bridging this gap slowly yet steadily. The case describes the approach that the foundation took to educate underprivileged students from municipal and government-aided schools on

the basics of financial literacy. It also underscores the need for multifaceted interventions required by several stakeholders to achieve financial literacy.

1. Introduction

Financial literacy is an essential skill for sustaining in the current society. Financial literacy as such is a well-researched topic and its importance is so well established that governments across the globe have initiated initiatives for creating awareness in adolescents and young adolescents. Research also states that adolescents from financially well-off communities have a better understanding of finances than the ones from communities that have fewer resources (Mandell, 2008). Many adolescents from the underprivileged segments come from families with economic instability, making it impossible for them to learn, observe or practice positive financial behaviour at home (Evans, 2004). The weaker sections have limited access to the curricula of financial literacy as well as there are linguistic barriers (Atkinson and Messy, 2013; Ashoka and Aswathy, 2021). This further increases the economic divide between the classes making the rich richer and the poor poorer because of a systemic under-exposure to financial literacy.

Financial literacy in secondary school adolescent students in India is as diversified as the income levels in the country itself. When it comes to school education, in India three kinds of structures exist: private schools, government-aided schools and municipal schools. The adolescents from the economically weaker section of society, typically go to the municipal schools. And the idea of reaching 100% financial literacy means reaching to the larger population of students, who go to government-aided and municipal schools. To create a financially literate and independent society, several initiatives have been taken up by the Government of India and several other non-governmental organizations to address it at multiple levels. Salaam Bombay Foundation (SBF) with the help of its donors, runs one such initiative to train students of Grade VIII to Grade X on the nuances of basic finance.

2. Financial Literacy of Indian Secondary School Students

The situation of financial literacy of secondary school students in India is a mixed bag. There are some concerning aspects but the growing awareness and

increased no of initiatives to increase the literacy levels is a welcome change. Till about 2018, studies indicated that only 45% of secondary school students could answer the basic financial literacy questions correctly and the numbers significantly reduced when it was advanced modules (Jayaraman & Jambunathan, 2018). Though there are several initiatives by the Securities and Exchange Board of India on the financial literacy modules and free courseware, there is little integration of the modules in non-commerce streams. To add to it the teachers lack the necessary training, skillsets and resources to train the students on the financial concepts (D'Souza & Dutta, 2020), more so in the municipal schools. But thanks to the internet penetration, numerous tic-toc videos, Instagram reels and the burgeoning numbers of social media influencers in the finance domain, there is increased awareness and the need for being financially literate is being felt by young adolescents. They intend to learn and thereafter aspire to be financially independent sooner. Non-traditional methods like gamified learning, interactive workshops, and interactive gaming apps are gaining traction in making financial education accessible, interesting and engaging (Nair & Joseph, 2023). Several fintech apps and digital financial services platforms offer tools and free resources to empower people to manage their finances better (Bhattacharya et al., 2022).

Even though there are several encouraging trends, to achieve cent per cent financial literacy in secondary school students in India, a multipronged approach is required that would require government and policymakers, nongovernmental institutions, large corporations, schools, teachers, trainers as well as the students to put in efforts.

3. About Salaam Bombay Foundation

Salaam Bombay Foundation is a non-profit organization that was established in 2002 in Mumbai, India. The foundation is committed to improving the lives of underprivileged adolescents who live in urban slums by providing them access to education, healthcare, skill development and livelihood opportunities. The foundation believes that every child deserves the chance to succeed and reach their full potential, regardless of their background or circumstances.

To achieve its mission, the foundation offers several programs that focus on different areas of support for adolescents. For example, its education programs provide after-school and vocational education, scholarships, and life skills training to help adolescents stay in school, improve their academic performance, and develop skills that will prepare them for job opportunities of the future. Its healthcare programs offer health, nutrition and hygiene awareness programs to adolescents and their families, helping to improve overall well-being. The foundation's livelihood programs provide vocational training and employment opportunities to young people, enabling them to gain skills that will help them earn a living and support themselves and their families.

In addition to these programs, the foundation engages in advocacy and research efforts to raise awareness about the challenges faced by underprivileged adolescents in India and to advocate for policies and programs that support their well-being. The foundation also collaborates with other government agencies, industry training partners, corporates and other businesses to achieve its goals and make a positive impact on the lives of adolescents.

They have now sown seeds in 5 states across India. Salaam Bombay Foundation, which has massive support from dedicated individuals, has spearheaded joint funding and program implementation, worked with the Harvard Secondary Schools of Public Health on measurement, and has received funding from the Gates Foundation and Bloomberg Family Foundation among others.

Overall, Salaam Bombay Foundation is working to create a more equitable and just society by empowering adolescents and giving them the tools and resources, they need to succeed. Through its various programs and initiatives, the foundation is helping to break the cycle of poverty and create a brighter future for the next generation.

4. Salaam Bombay Foundation's skills@school Programme

Each adolescent enrolled in the skills@school program completes specific training for skills across fields such as Home Appliance Repair, Mobile Repair, Robotics, A.I. and Machine Learning, Computer Hardware Repair, Automobile Repair (Two-Wheeler Technician), Web Design, Graphic Design, Beauty & Wellness, Bakery & Confectionery, Fashion Design and Jewellery Design. The curricula of these trades are aligned with the National Skills Qualification Framework (NSQF) of the National Skills Development Corporation (NSDC). The programme also deploys skills of importance like Financial Literacy, Conversational English and Entrepreneurship. The program brings in a network of technical experts and training partners like Kohinoor Technical Institute, Labour Net and Funfirst Global Skillers to ensure high-quality training. The programme implementation is monitored through daily processes like student attendance, performance during assessments and total sessions conducted with students.

Students are trained in trades like Beauty and wellness, Robotics, Home Appliance Repair, Mobile Repair, Bakery and Confectionary, Jewellery Design and Fashion Design. The online training programs are also quite successful. In the case of reverse migration during the lockdown where many of our students had gone back to their villages/hometowns, it was found that these students also joined the sessions from the remote locations as well. Some of these students apply their skills learnt to earn part-time in their respective villages and hometowns. In some cases, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, SBF also witnessed the upskilling of parents, siblings and other family members who attended the sessions with the adolescents. Besides Mumbai and Pune, the programme is also being deployed in other locations including Kolkata, Bengaluru and Jaipur with the help of other NGO partners. Since its inception, the programme has effectively trained over 30,000 adolescents.

4.1. The financial literacy module

Salaam Bombay Foundation implements a six-hour financial literacy programme for students in addition to the skills that they are being trained in. This is a part of the skills@school program. This encourages students to

acquire basic financial skills necessary to make informed and effective financial decisions throughout each stage of their lives.

The module is based on the 'Financial Education for Children' that has been created by the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI). The SBF team actively reviewed the original document and has created a module that is simple, activity-based and which can be delivered over six hours. In its current format the programme consists of 4 sessions of one and a half hours each, including; 'Money Matters': which explains the concept of calculating one's wealth and the difference between an asset and a liability, the session on 'Planning': takes the adolescents through the importance of having SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-bound) goals, while the session on 'Budgeting': introduces the students to planning a budget, the difference between wants and needs, and how to plan a budget for the month or family. The last session on 'Investments and Banking' highlights to the students the importance and value of investing, banking and its related terms as well as the kind of government schemes including scholarships and loans that are available to the public. The students are taken through each concept with the help of games and real-life – everyday examples.

The online financial literacy programme is delivered via the Dhangyan App (Tata Capital). Through Dhangyan students can access a critical skill like Financial Literacy online. Through this programme, students continue to learn key financial concepts. As a skill gained especially at a time when the family is reeling under financial pressure, it will enable students to make responsible money management decisions. In most cases, SBF has found that its Financial Literacy students inspire their parents to save money for a secure future.

In general, the goals of this financial literacy module are: a. Increase knowledge of general finance themes, b. Assist students in understanding the value of financial instruments in daily life, c. Assist students in connecting their personal financial goals, d. Identify assets and liabilities to better keep track of spending, and e. Education on the value of loans in building assets, budgeting skills instruction, and knowledge of banking instruments are all important.

The SBF initiatives and programs are usually donor-driven. SBF typically secures a donor who decides on the segment and the reach of the program. Given that these financial literacy programs align well with the UN Sustainable Development Goals of Quality Education (SDG 4), decent work and economic growth (SDG 8) and reduced inequality (SDG 10). However, since it is donor-driven it is usually specified by the donor which all locations they want SBF to reach. SBF then identifies the government-aided and Municipal Schools that they can reach out to and impart the modules to deliver. These modules are typically in sync with the donor's major CSR goals which the parent organization of the donor might have identified. With the limited resources that SBF has these curated programs work well, however, when we see the volumes of these underprivileged students, it is but a drop in the ocean.

1.1. Execution of the module

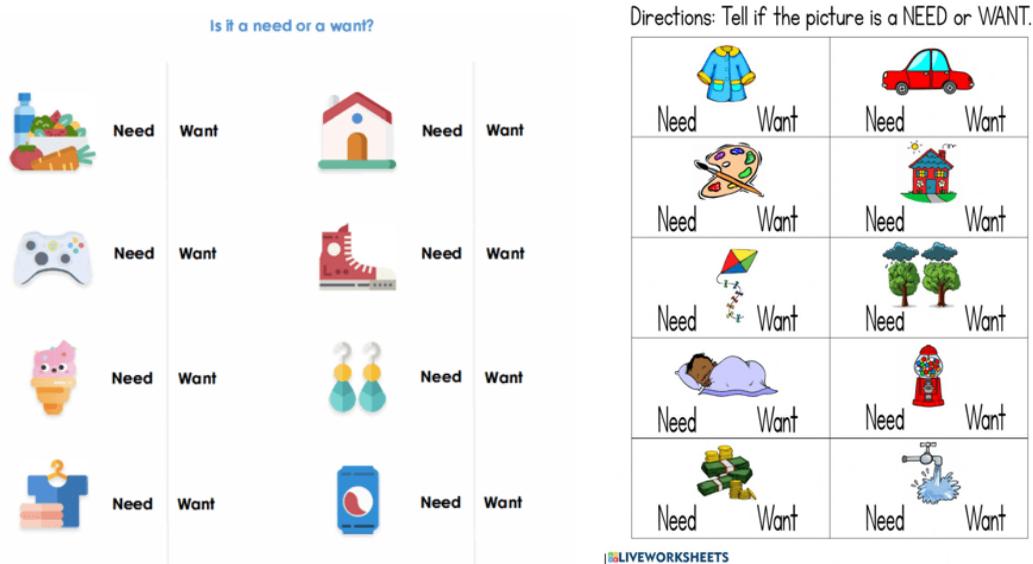
A typical session started with a brief introduction of all participants and the trainers followed by a quick pre-test. The main purpose of a pre-test is to examine the knowledge the students possess before the module is taught. The test comprised thirty multiple-choice questions which had two or three options each. The students were expected to write the option they thought was right as the answer on a sheet of paper. Once the pre-test handouts are collected from the students, the session formally begins. Depending on whether the school permits to conduct classes for two days for two hours each day or four days with an hour per day, the sessions are planned. If the school has the facility of a projector, SBF-curated presentations are used by the trainers, else they use the blackboard to explain the concepts. To ensure that the students understand the concept, they are also called out to the blackboard and given tasks to perform. The classes are interactive and activity-based. Post the delivery of the module the same set of questions that were given in the pretest are recirculated and the change in awareness levels is gauged.

Figure 1: Current outreach of SBF financial literacy initiatives

	Total Students Trained In Financial Literacy	Males Trained	Females Trained	Avg score of Pre-test	Avg score of Post-test	Avg Growth	City wise Trained						
							Mumbai	Pune	Kolkata	Nashik	Bengaluru	Jaipur	Kymore
Total Reach	14648	6917	7731	51%	75%	24%	10005	1450	1672	487	461	518	55
Years Wise													
2017-18	698	177	521	61%	83%	22%	698						
2018-19	2193	907	1286	66%	79%	13%	2129	64					
2019-20	4760	2672	2088	20%	58%	38%	3155	60	983		219	343	
2020-21	1836	905	931	36%	78%	42%	1075	373	292			96	
2021-22	2096	933	1163	57%	75%	18%	1513	284	31	224	44		
2022-23	3065	1323	1742	63%	78%	15%	1435	669	366	263	198	79	55

Source: SBF records

Figure 2: Example of an activity where the students classify needs and wants



Source: SBF records

2. Impact assessment of the financial literacy module

A Financial Literacy Research Study was conducted on a group of 504 adolescent students to evaluate financial knowledge and understanding as well as behaviors amongst this cohort. The 504 students (N=504) were divided into two groups: The Control Group (n=170) consisted of students who had not received any sort of financial training and the Intervention Group of (n=334) who had been given Financial Literacy Training.

The key observations of the study found that the intervention groups were more aware and equipped with financial literacy knowledge than the control group.

The study found that despite the cohort belonging to a lower socio economic strata and younger age bracket, at least 50% of the entire group had bank accounts. However, 63.5% of students from Intervention Group had bank accounts which was significantly greater in comparison to students in the control group (50%). For aspects of creating a household budget, 25% of the

control group were found to be involved versus 31.5% in the intervention groups.

Also, it was found that 52% of the intervention group and 48% of the control group were involved in monitoring personal level finances. Regarding financial literacy indicators like Smart Goals, Inflation, Interest or Net Worth, intervention group performed consistently better than the control group suggesting better financial understanding and knowledge of basic concepts.

3. Challenges

Sourcing continuous funds and donors is one of the biggest challenges that SBF faces. The proportion of underprivileged students who need this is phenomenally high. Other than the sourcing challenge, there are operational challenges too. Keeping the students engaged in the workshops is the main challenge that the trainers encounter during the sessions. This could be due to linguistic barriers that may add to the complexity of things and at times turn into a demotivator. Some of the adolescents may not take the program seriously as it is a skill-building initiative and not necessarily an evaluative exercise that affects the grade. Attendance is mandatory for these session, however at times, there are instances where the trainers end up rescheduling a particular session because students do not show up on time.

4. Conclusion

The financial literacy landscape of secondary school students in India is dynamic and witnessing several positive trends along with the persistent age-old challenges. Initiatives like skill@school and financial literacy modules embedded in them showcase how NGOs can put in the effort and transform this landscape. While the awareness is increasing, there is a need for more such initiatives to educate our secondary school students. Donor-driven programs like the ones organized by SBF highlight the alignment with UN sustainable development goals, emphasizing the potential impact on quality education and economic growth thus reducing inequality. Sustained funding and continuous support for initiatives like these can lead to empowering underprivileged students.

Acknowledgement

The authors thank Mr. Gaurav Arora from Salaam Bombay Foundation for his support. The authors also thanks the numerous student interns from the School of Business Management, NMIMS Mumbai who interned at SBF as trainers for the financial literacy modules and shared their experiences.

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Chapter - VIII

**TRANSFORMING EDUCATION FOR PERSONS
WITH DISABILITIES: CASE OF ADAPT**

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Abstract

Educating children with multiple disabilities is the principal objective of Able Disabled All People Together (ADAPT). ADAPT, formed on Gandhian principles of service or seva, social justice, and human rights, developed the first innovative model for educating children with disabilities. Since the initiation of the model in 1972, ADAPT has come a long way. From demonstrating and then influencing policymakers to enable disabled children to attend regular schools, and developing teachers with skill sets to train such children to the RTE, which makes inclusive education a right, ADAPT has

been at the forefront. ADAPT follows a transdisciplinary team approach, including parents as partners.

While RTE enabled access to education for children with disabilities, its implementation in true spirit is far from satisfaction. Also, challenges exist in the sustainable operations of organizations such as ADAPT.

Keywords: Education, Disability, Right to Education, Non-government Organization

1. Introduction – The Institutional Void Being Addressed

In 1966, very little was known about multiple disabilities like cerebral palsy. To address this abysmal lack of knowledge and absence of services for children with multiple disabilities Dr. Mithu Alur, together with a few colleagues and parents, set up The Spastics Society of India (SSI), now called ADAPT (Able Disabled All People Together), in Mumbai on 2nd October 1972, based on the Gandhian principles of service or seva, social justice and human rights.

It was the first innovative holistic model for educating children with neurological and physical disabilities, combining education, treatment, counselling, capacity building, vocational and skills development, advocacy, and many other services under one roof. Until then, children with multiple disabilities were either left in hospitals or kept at home with no access to any services. The organisation aimed to alert the nation to their needs and to show how the government and the community could help fulfil their dreams. The overall goal was to facilitate the cognitive, social, physical, and emotional development of children with disabilities (Alur, 2020).

2. About ADAPT (Formerly The Spastics Society of India)

2.1. ADAPT: Services

The Spastics Society of India, Mumbai, worked to fill the gap when there was no school. It began providing services in many areas. Various models have been developed, and direct services are offered at four centres in Mumbai,

Bandra, Colaba, Dharavi, and Chembur. Today, ADAPT is one of the largest NGO's in India (Alur, 2017). From a special school started with three students, it has grown to provide services in ten domains comprising of education, treatment, child and parents in partnership, training, capacity building, skills development, policy and spread of awareness, economics and sustainability, transformation of ideology and results and outcomes. The interventions provided include:

a) Early Intervention

The team works closely with the parents who are taught the correct techniques for carrying, changing, and feeding their baby after thoroughly examining their baby.

b) Education

Novel methods of teaching and innovative teaching methods were introduced. The centres follow a flexible curriculum with multi-level teaching, modifications of furniture, and individual attention and remediation. Like in any other regular school, the SSC and NIOS boards are followed. The students have grown and flourished. It began with three students, but over the years, more than 450 students have passed out of school and moved to employment or universities.

c) Therapy

Services offered by the Therapy Department include assessment, physical therapy, occupational therapy, sensory integration therapy, hand function training, and training in daily living speech and communication skills, psychology, and social work. Individualized therapy inputs and group therapy are provided and woven in with extracurricular activities such as music, painting, drama, and sports.

d) Aids and Appliances

Research into low-cost and indigenous aids was done in close partnership with engineers and technical institutes nationwide to provide indigenous aids and appliances around India. A book containing innovative aids and devices for people with a disability called 'Upkaran' was a milestone in its

time in the area of rehabilitation literature in the country.

e) Socio-Emotional Development

Various co-curricular and extra-curricular activities have been introduced to promote socio-emotional development. The beneficiaries are encouraged and motivated to participate in internal and external activities, programmes, and competitions, promoting inclusion and increasing confidence.

2.2. Research: Filling the Policy Gap

Research is one of the foremost and central activities at ADAPT. Over the years, ADAPT has undertaken international research with UNICEF, UNESCO, BMZ Germany, and the Canadian International Development Agency.

Dr Alur's doctoral research on Policy for the disabled in India entitled "Invisible Children: A Study of Policy Exclusion" showed that no cohesive policy existed for disabled people in the country, and millions of people were out of government programmes. A Government of India source revealed that only ten per cent of people with disabilities are being covered (GOI 1989), and it became critical to change, and this was the rationale for another innovative model, The National Resource Centre for Inclusion.

An 'Institutional Review Board' (IRB), an independent Ethics Committee, and a Research Action Committee (RAC) were constituted in 2009 to promote ongoing research and publications to review and document the institution's work and give direction. The IRB comprises leading doctors, researchers, parents of and persons with disability. The practitioners, comprising educators and therapists, have undergone training in research methodologies and have been presenting their studies to the Ethics Committee /Institutional Review Board. It has guided the team over the years to explore aspects and perspectives of disability and inclusion. All the research studies have paved the way for innovations, improvements, and changes in the services provided by ADAPT.

2.3. The National Resource Centre for Inclusion (NRCI): Including the Excluded Persons With Disability

In 1999, the organisation moved away from segregated education to the concept of inclusive education and set up The National Resource Centre for Inclusion (NRCI).

The aim was to increase the access of children to educational opportunities irrespective of disability, gender, and social disadvantage; promote the exchange of information and ideas on sustainable inclusion policy and practice; develop a cadre of resources (human and technological) to support a sustainable model for the universalization of primary education; and foster community attitudes, professional practices and legislative measures supportive of inclusive education and a social model of disability.

A unique model to address the massive exclusion happening in the country and demonstrate practice on how to include children with disability in classrooms and the programmes of the Government was developed (Alur, 2020). The main idea was to show how all children can learn side by side regardless of disability, gender, class, religion, or caste and to create a replicable model.

The term Inclusion was expanded to include ALL children who are facing barriers to learning and focused on children who are socially disadvantaged and caught in the grip of poverty, mainly Dalit children, the girl child who faces formidable cultural barriers, and the child with disability, facing systemic bias (Alur, 2020).

NRCI focused on how the mechanism of implementation can be actualized through change at three levels:

- Micro level of school and classroom, culture/policies/practice.
- Mezzo level of community and attitudes.
- Macro level of policy, ensuring change legislation, the structural and political culture of the local, state, national, and global levels.

Disabled students were placed into regular partner schools. The ADAPT Rights Group, an inclusive, cross-disability rights and entitlement wing of NRCI, was set up to advocate and lobby for persons with disability. Resource Material on the 'How To' of Inclusion was developed. Inputs provided on the macro level resulted in political and legislative structural changes and allocation for inclusive education in the country's five-year plan. A Code of Practice was developed (Alur, 2017).

2.4. Transforming Pedagogy: “Where There Was No Teacher”

In a country that ascribes considerable mystique to education, *training in inclusive education* is the most critical factor in its promotion. ADAPT offered training courses for teachers, therapists, community workers, parents, and government officials. The aim was capacity building at all levels. A Post Graduate Diploma in Special Education (Multiple Disabilities: Physical and Neurological) was introduced in 1978 and was affiliated with Mumbai University. Over 400 teachers across India were trained. A Management Course in Therapy for postgraduate therapists broke new ground, creating a much-needed cadre of people to treat this highly complex condition and helped spread awareness all over India (Alur, 2020).

In Maharashtra, inputs were provided for training for teachers, education officers, and project coordinators under the ICDS and SSA programmes, and over 85,000 primary school teachers were exposed to resource material the organisation developed.

A six-month Asia Pacific Course for Master Trainers called ‘The Community Initiatives in Inclusion’, was offered under The Mithu Alur Centre for Inclusive Studies (MACIS), under the aegis of ADAPT. The course began in 2001 and continues to prepare Master Trainers and Management Personnel to train others to promote inclusive education within the context and culture of that region. It tackles community issues and is firmly rooted in the social model of disability rather than the impairment-based medical model. Developed with support from the Centre for International Child Health (CICH) London, the Course is sponsored by ADAPT and The Women’s Council of U.K. More than 400 Master Trainers have been trained from twenty

Asia Pacific countries (*Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, China, India, Indonesia, Iraq, Jordan, Malaysia, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Sri Lanka, Tajikistan, The Republic of Maldives, Tibetan Government in Exile, Tonga, Vietnam*).

2.5. Library and Media Resources Centre

A specialized library, containing books, journals, magazines, and resource material on various subjects like psychology, therapy, education, counseling, and related topics was set up. These are now being digitized to expand their reach.

2.6. Transforming Community:

a) Early Intervention: A Whole Community Approach to Inclusive Education

On the community level, a two-year research project in collaboration with UNICEF, supported by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), '*Inclusive Education Practice in Early Childhood in Mumbai, India*' was conducted in the slums of Dharavi. The aim was to study the mechanism or intervention strategies needed to put children with disabilities into the government's existing programmes. Substantial work was done with key persons from the community. Siblings, cousins, parents, grandparents, in-laws, joint family members, relatives, neighbours, as well as local leaders, local and state level bureaucrats, municipal bodies, governmental and non-governmental organizations, and schools were all a part of this study (Alur, 2010).

Demystification was a crucial aspect of this model, and inclusion involved moving from an institutional base to a community base involving parents (Alur, 2012). This project demonstrated that disabled children and non-disabled children could learn together. It showed how to include all in a highly cost-effective manner. Building on this evidence, ADAPT established a Community Development Initiative in Dharavi (the largest slum in Asia) to create inclusive nurseries. This programme has impacted many disadvantaged children with no additional project resources.

b) Building Capacity in the Community

A survey of 11,820 households (Billimoria and Krishnaswamy, 1986) was mounted by ADAPT, then The Spastics Society of India, examining the prevalence and incidence of disabilities among children in the city of Mumbai. The study revealed that 63 per cent of children with disabilities were from lower-income groups, and the largest concentration of children with disabilities was in the slums of Mumbai.

ADAPT was invited by Mrs Latif (the wife of the then Governor of Maharashtra, Shri Idris Latif) to start a new community model in two large halls and two small rooms. Treatment and educational facilities were provided under the Karuna Sadan project at the community-based hospital Urban Health Centre, Dharavi, in 1985. Pre-schoolers were given an enrichment programme, and a large number of them were integrated into municipal schools, with Karuna Sadan providing the support they needed. This service continues to date.

Capacity training of the community health volunteers (CHVs) of the Health Department at the hospital was carried out for them to liaise with the community and refer children to the services. Courses were also conducted for others working in the Health Department, such as Auxiliary Nurses, CHVs, Community Nurses, Multipurpose Rehabilitation Workers, *Anganwadi* workers, and *Balwadi* workers, demystifying disability in the community.

Hamish McRae writes in his book 'What Works' about the inclusive nurseries:

"I began to understand (Dharavi) when I walked round it. My guide was Dr. Mithu Alur, a long-standing friend best known for founding one of the country's largest educational charities, SSI. The society pioneered the provision of services for people with CP and more recently, has been promoting the policy of inclusion of people with handicaps into the mainstream educational system. But the particular reason for Mithu showing us around Dharavi was because of her organization's role in setting up primary schools for the poor.

For many of these children, this is the only education they will get. If you shut your eyes to the surroundings and kneel with the children, talk to them, and play with them, as Mithu made us do, you could be anywhere in the world. Primary school kids are the same everywhere. I was told that parents want their children to be taught English, particularly if they do not speak it themselves, because they know this is a pathway towards better jobs. So the schools teach English.

Here, there was a lesson. The most effective way to assist a deprived but vibrant economic region is to attend to detail and to listen to the voices on the ground. One such example, and I am sure there are many more, is the work of SSI, which I felt privileged to glimpse. One of the critical points of its operation is that it is not a 'Lady Bountiful' charity.

Yes, it is a charity, but thanks in part to the fact that the educational services it provides are in part paid for, it is an economically sensitive provider. It gives people the things they want, which among other things, is education for their children. The broader message here is that anyone seeking to intervene in the hugely complex economic interactions that take place in a complicated, if informal, city must listen to the signals of the market to show what people want rather than impose some theoretical solution to perceived problems. If you listen to what people want, you may get it right. If you impose an external solution, even if it seems successful elsewhere, you are liable to get it wrong" (McRae, 2010).

2.7. Resources

From the research studies, a series of instructional resource materials has emerged: the '*How to Series of Inclusive Education*'. Entitled *The Culturally Appropriate Policy and Practice*, these are at the micro, mezzo, and macro levels and relevant for any organisation or agency working in inclusion (Alur, 2012).

2.8. Policy Intervention and Change

All over the world, Disabled People's Organization (DPOs) consist of groups of disabled people. The ADAPT Rights Group (ARG), set up by Founder Student and Trustee Malini Chib, looks at an inclusive society, with *disabled*

people and non-disabled people working together.

The central message of ADAPT is “*nothing about us without us.*” A significant activity is conducting Access Audits of public places. It has altered public places like hospitals, multiplexes, shopping malls, and amusement parks (*Some of ARG’s achievements in making places accessible include: Bombay High Court, Shopper’s Stop, Globus, Imax, Hiranandini Hospital, St Theresa’s Church, Reserve Bank of India, Water Kingdom, Godrej Hospital, Fun Republic*).

In transportation, the ARG has made local buses accessible and disabled-friendly. There were thirty disabled-friendly buses in Mumbai and 200 in New Delhi. Three railway stations in New Mumbai have been made accessible. A wheelchair event was included in the Mumbai Marathon in 2005 after a prolonged intervention by the ARG (Alur, 2017).

2.9. Influencing Policy and Outcomes: Partnerships with Government

On the macro level, collaboration with the government has been at the local, state, national, and international levels. Dr. Alur, through her membership in elite national-level committees, such as the Central Advisory Board of Education, has influenced policy decisions and brought about much-needed systemic changes in the country. Setting up networks such as the ‘*All India Regional Alliance*’ and the ‘*Asia-Pacific Alliance for Inclusive Education*’ has helped disseminate learning and promote local inclusive education initiatives.

Some of the successful strategies used by ADAPT included regular interaction with key Ministries, politicians, parliamentarians, and policy-makers of all political parties, critiquing of policy measures and documents, sharing constructive suggestions with the government, practical activities to operationalize existing as well as new initiatives, creating a lobby for the implementation of laws that have been passed and interaction with the media.

The Outcomes have been:

- a) A question on disability was included as a category in the Census in 2011 after sustained efforts by ADAPT to mobilise NGO support for the same. Reformative action has also taken place due to the intense

lobbying by ADAPT.

- b) In November 2009, the Government passed the RTE Act in Parliament, making education a constitutional right and extending the right to universal education for all children in disadvantaged areas. Still, unfortunately, it *failed to include the disabled in its key definition*. Demonstrations, several trips to Delhi, and extensive lobbying for the cause ensured that the RTE today makes it legally mandatory to include all disabled children, giving them the constitutional right to education (Alur, 2022).
- c) ADAPT also organised a campaign for civil rights called 'The Disabled Vote' with a political charter outlining four significant demands of people with disabilities:
- Disability issues should be included in the political manifesto of all political parties and in their common minimum programme.
 - A national disability advisor working under the prime minister's jurisdiction would help bring about effective public-private partnerships and monitor the implementation of all programmes for people with disabilities.
 - A commitment must be made that 10 per cent of the Member of Parliament's budget or the MP Lad Fund is spent on disabled people for their education and health programmes.
 - Disabled people need to be heard in Parliament.

A solidarity march was organized, and a groundswell that could 'swing' the vote was created.

AIRA partners, too, participated in solidarity marches, held press meets, approached those in power with memorandums based on the political charter, and conducted similar audits. The outcome was that four major political parties, the Congress, CPI (M), BJP, and the NCP *included disability issues in their political manifestos*.

- a) The flagship programme in the country *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyaan (SSA -*

Education for All) now incorporates inclusive education and education of disabled children as a key element to achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDG).

- b) The government has created the Ministry of Women and Child Development, focusing on early childhood care for the first time, and ADAPT has trained its officials in inclusion.
- c) At the international level, multilateral agencies and international organizations, foreign governments, the education sector, universities and academic institutions, and national and international NGOs have been networked with through research projects and international conferences called The North-South Dialogues (Alur, 2010).

2.10. Economics and Sustainability

The organisation was founded on service delivery and not-for-profit ideology. For decades, the organization's financial management rested purely on a charity framework. This was important in laying the foundations of a service that was non-existent in the country. The key was to reach out to the beneficiaries and to empower them.

The charity's operational framework depended on ad hoc donations, small-scale fundraising programmes, and government grants. With the enormous growth of services and allied activities, continuing the charity model of operations became a challenge. It was essential to move from a charity framework to an entitlement-based one. To ensure sustainability, it was necessary that each of the stakeholders understood the process and contributed. This way, they would take ownership (Alur, 2017).

Over the years, fundraising has evolved creatively, from sponsorships, scholarships, and earmarked donations, film premieres to art and craft exhibitions, 'I Can' bazaars and melas, greeting cards, charity balls, carnivals, and annual concerts. Fundraising is an ideology that has percolated through all stakeholders at all levels at ADAPT. Corpus donations through individuals and foundations are an ongoing part of the revenue generation programme.

International partnerships and collaborations with like-minded partners like

Danida (Denmark), SIDA and Church of Sweden, Lutherjhalpen (Sweden), European Union (Britain), NIDRR (USA) have provided the organization an opportunity to innovate and venture into otherwise unthreaded territories of developmental work. Project grants with like-minded partners like corporate houses, public sector companies, and foundations have been a key outcome of the CSR initiative, which has strengthened over the years.

Now, the principles of sustainability are an integral part of running through the entire organizational structure.

3. ADAPT: Transforming Education At The Grassroots

3.1. A Trans-Disciplinary Team Approach

Management of children with cerebral palsy requires a *holistic programme combining education and treatment*. A unique, trans-disciplinary approach to providing services like physio, occupational and speech therapy, social and psychological counseling, and remedial education was developed under one roof (Alur, 2017).

The *Infant Stimulation Clinics* have been set up to cater to children 0 - 3 years of age, where *high-risk* babies as young as ten days are referred.

The *Home Management Programmes* train families from out of town where mothers are trained *how* to effectively deal with their disabled child at home so that secondary and tertiary handicaps do not develop with their disabled child at home.

Assessment of children with multiple disorders, such as cerebral palsy, needs a team of specialists who understand the difficulties of children and their parents. A new Assessment Unit was created consisting of social workers, psychologists, teachers, assessment of children and to advise parents.

3.2. Parents as Partners

The team works closely in *partnership with parents* and provides technical and professional guidance about managing their child and their family. This

professionalism is always combined with the new approach of compassion and care to empower them to take up the challenge of this chronic handicap. This approach was new to India and has helped to change the situation for hundreds of parents in the subcontinent (Alur, 2017). In addition to managing their children at home, parents are now teachers, therapists, principals of schools, and in management positions at ADAPT.

3.3. Education

Sixty percent of children with cerebral palsy have average intelligence and hence, educating them is a big challenge. They have been graphically described as "*an intelligent mind in a disobedient body - a mind that works but a body that doesn't*".

New cost-effective methods of breaking communication barriers from a very young age were put together such as magnetic boards, flannel boards, rubber stamps, flashcards, typewriters, and later computers.

The organisation engaged with State School Boards, and several much-needed concessions were introduced. This enabled hundreds of students with severe disability to excel in academic study nationwide (Alur, 2017).

3.4. Vocational Skills

Having begun to educate young people with severe disabilities, the next service was a response to the challenge of 'After School What'? A small programme was set up to demonstrate what disabled youth could do after school. This expanded, and a variety of skills training programmes in areas such as printing, tailoring, catering, computers, etc. was set up with help from the Spastics Society, U.K., (now known as Scope), NIDRR (United States), and the Central and State Governments. Earlier known as the National Job Development Centre, it is now called the Skills Development Centre (Alur, 2017).

4. Social Impact of the Initiatives

A significant outcome of SSI is that *neurological disability* and Cerebral palsy, *which had previously not been recognized* amongst the Government's

classifications, is *now* recognized as one of the 11 official classifications accepted by the Government of India's Ministry of Social Justice and Welfare (Alur, 2017).

- Many Students have pursued Higher and Technical Education and set up their successful businesses. Over 300 models of employment have been developed.
- Pedagogy training of manpower on a national level, training workshops, and seminars has supported the growth of services across the subcontinent.
- Autonomous Societies in twenty-nine of the Indian States based on this first model have been set up.
- The organisation was presented with the National Award for the Best Voluntary Agency in 1987.
- It has been acknowledged as one of the 47 'sanitised' NGOs eligible for CSR grants by the Government of India.

5. Case Studies

a) Malini Chib

Malini Chib, the *raison d'être* for the setting up of The Spastics Society of India, who had been referred to as a 'vegetable' when she was born, has completed a Double Masters in Womens' Studies from the Institute of Education (IOE), London and Information Management from the London Metropolitan University. She has moved society's service delivery model from charity to rights, introduced the social model, and formed the ADAPT Rights Group (ARG) which addresses issues of accessibility, equal opportunity, and participation. Malini is an author, an activist, an inspirational speaker, and lecturer, giving talks pan India, in Sorborne in France, and the U.K. She is also Trustee, ADAPT, Founder Chairperson, ADAPT Rights Group (ARG), and Member, Diversity Team, Tata Sons.

Her debut autobiographical work, *One Little Finger*, has contributed tremendously to awareness about disability and also fetched her a National Award as a role model for persons with disability from the President of India. She also received the CNN IBN National Award for contribution to the nation and many other awards. She has written extensively and is a strong advocate for the cause of disabled people. She inspired the film, 'Margarita with a Straw' directed by her cousin Shonali Bose, which has won national and international acclaim. Today, Malini is working with Tata Sons in Mumbai as part of their Diversity Team and continues to inspire many.

b) Utpal Shah

Utpal Shah was referred to the Centre for Special Education by the Children's Orthopaedic Hospital (COH), where he has been receiving treatment and education services. At the centre, he was eager to learn. Utpal's family was advised to encourage him by giving him simple responsibilities. He was given speech therapy focusing on self-monitoring to listen to, critically evaluate, and correct speech. His family was advised to make him read short passages aloud while sitting in a stable and relaxed position. Utpal stayed with the centre until he passed SSC and Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC) with the help of an amanuensis (a writer who could follow his speech) provided by the centre. He joined Podar College of Commerce and graduated with a B.Com. in 1992 and M.Com. in 1994. He then joined NJDC for a computer course. In 1994, he was employed at NJDC as an Assistant Accountant and worked there for ten years. After that, he was with a pharmaceutical company for another ten years and has recently re-joined ADAPT (Able Disabled All People Together) as the Accounts Manager.

6. ADAPT: Challenges

The organization still faces numerous challenges in various areas. These include:

- a) The need to make the general educational system inclusive is critical. The RTE is not being implemented in its true spirit at the ground level. Training, especially of *regular teachers*, is imperative for Inclusive Education to happen.

- b) Universal design deals with physical access and *an accessible curriculum*. Accessibility to education does not only mean physical infrastructure like ramps or toilets; it means addressing teacher training, access to the school syllabus, and pedagogy, where regular teachers need to change their attitude and be trained.
- c) In order to close the gap between the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) mandate and the situation on the ground, there needs to be *convergence between the special and general school systems*. The Mithu Alur International Multiversity for Special and Inclusive Education planned by ADAPT aims to fill this gap (Alur, 2017).
- d) Acceptance of persons with disabilities into mainstream society and to be considered as contributing tax-paying citizens of India.

7. Conclusion

ADAPT has essentially been a Knowledge Centre, which was set up with the help of Oracle and is now moving on to becoming a College and a Multiversity.

To implement the Right to Education in its true spirit, there must be convergence between the special and general school systems. ADAPT is setting up The Mithu Alur International Multiversity for Special and Inclusive Education, a research-intensive, post-graduate degree-granting University that will be inclusive of all people with special needs and will address diversity and inclusion and develop a cadre of resources (human and technological) to support a sustainable model for universal primary education, while also working towards influencing public policy (Alur, 2020).

Transformation of schools through Teacher Preparation is the need of the hour. This University will aim to fill this gap. Gandhi said, "*A small body of determined spirits fired by an unquenchable faith in their mission can alter the course of history.*" This ADAPT, formerly The Spastics Society of India has done through a civil society movement built on the bedrock of social justice and human rights.

The reach of ADAPT in the five decades of service, through direct services as

well as Indirectly, through training programmes, networks, national and international conferences, advocacy efforts, and policy change, is *over 300 million across the world*.

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Price : ₹1,550/-



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