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COVER INTERVIEW

Today, I measure an education less by what students score and more by who they become

The Most Persistent Weakness in India's Engineering Education System Is the Gap Between Knowing and Doing

Dr. Tapas Kumar
Dean, Institute of Engineering & Technology
JK Lakshmipat University (JKLU), Jaipur

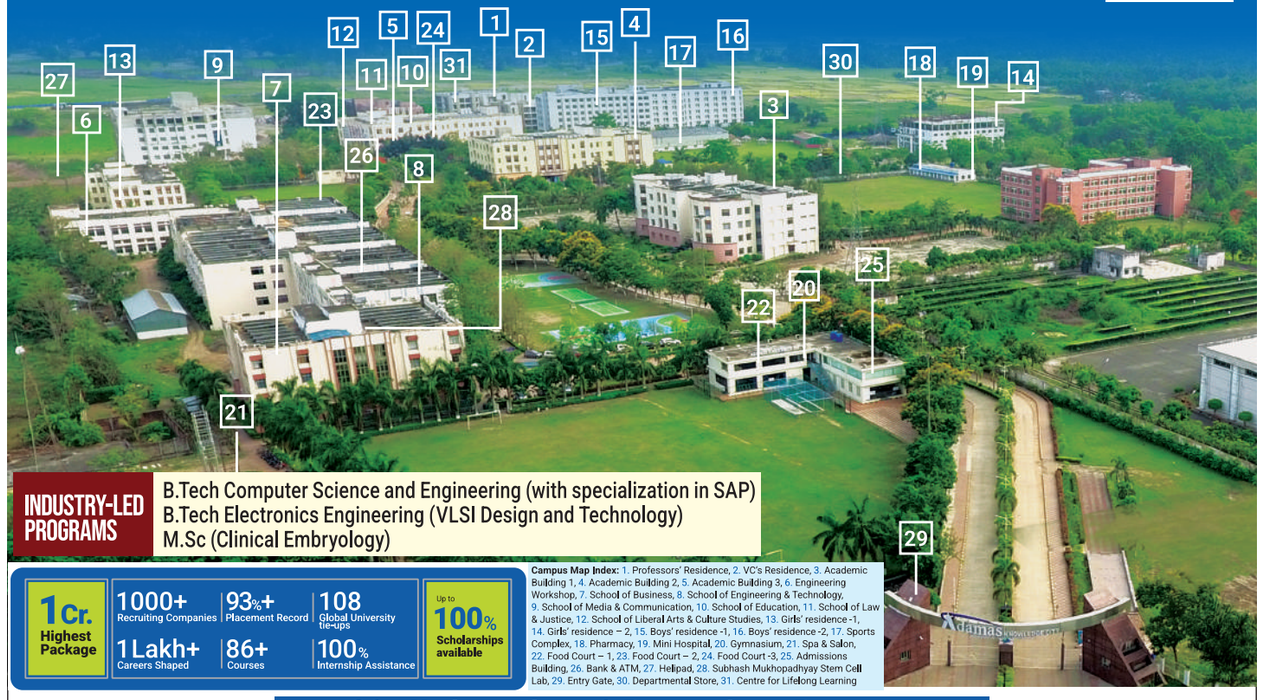
INDIA'S EDUCATION AT A CROSSROADS

Six years after NEP 2020, India faces a defining question: Are schools and universities preparing students for the future, or struggling to deliver on the promise of reform?

Prof. Y.S.R. Murthy
Pro Vice-Chancellor (Law),
SRM Institute of Science and Technology

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THE REAL TEST OF EDUCATION REFORM LIES BEYOND POLICY

India has never lacked ambition when it comes to education. From expanding access to schools and universities to introducing new technologies and revisiting how students learn, the country has repeatedly expressed its commitment to building a better education system. Yet ambition alone cannot determine progress. The real measure lies in what changes inside classrooms, how institutions respond to students' needs and whether education prepares young people for the world they are about to enter.

Six years after the introduction of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, the discussion must move beyond its intentions to the realities of implementation. The policy presented a vision of greater flexibility, multidisciplinary learning and a shift away from rote memorisation. However, translating these ideas into everyday teaching requires more than administrative instructions. Teachers need sustained support, institutions need the capacity to adapt, and students must experience these changes in ways that improve how they learn.

The challenge becomes more complicated as students move from school to higher education. Academic achievement remains important, but qualifications alone cannot guarantee opportunity. Employers increasingly expect graduates to demonstrate practical understanding, adaptability and independent judgement. This raises an uncomfortable question for institutions: are they preparing students to understand their disciplines, or merely to complete courses and obtain degrees?

Artificial intelligence has added another dimension to this debate. Its growing presence in education and employment offers possibilities for personalised learning, research and career guidance. But technology cannot be treated as a substitute for effective teaching or sound institutional judgement. Without examining its limitations, the enthusiasm surrounding AI risks creating another gap between what education promises and what students actually receive.

Equally important is the responsibility of educational leadership. Institutions must be willing to examine their own weaknesses, question established practices and assess success beyond enrolment figures, infrastructure expansion and placement claims. A university's reputation should ultimately rest on the quality of education it provides and the intellectual independence it encourages.

There is also a larger responsibility that education carries in a democratic society. Students must learn to question information, engage with opposing perspectives and distinguish evidence from assertion. These abilities are essential in an age when public opinion can be shaped by misinformation and complex issues are frequently reduced to convenient conclusions. Education that discourages questioning cannot adequately prepare young people for responsible citizenship.

For policymakers, the priority should be to examine outcomes with the same seriousness devoted to announcing reforms. For educators, it should be to ensure that learning remains meaningful. And for institutions, it should be to recognise that their responsibility extends beyond the awarding of certificates.

At Education Post, we believe that conversations about education must be grounded in evidence and accompanied by difficult questions. Progress deserves recognition, but shortcomings must be examined with equal seriousness. The purpose of education journalism is neither to celebrate every institutional claim nor to dismiss every reform. It is to understand what works, what does not and why.

India's educational future will not be decided by the number of reforms it announces, but by what those reforms make possible for its students. That is where accountability must begin.

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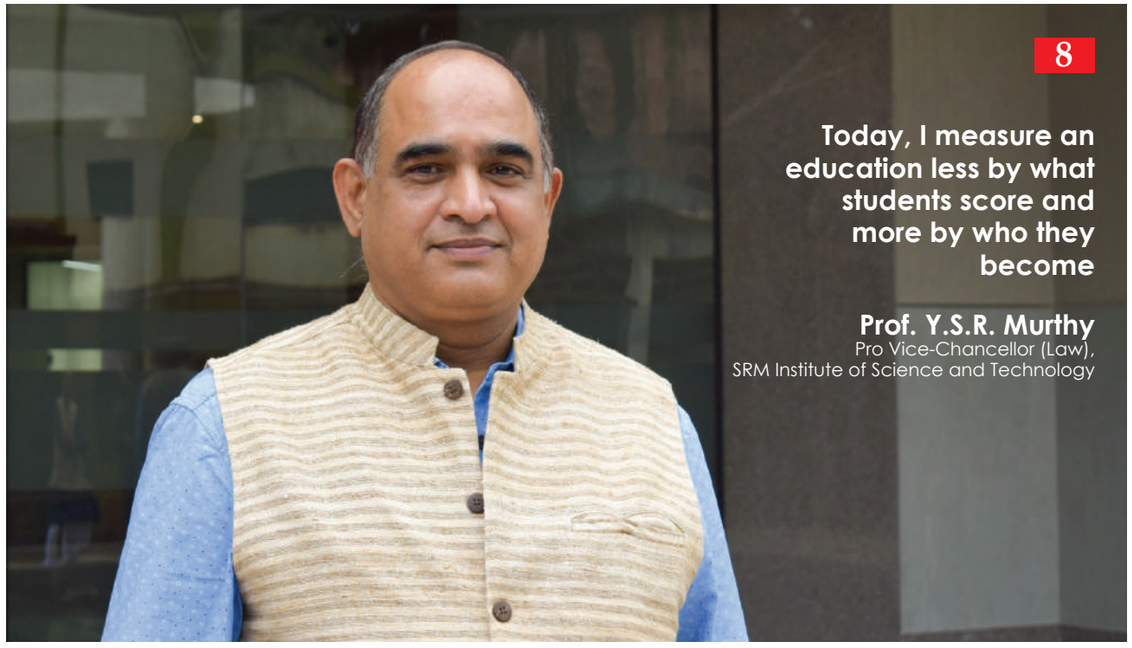
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Pro Vice-Chancellor (Law),
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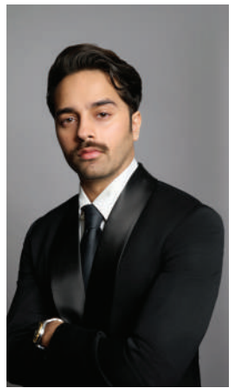
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Pro Vice-Chancellor (Law),
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Today, I measure an education less by what students score and more by who they become

Prof. Y.S.R. Murthy
Pro Vice-Chancellor (Law),
SRM Institute of Science and Technology

India's legal education system has expanded considerably, but a fundamental question remains: Are law schools preparing students to understand the law or equipping them to practise it? Despite growing opportunities in litigation, corporate law and public policy, the gap between classroom instruction and professional competence continues to challenge legal education.

Prof. Y.S.R. Murthy, Pro Vice-Chancellor (Law), SRM Institute of Science and Technology, draws on more than four decades of experience in public service, university leadership and academia to examine what needs to change. In this exclusive interview with Education Post's **Prabhav Anand,** he discusses the shortage of qualified faculty, unequal access to quality education, the limitations of conventional teaching and the growing influence of artificial intelligence on legal practice. Reflecting on academic freedom, constitutional values and access to justice, Murthy argues for an education system that prioritises independent thinking, practical competence and professional integrity over examination scores, institutional rankings and placement figures.

COVER **INTERVIEW**



You have seen Indian higher education from three different positions–as a civil servant, a university leader and a legal academic. From this experience, what is the biggest structural weakness in Indian legal education today? Are we producing graduates who understand the law, or professionals who can actually apply it to real-world problems?

There are several weaknesses in the Indian legal education system. In my personal view, the dearth of top-quality law teachers who are tech-savvy, research-oriented and capable of shaping the next generation of lawyers is a major gap. We need inspiring and highly motivated law teachers and practitioners to change the face of legal education in the country. We produce many graduates who know the law, but far fewer who can confidently apply it to a client's problem.

A law degree can lead to litigation, corporate law, public policy, judicial services, research and several other careers. Yet, many students struggle to understand the practical demands of these professions while studying. How should law schools redesign their curricula to bridge the gap between classroom learning and professional practice?

I do not think the problem is a shortage of practical content. The Bar Council of India's Rules of Legal Education, 2008, already require clinical papers, moot court exercises and internships. The real problem is that we teach the law in one semester and the work of a lawyer in another, and there is often a big gap between the two.

For instance, a student may study contract law for a full semester without reading a commercial agreement from start to finish and may encounter a plaint, a bail application or a board resolution for the first time only in the final year. Curricula should be redesigned so that each core subject is taught alongside the documents it produces in practice. Contract law should be taught with an agreement on the table, criminal procedure with an FIR, a charge sheet and a bail application under the BNSS, constitutional law with a writ petition, and company law with board minutes and a shareholders' agreement. Drafting and procedure must be introduced in the early years, and practitioners, whether advocates, in-house counsel or retired judicial officers, should co-teach courses rather than appear only as guest lecturers.

Many students choose litigation, corporate practice or judicial services based on reputation or salary figures and understand the demands of these professions only after graduation. Early, supervised exposure to a trial court, a law firm, a regulator and a research centre should come first. In the later years, students can then concentrate on a trial file for litigation, a transaction carried from term sheet to closing for corporate practice, a well-researched submission on a draft law for public policy, and the framing of issues and writing of judgments for those preparing for the Bench.

The Supreme Court's ruling of August 2026 on the recruitment of Civil Judges makes this point clearly. For recruitment advertisements issued from April 1, 2027, the Court reduced the prior practice requirement from three years to one, while retaining a year of training at a

judicial academy and a year of structured law clerkship after selection. Under the transitional arrangement, fresh law graduates remain eligible to apply without prior practice for recruitment advertisements issued through March 31, 2027. Judgment in a courtroom, in other words, is learnt by doing. Law schools should begin that process well before graduation instead of leaving it entirely to the years that follow.

Moot courts, internships, legal aid clinics and clinical legal education are widely discussed as ways to make law courses more practical. What should a law student be able to do independently by the time they graduate, and how can universities measure whether these practical learning opportunities are genuinely effective?

By the time students graduate, I would expect them to be able to perform certain tasks without constant supervision. They should be able to sit with a client, take instructions, ask the questions that matter and identify the legal issues in a set of facts. They should be able to research a point using primary sources, not just commentaries, and write a short opinion that a senior could rely on. They should be able to draft everyday legal documents, such as a legal notice, a plaint or written statement, a bail application and a simple commercial agreement, without relying on a template or an AI tool to do the thinking for them.

They should be able to stand before a court or tribunal and make a short, structured submission on an interlocutory application. They should also be able to maintain client confidentiality, recognise a conflict of interest, meet deadlines, verify every authority before citing it in a pleading and know when to say, “I need to check this.”

To determine whether moot courts, clinics and internships are working, universities must stop counting inputs. The number of moots attended, the weeks of internship completed (the Bar Council prescribes a minimum of 20 weeks for the five-year course) or the certificates collected tells us very little about competence. What matters is the quality of work a student can actually produce.

Clinical courses should be assessed through performance: a client interview, a drafting exercise under time pressure and an oral submission before practitioners, each evaluated against criteria published in advance. The Solicitors Qualifying Examination in England and Wales already tests entry-level lawyers in this way, through client interviewing, advocacy, legal research, writing and drafting.

Internship supervisors should assess specific tasks instead of issuing a general certificate, and a legal aid clinic should be judged by whether people’s problems were actually resolved and how carefully each file was handled. The real test comes after graduation. Ask the employers, senior advocates and judges who work with our graduates during their first two years of practice. If that feedback is gathered regularly and incorporated into the curriculum, practical training stops being a compliance exercise.

India has a wide range of law schools, with substantial differences in faculty strength, infrastructure, research opportunities and access to professional networks. How can the country improve the quality of legal education beyond a small group of well-resourced institutions? What reforms would make the greatest difference for students from smaller cities and less privileged backgrounds?

India’s challenge in legal education is not a shortage of law schools but the uneven distribution of what makes a law school good: qualified faculty, a research culture, clinical training and access to professional networks. A small group of institutions, led by the National Law Universities, dominates the national rankings. Most students, including almost all first-generation learners from smaller cities, study elsewhere.

The Bar Council of India (BCI) has itself acknowledged that many colleges operate without adequate infrastructure or faculty and that most receive no grant support to improve their standards. Therefore, raising quality means raising the floor of the system, not reproducing a few elite campuses.

The reforms that would make the greatest difference are practical. Strengthening faculty through capacity-building programmes and shared teaching arrangements would address the most serious constraint. A formal hub-and-spoke partnership model, in which established universities mentor district-level colleges and share libraries, legal databases, moot court facilities and legal aid clinics, would spread existing resources.

Bilingual instruction, which the National Education Policy 2020 encourages for state institutions, would turn regional language skills



from a barrier into a strength. SRM has, for instance, conducted a Tamil moot court. Need-based scholarships, paid internships and alumni mentorship would open professional networks to students without connections. Regulation should also shift towards publishing institutional data, such as faculty-student ratios and graduate placement outcomes, so that students can make informed choices and institutions are held accountable.

Artificial intelligence can now assist with legal research, document review, contract drafting and summarising judgments. What legal skills will become more valuable as these tasks become increasingly automated? Should Indian law schools make AI literacy and technology ethics compulsory parts of legal education?

Yes. AI literacy and technology ethics must become compulsory parts of legal education. Given the risk of fictitious judgments and legal hallucinations resulting from the use of AI, it is very important to maintain human oversight, or a human-in-the-loop approach, to ensure that there is no miscarriage of justice.



Universities must identify and declare the capacities they will protect. Five things are important.

First, reading primary sources: the entire judgment, the full statute and the original dataset, rather than a machine-generated summary.

Second, inculcating the habit of writing to stimulate critical thinking. The first draft is where an argument is actually formed, and a student who never struggles with one never learns to reason on paper.

Third, verification and attribution. Checking where a claim comes from and acknowledging the source honestly is the new foundational literacy.

Fourth, reasoning aloud under pressure. Law students should be trained consistently through moot courts, viva voce examinations and seminars, where their judgment can be tested in real time without relying on a tool.

Fifth, owning the consequences. A professional cannot apologise to a court, a patient or a client on behalf of an algorithm.

AI-generated legal material can contain fabricated judgments, inaccurate citations and misleading interpretations. How should law schools teach students to use these tools without weakening their ability to conduct independent research, verify sources and exercise professional judgment?

In continuation of my response to the earlier question, it is important to bear in mind that some of these failures were not caused by the use of AI as such. They were caused by the absence of a human habit that legal education once took for granted: opening a law report and reading the judgment. That habit cannot be inculcated through a software update. It must be developed gradually in classrooms.

A study by Microsoft Research and Carnegie Mellon University, presented at the CHI 2025 conference, surveyed 319 knowledge workers who shared 936 real-world examples of using generative AI at work. It found that greater confidence in AI was associated with less critical thinking, whereas greater confidence in one's own abilities was associated with more critical thinking.

The researchers also observed that workers may forgo critical thinking when they lack the skills to inspect and improve what AI has produced. The lesson for educators is plain and simple: one cannot supervise a machine doing work one has never learned to do.

You are also associated with SWAYAM as a National Coordinator. What can digital learning platforms contribute to legal education, particularly for students who lack access to specialist faculty or high-quality learning resources? Where should online learning complement, rather than replace, classroom teaching and practical legal training?

As a SWAYAM National Coordinator, I have seen how a well-designed online course can make the teaching of an outstanding scholar accessible to a student in a small district town who might otherwise never have had the opportunity to learn from that teacher.

For students without access to specialist faculty, digital platforms can offer subjects that their colleges cannot teach due to faculty shortages. They provide recorded lectures, reading materials and assessments that students can revisit at their own pace. Through the credit framework, these courses can also count towards their degrees.

Through this process, the system has sought to bridge the disparity in access to quality higher education for the majority of students across India. However, online learning should complement, not replace, classroom teaching. Moot courts, legal aid clinics, court visits, client interviews and internships should remain in person, as these are the settings in which students learn to think and act like lawyers.

Your experience at the National Human Rights Commission brought you into close contact with questions of rights, governance and institutional accountability. How can law schools ensure that human rights and constitutional values are not treated merely as subjects to pass, but as principles that shape how future lawyers, judges and public officials approach their work?

My work at the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) taught me that rights violations are rarely legal problems alone. They arise where law intersects with poverty, labour, caste, gender and institutional neglect.

Consider the bonded labourer, the migrant worker without a contract or the person injured at work without compensation. None of their circumstances can be understood through statutes alone.

Law schools must therefore stop teaching law in isolation. In other words, we need justice education, not just legal education. For example, initiatives such as human rights clinics and visits to jails, juvenile homes, beggar homes, destitute women's homes, mental hospitals and halfway homes can help students understand the nature of socio-legal challenges.

These experiences enable students to meet the people for whom these rights exist. When a student has stood at a worksite or in a shelter, the Constitution stops being a syllabus and becomes a professional conscience. That is exactly what we must cultivate in future lawyers, judges and public officials.

In a 2023 interview with The New Indian Express, you argued that education should not be politicised and that frequent changes to educational content can undermine continuity. How should law schools approach politically sensitive constitutional and legal questions while encouraging open debate, protecting academic freedom and ensuring that students learn to evaluate competing arguments objectively?

My concern has always been continuity. Education suffers when what we teach changes with every shift in government because students and institutions pay the price of that instability. If something in a curriculum is genuinely problematic, it can be corrected carefully, but reform should be guided by experts and evidence rather than political convenience.



This does not mean law schools should avoid sensitive constitutional questions. A law school must directly examine questions of federalism, free speech, reservations, personal laws and the limits of state power. What matters is how these questions are taught.

Students should read the text of the Constitution, the Constituent Assembly debates, the leading judgments and the strongest dissenting opinions. They should learn to argue every side before forming their own views. They should be exposed to all perspectives and compelled to accept none.

Academic freedom depends on genuine institutional autonomy and faculty who are free to teach and conduct research without fear, but who do not use the classroom for advocacy. We must never forget that universities are liberal spaces and classrooms are free spaces for the contestation of ideas.

My years at the NHRC reinforced my belief in freedom of expression. A future lawyer or judge must learn to decide on the strength of an argument, not on the comfort of an ideology.

Access to justice remains a serious concern for people who cannot afford legal representation or navigate complex legal procedures. What responsibility should universities have in addressing this problem? Can legal aid clinics and community-based programmes become a meaningful part of a law school's contribution to society, rather than remaining limited academic exercises?

Access to justice is a responsibility that universities share, not merely a subject they teach. The Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987, read alongside NALSA's 2013 scheme, already provides for legal services clinics in law colleges. The challenge is to make them meaningful rather than ceremonial.

A meaningful clinic is supervised by faculty and practitioners, linked to district legal services authorities and present in the community. Students should be able to work with workers, women, senior citizens and undertrial prisoners.

They can help people obtain documents and welfare entitlements, conduct legal literacy camps in local languages and refer cases to panel lawyers. This work should carry academic credit and be assessed seriously so that it is recognised as central to legal education.

You helped lead O.P. Jindal Global University during a period of expansion, established RV University's School of Law as its founding Vice-Chancellor and Dean, and later served as Vice-Chancellor of Assam Royal Global University. Having experienced different institutional settings, what separates a law school that builds a strong reputation from one that achieves lasting academic quality? Which indicators should matter more than rankings, placements and infrastructure?

Helping to build O.P. Jindal Global University in its formative years and establishing RV University and, later, its School of Law have been among the most rewarding experiences of my career.

These experiences taught me that a good reputation can grow quickly, but lasting quality is built patiently over many years. Rankings and recognition are encouraging, and they have their place. Yet the qualities I have come to value most are quieter: faculty members who stay, teach with commitment and continue researching; students who learn to think and argue for themselves; legal aid work that genuinely reaches people; and graduates who demonstrate competence and integrity long after they leave.

For me, a law school's real achievement lies in the people it produces and the standards it upholds year after year.

Private universities play a growing role in Indian legal education, but tuition fees, affordability and access to quality education remain important concerns. How can private law schools balance the need to invest in faculty, research and infrastructure with the responsibility to make legal education accessible? What should universities be more transparent about when communicating the value of a law degree to prospective students and parents?

Private universities serve the same social purpose as public institutions: educating the next generation and developing future leaders. Yet they operate under real constraints.

Tuition fees are often their only significant source of income, as philanthropy remains limited in India. Establishing a campus also requires substantial investment that can take years to recover.

Even so, these constraints cannot justify making legal education a privilege of the wealthy. There must be a balance.

Equally important is transparency. Before choosing a law school, students and parents deserve clear information about the total cost of the degree, faculty qualifications, student-faculty ratios, financial aid and graduate outcomes.

You took charge as Pro Vice-Chancellor (Law) at SRM Institute of Science and Technology in April 2026. What are your immediate priorities for the School of Law, and what measurable changes would you like students and faculty to see over the next three years?

The vision of SRM School of Law is to emerge as a truly world-class global law school. My immediate priorities are to deepen cutting-edge research, significantly improve teaching and learning, forge national and international collaborations, and diversify the student body and faculty.

We also wish to embrace internationalisation in a major way. By 2029, we expect to see an increase in national and international collaborations, research output and diversity.

In your July 2023 interview with The New Indian Express, you argued that India needs to improve teaching, research facilities and the overall value of its degrees to compete with leading international universities. You also stressed the importance of continuity in education policy. Looking at legal education specifically, what has materially improved since then, and where has progress fallen short? If you could change one policy or institutional practice immediately to improve the quality of Indian law schools, what would it be—and how would you measure its impact?

Since 2023, law schools have incorporated the new criminal laws into their curricula, with a



welcome emphasis on forensic science and case-based learning. The gradual but regulated opening of the Indian legal market to foreign lawyers signals that our graduates must be prepared for international practice. The Bar Council's focus on quality over numbers is also a positive step.

Progress has been slower within institutions. We still need more well-trained teachers, more funded research and greater autonomy for good institutions.

If I could change one thing, I would invest directly in law teachers through a national faculty development and research fund, open to public and private institutions alike.

I would measure its impact through faculty retention, the number of qualified doctoral faculty members, research quality and, above all, how well our students learn to reason and write. Great law schools are built by great teachers, their most valuable asset.

15. Many law students enter university believing that success depends primarily on grades, entrance examination ranks or placement packages. What three capabilities should they deliberately develop during their five-year law degree to build a meaningful and sustainable career?

Law students should develop three essential capabilities during their five-year degree: extensive reading and critical thinking, strong legal research skills, and the ability to develop their own voice and belief system through extensive reading. They should also learn to articulate their own cause with force.

After more than four decades across public service and academia, what is one assumption about higher education or the legal profession that your own experience has fundamentally changed?

I began my career as a statistician, trained to believe that what matters can be measured. For many years, I assumed that rankings, results and numbers could tell us whether an institution or a student was truly succeeding.

My work at the NHRC and, later, in building universities gradually changed that view. I met people whose dignity depended on the integrity of a single official. I watched students who never topped an examination become outstanding lawyers and public servants.

I came to see that the most important outcomes of education, such as judgment, integrity, empathy and the courage to stand for what is right, rarely appear in any table.

Today, I measure an education less by what students score and more by who they become. EP

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In Pursuit of Truth
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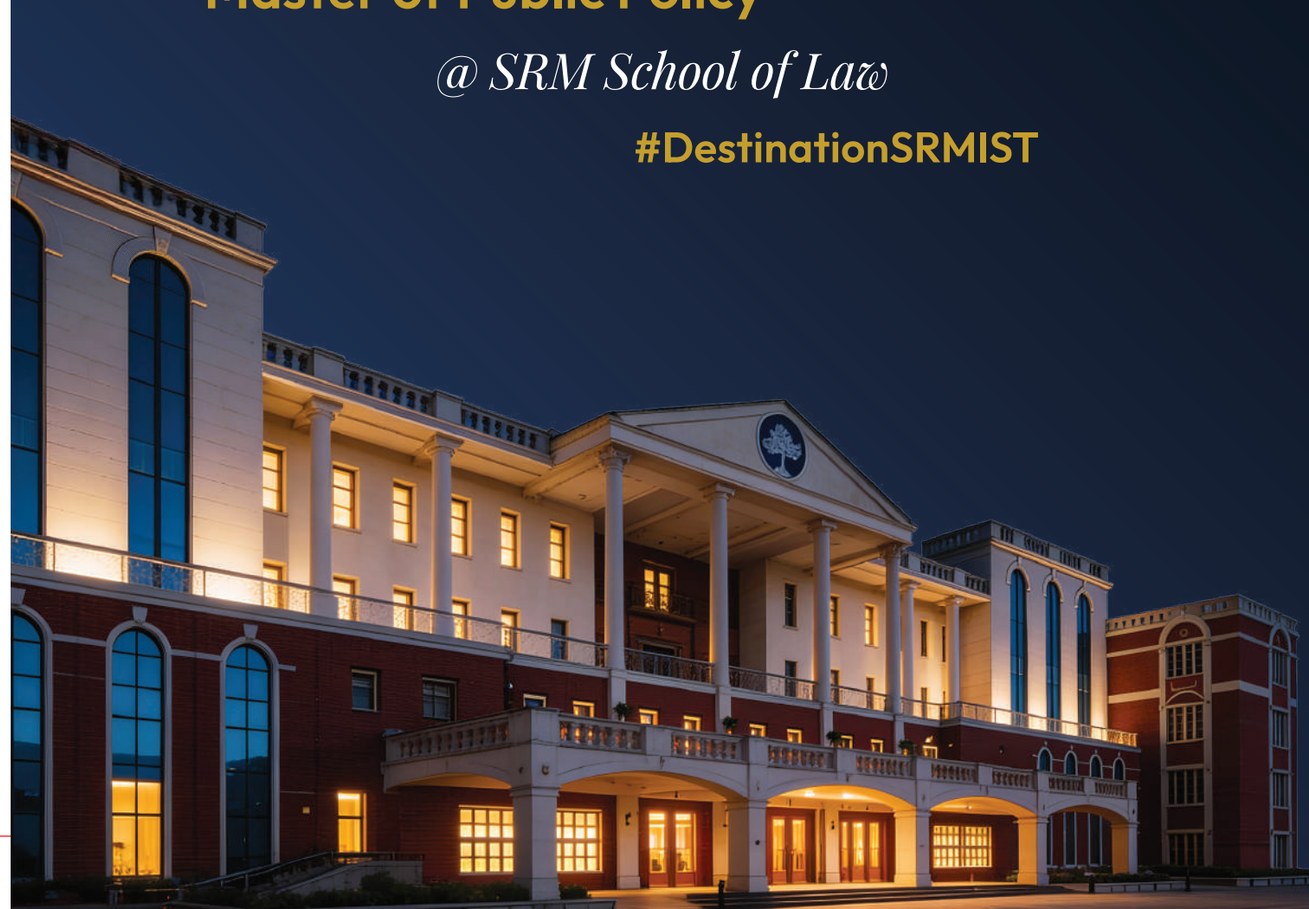
SRM School of Law Launches Master of Public Policy (MPP) Programme

With access to state departments, research institutions, NGOs, and policy-driven industries, the Post Graduate - Master of Public Policy Programme offered at SRM School of Law, SRMIST-Chennai, constitutes real-world context for evidence-based policy analysis and public administration.

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India's engineering education system continues to face a fundamental challenge: translating classroom knowledge into practical competence. Despite curriculum reforms, technological advances and growing industry partnerships, questions remain about whether institutions are preparing graduates for real-world engineering challenges. **Dr. Tapas Kumar,** Dean, Institute of Engineering & Technology, JK Lakshmipat University (JKLU), Jaipur, in this interview with Education Post's **Prabhav Anand,** examines the shortcomings of examination-driven learning, the uneven adoption of artificial intelligence and the limitations of placement-based performance measures. Drawing on nearly three decades of academic experience, he also discusses research accountability, industry relevance and why universities must prioritise problem-solving over academic credentials.

THE MOST PERSISTENT WEAKNESS IN INDIA'S ENGINEERING EDUCATION SYSTEM IS THE GAP BETWEEN KNOWING AND DOING

Dr. Tapas Kumar
Dean, Institute of Engineering & Technology
JK Lakshmipat University (JKLU), Jaipur

With nearly three decades of experience in engineering education and academic leadership, what do you consider the most persistent weakness in India's engineering education system? Why have successive curriculum reforms struggled to address the gap between classroom learning and practical competence?

The most persistent weakness in India's engineering education system is the gap between knowing and doing. Over nearly three decades in engineering education and academic leadership, I have observed that many students understand theoretical concepts and perform well in examinations but struggle to apply their knowledge to real-world engineering problems.

Several factors contribute to this gap, including examination-oriented learning, limited experiential education, inadequate laboratory facilities, insufficient problem-solving opportunities, and weak industry-academia collaboration. In many institutions, academic success is measured primarily through marks rather than practical competence, creativity, innovation, and critical thinking.

Although successive curriculum reforms have introduced outcome-based education, project work, and industry-oriented courses, their impact often remains limited because implementation has not kept pace with policy. Traditional teaching methods, outdated infrastructure, and inadequate faculty development frequently undermine the objectives of these reforms.

Engineering education must prioritise project-based learning, design thinking, interdisciplinary projects, internships, and continuous assessment. Students should be encouraged to design, build, test, fail, improve, and innovate.

Equally important are communication, teamwork, adaptability, digital literacy, and lifelong learning. Meaningful transformation requires collective efforts from institutions, faculty, industry, policymakers, and students. Engineering education will truly progress when we move beyond teaching subjects to developing capable, confident, and innovative problem-solvers.

As generative AI increasingly takes over routine coding and technical tasks, the skills expected of engineering graduates are changing. Are Indian universities adapting their curricula quickly enough, and what should students learn today to remain relevant in an increasingly AI-driven job market?

Generative AI is transforming how engineers work and redefining their professional responsibilities. While AI can generate code and automate routine tasks, engineers remain essential for asking the right questions, designing reliable systems, and exercising sound judgement.

Indian universities have made a promising start by introducing programmes in artificial intelligence, data science, and machine learning. However, adaptation remains uneven. AI is often taught as a standalone subject rather than integrated across disciplines. Universities need faster curriculum reforms, faculty development, modern infrastructure, and stronger industry collaboration.

Students must recognise that AI does not diminish the importance of engineering fundamentals. Mathematics, algorithms, computational thinking, programming principles, and domain expertise remain essential for evaluating AI-generated solutions for accuracy, security, efficiency, and reliability.

To remain relevant, graduates should develop AI and data literacy, cybersecurity awareness, systems thinking, creativity, communication, teamwork, and ethical decision-making. Practical experience through projects, internships, research, and industry engagement is equally important.

The most successful engineers in the AI era will combine technical depth with critical thinking, adaptability, creativity, and lifelong learning. Universities must prepare students not merely to use AI tools, but to understand, evaluate, and apply them responsibly.

Outcome-Based Education (OBE) has become an important part of engineering education, yet questions remain about how effectively learning outcomes are measured. Are universities genuinely assessing students' problem-solving abilities, or has the approach become another accreditation exercise focused on documentation and compliance?

Outcome-Based Education (OBE) has strengthened Indian higher education by establishing clear learning expectations and connecting teaching, assessment, and curriculum improvement. Its central principle is shifting the focus from what is taught to what students actually learn.

However, in some institutions, OBE has become documentation-driven, with excessive emphasis on Course Outcome mapping, Programme Outcome attainment, spreadsheets, and accreditation compliance. Well-prepared reports do not necessarily demonstrate that students can solve engineering problems or apply knowledge in unfamiliar situations.

The challenge lies not in OBE itself but in its implementation. For example, instead of merely testing theoretical knowledge of image processing, students could develop an image-based system to detect defects in manufactured components. Their ability to design solutions, analyse results, and justify decisions would provide more meaningful evidence of learning.

Authentic assessments, including laboratory investigations, design challenges, simulations, capstone projects, and real-world assignments, must complement conventional examinations. Clear assessment rubrics, constructive feedback, and continuous evaluation can further strengthen learning.

Faculty and academic leaders must ensure that outcomes guide teaching, assessment, and curriculum development. Ultimately, OBE should be measured not by accreditation documentation but by students' demonstrated ability to analyse, innovate, design, and solve complex engineering problems confidently.



Engineering institutions frequently highlight placement percentages, salary packages and industry partnerships. However, these figures may not fully reflect graduates' employability. What should universities disclose about placement quality, actual job roles and long-term career outcomes to give students a more accurate picture?

Placement statistics and career outcomes are not the same. Although placement percentages, salary packages, and industry partnerships create confidence, they do not always reflect graduates' professional readiness. Universities must provide a transparent and comprehensive picture of employability.

Institutions should disclose the total number of eligible graduates, placement percentages, median salaries, salary distributions, actual job roles, recruiting sectors, and joining status. They should also clarify whether employment opportunities align with graduates' engineering disciplines, technical competencies, and career aspirations.

For instance, a mechanical engineering graduate working in product design, manufacturing, or automation may directly apply core engineering knowledge. Another graduate earning a higher salary in an unrelated role may have fewer opportunities to use those skills. Both careers have value, but this distinction helps students understand the relevance of their education.

Universities should also report outcomes related to higher education, research, entrepreneurship, and other career pathways. Information about internships, industry projects, professional certifications, and employer feedback would provide additional insights.

Long-term career tracking can reveal professional growth, skill development, and employment stability. Ultimately, an institution's success should not be judged solely by first-job placements, but by how well graduates are equipped to build meaningful, relevant, and sustainable careers.

Your research interests include artificial intelligence, medical image processing and AI-assisted healthcare systems. Despite growing research in these areas, translating academic innovations into clinical applications remains challenging. What barriers involving clinical validation, patient privacy and technological reliability need greater attention from researchers and policymakers?

The true measure of healthcare AI is not its accuracy in a laboratory, but how safely and meaningfully it improves patient care. Although AI is advancing medical imaging, disease prediction, and clinical decision support, promising research results do not automatically translate into clinical effectiveness.

A major challenge is the diversity of clinical data. Patients, hospitals, diagnostic practices, and medical equipment vary considerably. An AI system trained to detect diabetic retinopathy at one hospital may perform less reliably elsewhere. Therefore, validation across diverse patient populations and clinical settings is essential.

Patient privacy is equally important. Sensitive medical information requires informed consent, secure data sharing, and robust governance. Anonymisation helps protect privacy but cannot eliminate every risk.

Reliability also demands attention. Incorrect predictions, cybersecurity vulnerabilities, and unexplained recommendations can compromise patient safety and clinician confidence. AI systems must undergo rigorous evaluation, continuous monitoring, and appropriate human oversight.

Addressing these challenges requires multicentre clinical studies, independent validation, collaboration between engineers and clinicians, and effective regulatory oversight.

AI should strengthen clinical judgement rather than replace it. Researchers and policymakers must prioritise measurable improvements in diagnostic accuracy, treatment decisions, accessibility, and patient outcomes. Ultimately, healthcare innovation succeeds when technological capability is matched by scientific evidence, ethical responsibility, and accountability. AI must be safe, reliable, and worthy of human trust.

Indian universities are increasingly encouraging patent filings, entrepreneurship and industry-funded research. However, many academic innovations struggle to move beyond publications and prototypes. What changes in research funding, evaluation and institutional incentives are necessary to ensure that university research produces measurable benefits for society?

Research output and research impact are not the same. Publications generate knowledge and patents protect innovations, but the true value of research lies in addressing real-world challenges and improving people's lives. Indian universities must move beyond counting publications and patents towards translating research into practical outcomes.

Promising innovations often remain prototypes because of limited funding for product development, field testing, validation, regulatory approval, and commercialisation. Research funding should support the entire innovation journey, from fundamental research to pilot implementation and societal deployment. Seed grants, technology incubators, testing facilities, and industry co-investment can bridge this gap.

Research evaluation must also evolve. Publications and patents remain valuable, but they should be complemented by technology transfer, licensed innovations, successful start-ups, industry adoption, policy contributions, and measurable social benefits.

For example, a university-developed healthcare AI tool should be evaluated not only for accuracy but also for reliability across hospitals, affordability, safety, and contribution to patient care.

Institutional incentives should encourage translational research without compromising academic rigour or fundamental inquiry. Stronger industry partnerships, interdisciplinary collaboration, and professional technology-transfer support can accelerate adoption.

Ultimately, universities must value innovation not merely for its academic output but for its societal impact. Research succeeds when knowledge becomes practical, sustainable, inclusive, and beneficial to people.

In an earlier interview with SugerMint, you stated that "the future belongs to institutions that successfully combine academic rigor with industry relevance." Given the increasing pressure on universities to produce job-ready graduates, where should institutions draw the line between meeting immediate industry demands and preserving fundamental knowledge, independent thinking and long-term academic learning?

Universities should not choose between academic excellence and employability; they must integrate both. Engineering education should prepare students for current industry demands while equipping them to navigate an uncertain future.

Strong foundations in mathematics, science, engineering principles, and critical thinking remain essential. These should be complemented by specialised technical skills, interdisciplinary learning, and exposure to emerging technologies.

Connecting classroom learning with real-world applications is equally important. Internships, collaborative projects, expert mentoring, and industry-defined assignments help students apply theoretical knowledge effectively.

For example, developing a solar energy optimisation system enables students to combine electrical engineering, data analytics, and artificial intelligence to improve energy efficiency while developing practical problem-solving skills.

However, universities must avoid allowing short-term industry trends to dictate entire curricula. Future engineers also need creativity, research orientation, ethical judgement, communication skills, and a commitment to lifelong learning.

Achieving this balance requires sustained collaboration between academia and industry, along with regular curriculum updates that preserve academic depth and independent thinking.

Ultimately, engineering education should be measured not merely by placement rates or starting salaries, but by graduates' ability to innovate, adapt, and contribute meaningfully to society. The goal is to develop engineers who possess the knowledge and creativity to shape the future, rather than simply respond to technological change. EP

THE OBJECTIVE SHOULD BE TO MAKE EDUCATION INVESTABLE WITHOUT MAKING LEARNING TRANSACTIONAL



Nirvaan Birla
Managing Director, Birla Open Minds

Six years after the introduction of the National Education Policy 2020, the gap between policy ambitions and classroom realities remains a pressing concern. **Nirvaan Birla**, Managing Director of Birla Open Minds, examines the challenges facing India's school education system, from uneven policy implementation and teacher preparedness to rising fees and institutional accountability. In this interview with Education Post's **Prabhav Anand**, he discusses the need to maintain academic standards across expanding school networks while balancing private investment with affordability. Birla also reflects on teachers' working conditions, student mental health and why meaningful education reform must ultimately be measured by improvements in classroom learning.

Six years after the introduction of NEP 2020, India's school education system continues to struggle with learning gaps and unequal access to quality education. What do you see as the biggest failure in its implementation, and what reforms should the government prioritise?

I would hesitate to call NEP 2020 a failure. It has given Indian education a much-needed direction and, more importantly, shifted the conversation from merely completing syllabi to building competencies, critical thinking and holistic development. However, the real challenge has been translating this vision into consistent classroom practice.

BIRLA OPEN MINDS

One of the biggest gaps is the uneven capacity of schools to implement the policy. While some institutions have moved towards experiential learning, competency-based assessments and multidisciplinary education, many are still constrained by traditional teaching practices, infrastructure limitations and inadequate teacher preparedness. We have a policy that is ambitious, but its implementation ecosystem needs to catch up.

I believe the government's immediate priority should be strengthening foundational literacy and numeracy, investing in continuous teacher development, and creating stronger mechanisms to measure actual learning outcomes rather than just infrastructure or enrolment numbers.

We also need to bridge the urban-rural divide in access to quality teaching and learning resources. Technology can be an enabler, but it cannot replace a capable teacher.

Ultimately, education reform must be measured by what happens inside the classroom. A policy succeeds not when it is adopted by institutions, but when a child in a classroom experiences better learning because of it.

Birla Open Minds has expanded to more than 280 institutions across India. With franchise-based school networks growing rapidly, how can educational quality and accountability be maintained across schools operating under the same brand but managed independently?

Scaling an education network is fundamentally different from scaling a conventional business. A school is not simply a brand outlet; it is a living ecosystem of students, teachers, parents and communities. Every institution carries a responsibility that extends well beyond its commercial identity.

At Birla Open Minds, our approach is to establish a common academic philosophy, clear quality benchmarks and defined operating processes while allowing schools the flexibility to respond to their local communities. We believe in standardising the quality promise, not necessarily standardising every classroom experience.

This requires a structured quality assurance mechanism. Regular academic reviews, classroom observations, teacher development programmes, curriculum implementation audits, parent feedback and student learning assessments must become integral to the network. Equally important is building the capability of school leaders, because the quality of a school is often a reflection of the leadership culture it nurtures.

From a business standpoint, sustainable expansion depends on protecting the credibility of the brand. One institution's performance can influence the trust families place in the entire network. Therefore, accountability cannot be optional.

I believe the future of school networks lies in a partnership model where the central organisation provides academic direction, systems, expertise and continuous support, while the school management takes ownership of execution.

Our philosophy should be simple: every school may have its own identity, but the quality of education associated with the brand must remain consistent.

In an earlier interview with ET-Education, you argued that schools should be allowed to operate as companies rather than only through trusts and societies. How would such a model balance commercial investment with affordability and prevent profit considerations from affecting educational quality?

I believe we need to look at this conversation from the perspective of both educational sustainability and investment. Quality education requires significant and continuous capital — infrastructure, technology, teacher development, sports facilities, laboratories and learning resources. These investments cannot always depend on limited funding structures.

Allowing schools to operate through a more flexible corporate framework could potentially bring in greater professional management, institutional capital, better governance and long-term investment into the sector. It could also encourage innovation and improve operational efficiencies.

However, commercialisation must not be confused with compromising educational priorities. Education is a long-term commitment, and its returns cannot be evaluated through financial metrics alone. Student outcomes, teacher quality, institutional credibility and parent trust are equally important measures of success.

Any such model would need a transparent regulatory framework with clear safeguards. This could include disclosure of fee structures, defined reinvestment commitments, independent academic quality assessments, financial accountability and safeguards against excessive commercial extraction.

Affordability must remain central to the discussion. A sustainable school business model should focus on operational efficiency, responsible expansion and appropriate resource allocation rather than relying on continuous fee increases.

I would also emphasise that the debate should not be about choosing between education and business. A well-governed education institution needs both financial sustainability and academic integrity.

The objective should be to make education investable without making learning transactional.

Rising private school fees remain a concern for many Indian families. Should governments introduce stricter regulations on fee increases and additional charges, or would greater intervention affect the financial sustainability and autonomy of private schools?

Fee regulation is an important and sensitive subject because there are legitimate concerns on both sides. Parents want transparency, predictability and value for the investment they make in their child's education. Schools, meanwhile, have to manage rising operational costs, infrastructure investments, statutory requirements, teacher salaries and the continuous improvement of learning facilities.

I believe the answer lies in transparent and accountable fee governance rather than blanket restrictions.

A uniform cap on fee increases may not always reflect the financial realities of institutions operating in different geographies, infrastructure categories and economic environments. A school investing in specialised learning facilities or strengthening its teacher workforce may have a very different cost structure from another institution.

At the same time, schools must recognise that parents are stakeholders, not merely fee-paying customers. Fee structures, additional charges, the rationale for revisions and the utilisation of resources should be communicated clearly.

Governments can play a constructive role by establishing transparent guidelines, standardised disclosure requirements, accessible grievance redressal mechanisms and reasonable checks against arbitrary increases.

From an institutional perspective, schools must also become more conscious of cost efficiency and financial planning. Better resource utilisation, technology-enabled administration and long-term infrastructure planning can help manage costs without transferring every increase to parents.

Ultimately, the objective should be to protect parents from unreasonable financial demands while ensuring that schools remain financially viable enough to deliver quality education.

Affordability and quality should not be treated as opposing goals. The regulatory framework must enable both to coexist.

Despite growing emphasis on teacher training under NEP 2020, concerns over salaries, workload and professional development persist in private schools. What changes are needed to improve teachers' working conditions, and should private institutions face stronger accountability for these standards?

We often discuss educational transformation through curriculum reforms, technology and infrastructure, but we sometimes overlook the most important contributor to the learning experience , the teacher.

We cannot expect teachers to prepare children for a rapidly changing world if we do not invest in preparing and supporting teachers themselves.

The first change required is a shift in how institutions view teachers. Professional development should not be treated as an annual training requirement or a compliance exercise. It must be a continuous process that includes mentoring, classroom coaching, peer learning, exposure to new pedagogies and opportunities for professional growth.

Equally important is the need to review teachers' working conditions. Reasonable workloads, clearly defined responsibilities, fair compensation, opportunities for career progression and adequate planning time are essential. We must also recognise the emotional and administrative demands of teaching, which often go unnoticed.

I believe private institutions should be accountable for maintaining fair employment practices and providing meaningful professional development opportunities. However, accountability should encourage improvement rather than become another layer of paperwork.

At Birla Open Minds, we believe that investing in teacher capacity is directly connected to the quality of student learning. A teacher who feels supported, respected and professionally empowered is more likely to create an engaging and progressive classroom.

We also need to make teaching an aspirational profession again. This will require collaboration between policymakers, school managements and teacher education institutions.

If we want better learning outcomes for children, we must first create better working and learning environments for teachers.

Schools are increasingly introducing mental health and emotional well-being programmes, including initiatives such as Birla Open Minds' Soul Science. How can schools measure the effectiveness of these programmes and ensure students receive professional psychological support when needed?

For a long time, school success was largely measured through academic achievement. Today, we increasingly recognise that a child's emotional well-being, sense of belonging, resilience and ability to manage relationships are equally important to their development.

At Birla Open Minds, initiatives such as Soul Science reflect our belief that emotional and social development must be integrated into the educational journey rather than treated as an occasional intervention.

However, introducing a well-being programme is only the starting point. Schools must be able to understand whether it is making a meaningful difference in children's lives.

This requires a combination of qualitative and quantitative indicators. Schools can periodically assess students' sense of belonging, emotional awareness, peer relationships, confidence, classroom participation and ability to manage challenges. Age-appropriate student reflections, teacher observations, parent feedback and structured well-being surveys can provide useful insights over time.

It is equally important to distinguish between emotional education and psychological intervention. A classroom programme can help children identify emotions, develop empathy and learn coping strategies, but it cannot replace professional mental health support when a child needs it.

Schools should therefore establish clear referral mechanisms, ensure access to qualified counsellors and trained mental health professionals, maintain confidentiality, and work in partnership with parents and specialists. Teachers should be equipped to identify early signs of distress, but should never be expected to diagnose or provide clinical intervention.

We must also move away from treating well-being as a standalone period on the timetable. It should reflect in the way teachers interact with students, how schools address bullying, how discipline is practised and how children are encouraged to express themselves.

A school should not only prepare children to succeed in life; it should also equip them with the emotional strength to navigate life.

AS INDIA MOVES TOWARDS COMPETENCY-BASED EXAMS, SHOULD CAMPUS HIRING RETHINK ASSESSMENTS TOO?



Ankit Aggarwal
Founder & CEO, Unstop

If schools are starting to ask students to do more than memorise answers, why do companies still seem to lean on tests that usually reward the right answer faster, like in a rush, and not something more?

In India, the education system is putting a lot more emphasis on competency-led learning where students are expected to use what they understand, not just regurgitate textbook facts. But then, once these learners move into the job market, their first real snag is still often an aptitude test, a coding round, or some standardized assessment, you know.

These tests serve a purpose. Companies that are hiring thousands of graduates cannot interview everyone one by one, and recruiters need some method to shortlist candidates quickly, without spending ages on it. Still, there is a difference between spotting students who perform well in a test and spotting those who actually can apply that knowledge at work, like in real situations. So campus hiring really should pay more attention to that split, even if it sounds a bit fussy at first.

The question is not really whether companies should abandon traditional assessments. It's more like: is the current process actually helping them find the right candidates, or is it just making it easier to rank a huge number of applicants, kind of without much else to go on?

The problem with hiring by scores alone

So, think about two students going after their first job. One person sort of keeps doing well on examinations, and at the same time, really shines in aptitude tests, like really, consistently. The other student has kind of average marks academically, but the second something unfamiliar shows up, they break it down, and they do it in a careful manner. They ask the right questions; they kind of unpack the whole thing, then explain their reasoning too.

A test may place the first candidate ahead. But does that automatically make them better suited to the job? Not always.

Most entry-level roles ask for more than just subject knowledge, right? A data analyst kind of has to decipher the information, spot patterns, then explain what the numbers actually mean. An engineer might be pulled into troubleshooting a problem that doesn't have a simple, clean solution. A sales professional, meanwhile, should really get what a customer is worried about and respond in a way that fits.

These abilities are kind of difficult to judge by numbers alone.

That doesn't mean, though, that a student with higher marks has no practical skills at all, or that a lower score automatically means they'll do better in the field. The idea is much simpler than it sounds: academic results and workplace capability overlap, but they're not the same. If you treat one as if it were a full measure of the other, employers might just miss candidates who could actually succeed later on, in real life.

For fresh graduates, this matters even more. They sometimes don't have much professional experience to show what they can do. And then the evaluation process turns into a rare chance to show employers how they think, how they tackle problems, and even how they learn, in a kind of indirect way.

What should change in campus hiring?

The most useful change would be to introduce practical, role-specific tasks alongside conventional assessments.

Imagine two candidates applying for an entry-level data analyst position. Both are given a dataset containing sales figures from several stores. One calculates the average sales properly and then submits the result; done. The other notices that overall sales have gone up, but somehow one store shows a sharp decline. They kind of dig into why there might be a difference; they aren't 100% sure, but then they sort of figure out what other information they really need. After that, they lay out how the findings could steer a business decision even if the numbers look good on the surface.

The second candidate has done more than calculate a number. They have shown a kind of curiosity, judgement, and an ability to look past the obvious; answers may not be so straightforward.

That sort of thinking employers need to recognise, in case it sounds small, but it isn't.

For a software role, it might mean having candidates spot and fix a bug in a small piece of code, instead of just checking if they can answer timed questions. For an analyst role, you may end up giving them a short business scenario to interpret. And for a communication-related position, candidates might be asked to run through a hard concept in plain language, sort of using words that most people can follow without too much trouble.

These exercises don't need to be fancy, not elaborate, and definitely not expensive. A quick and well-designed task can still show a lot, even stuff a plain score might miss, and it can do it pretty fast too.

The real point is that the assessment should mirror the actual work the candidate is being hired for, not just generally but specifically. If you pile on extra tests without tuning what they measure, then the whole thing gets longer, not really better, even though it kinda sounds safer in the beginning.

The challenge is making practical assessments fair

Sure, practical assessments are not a perfect way. They can turn a bit subjective, take up time, and get hard to manage when, say, thousands of students apply for a limited number of places.

Also, a badly set up assignment may quietly favor those who have better resources, extra mentoring or more familiarity with a certain tool. And if candidates are graded differently by different evaluators, the whole exercise might add yet another kind of bias, instead of actually lowering it.

This is why companies really need pretty clear evaluation criteria. If people are applying for the same job, they should have basically the same expectations, more or less, you know. Then the recruiters should pay attention to how someone actually goes about a problem,

like what angle they take, why those specific choices make sense, and also how clearly they can explain the work they did, or would do, in the first place.

Technology can help employers run assessments at scale, sure, but it should not turn into this weird shortcut that filters people without actually spending time to understand what they can do. The whole point of an assessment is to gather solid evidence about a candidate, not just to output some other ranked list, you know, like it's just a number in a long queue.

Companies should also resist the temptation to turn each stage of recruitment into some sort of test, like, all the time. A carefully designed exercise that sort of matches the responsibilities of the role may be more useful than several rounds that keep measuring pretty similar skills, again and again.

Colleges cannot do this alone, and neither can employers

Colleges do play a role in getting students ready to actually use what they learn, not just memorize it, but sort of apply it in a real way. You know, stuff like projects, case studies, internships, and group assignments kind of helps learners build real problem-solving and communication skills, even before they fully step into the workforce. It's not only the course content but the practice, you know.

But employers also have to pause a second and kind of accept that fresh graduates are still in learning mode, you know. Someone who is starting their very first job shouldn't be expected to show that same level of judgment or experience- the kind that shows up after you've been in the industry for a few years, maybe.

Campus hiring should spot a blend of foundational knowledge, relevant skills, and the willingness to learn, sort of. Then companies can build on those strengths through training and learning while actually doing the job, which feels different.

Academic marks remain useful. Aptitude tests can help sort out certain abilities, but the interviews give a bit more room to see how a candidate thinks and communicates, kind of. And on top of that, practical exercises add a different angle because you can watch in real time how people put what they know to use, not just what they say.

So, the answer is kind of simple: don't toss one way of assessing for another, like entirely. Instead, stop expecting any one method to tell the whole story.

From ranking candidates to recognising potential

As India's education system starts to put more weight on competency-based assessment, campus recruitment may have a chance to rework what it looks at or counts. The two systems do, kind of, serve different purposes, but there is a link that seems pretty useful: understanding something and then actually being able to use it are two different things.

Companies don't really have to redo their hiring systems all at once. They can start by checking, kind of slowly at first, whether the assessments they already use actually align with what the job roles they are hiring for require, and then, adding small hands-on exercises where it really makes sense, because they can provide extra, helpful perspective.

For students, this could end up meaning being judged on more than just how well they prep for some specific test format. For employers, it might mean spotting people whose strengths could remain tucked away behind one tidy score, sort of quietly.

The real question for campus hiring isn't only how quickly companies can wipe out candidates, but also how confidently they can spot the people who will probably mature into the role. If those assessments are designed to really answer that question, then they stop being only a screening tool. They turn into a better method of pairing up new talent with the environments where they can succeed, and it kind of feels more like a fit rather than a filter.

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COMPETITIVE CODING CONTESTS
TO IMPROVE EMPLOYABILITY OF COMPUTER SCIENCE & ENGINEERING GRADUATES IN INDIA

Dr. Prashant R. Nair
Deputy Registrar, Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham, Coimbatore

COMPUTER SCIENCE & ENGINEERING EDUCATION IN INDIA

India has emerged as one of the top destinations worldwide for engineering education. There are 6000+ higher educational institutions in engineering education with over 3 million enrolments annually as per the statutory body regulating engineering education in India, All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE). Over 50% of this is in computer science & engineering and related branches such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), Information Technology (IT), Information Science, Data Science, Software Engineering, and Cyber Security. In recent times, we are also seeing a trend in which engineering colleges are adding more seats and branches in computer science & engineering and closing core engineering branches. The India Skills Report 2025 is a report providing insights on employability in India with the participation of Confederation of Indian Industry (CII), Association of Indian Universities (AIU), AICTE, Google and Wheebox. As per this report, employability rate with respect to engineering education is 70% which is much better than other disciplines. However, this is a cause of concern, considering the fact that 30% of engineering graduates in India are not employable. These numbers are also disturbing considering the numbers, which are close to a million engineering graduates in India.

So how do we do address this?

A wide variety of 21st century skills is needed for preparing the next-generation engineers. These include Data Science and Analytics, AI & Machine Learning (ML), IoT & sensors, cloud & virtualization, Cybersecurity as well as life skills and humancentric abilities like leadership, collaboration, empathy, communication, ethics, and cognitive skills. Initiatives such as hackathons, activity-based learning, project-based learning, problem-based learning and experiential learning programs can help in this context. Hackathons, and competitive coding contests like International Collegiate Programming Contest (ICPC) can be highly effective to improve employability of computer

science students, who make up over 50% of the total engineering student population in India. Improving the employability can ensure India's demographic dividend be put to good use so as to meet the need for engineering talent on a global scale, with the potential for talent mobility across borders to contribute US $ 500 billion to the global economy.

COMPETITIVE CODING

Competitive coding is the regular practice of programming to devise problem solutions in a competitive ambience in which the programmer is pitted against other programmers, who are also working on the same things. Also called competitive programming, the coder competitors are rated based on several factors, which include efficiency and accuracy of the code and the time taken for developing the program and its execution time. Competitive programmers are also known as sports programmers. This is highly recognized by IT majors like Apple, Cisco, Google, Facebook, Amazon and Linked-in and these companies keep track of these competitions and the outstanding participants. Typically, in these competitions, an assortment of problems based on logic or mathematics is administered to contestants. These contestants could be from anything to two to several thousands and their mandate is to write and execute programs to solve these problems. Typical such tasks belong to data structures & algorithms, machine learning, data science, combinatorics, number theory, graph theory and cryptosystems. Competitive coding platforms can have machine and/or human judging. Platforms such as CodeChef, HackerRank & HackerEarth and contests such as TopCoder, Facebook Hacker Cup and International Collegiate Programming Contest (ICPC) are activities promoting competitive coding.

ICPC

ICPC is a premium competitive programming event considered as the Olympics & World Championships of Collegiate Programming with annual participation of 70,000+ students in 3000+ universities in 100+ countries spread across 6 continents. ICPC happens every year in a 3-tiered format as a coding competition with university or college-level contests, regional contests also called semi-finals and world finals where the world champion is decided.

Coordinated by Baylor University, ICPC operates under the auspices of the ICPC Foundation. From 1977 to 2017, ICPC was held under the auspices of the international computer science professional body, Association for Computing Machinery (ACM) and was referred to as ACM-ICPC with funding globally from IBM. Typically, the team size is three and contest timeframe is 5 hours. For any given contest, between 8 to 15 problems are given, which require the participants to leverage their creativity, teamwork, collaboration, design skills, innovation, and knowledge of data structures & algorithms working under pressure. Solutions can be developed in C, C++, Java, or Python. The problems are giving with multiple constraints and challenges. Test data is provided but no requirement specifications are provided for the problem, and participants are required to solve more problems in a smaller number of iterations and least cumulative time. Normally, participants do not have access to the acceptance criteria of the judges.

The 400,000+ ICPC alumni are top-notch and high-tech software developers, data scientists, cyber specialists, start-up founders, tech leads and project managers in leading companies. Noteworthy alumni include Adam D'Angelo, the former CTO of Facebook, and the Founder of Quora; Nikolai Durov, the former CTO of VK & CTO of Telegram and Craig Silverstein, the first employee of Google.

Since 2005, AMRITA Vishwa Vidyapeetham has been hosting the ICPC Asia-Pacific regional contest. ICPC Asia-Amritapuri regional contest of AMRITA is the largest site of ICPC world-wide with 7000+ participants. AMRITA has been responsible for popularizing ICPC in India from a few hundred participants from top engineering institutions like IIT in 2005, to these present-day numbers. With tens of thousands of ICPC alumni in India, we observe a correlation in several of them securing high-paying dream jobs and international placements. Students having experience in competitive programming shows employers that they can work in a team, solve complicated problems, work in stressful situations, manage time and deadlines and minimize errors. It also gives pointers on the student being a disciplined, focused, and fast, which are all indispensable skills. Another platform that has contributed to the popularizing of ICPC in India is CodeChef. CodeChef is an online programming platform with a subscriber base of two million, promoted by the start-ups, Directi and Unacademy.



INDIAN STUDENT'S GUIDE TO SCHOLARSHIPS AND FELLOWSHIPS

Siddharth Verma

In a small study room in Tier-2 India, under the hum of an oscillating fan, an ambitious student stares at an acceptance letter. The institution is world-class, the faculty luminous, and the prospect exhilarating. Then comes the invoice. For generations, the cost of higher learning has functioned as an invisible filter across India, quietly sorting brilliance not by curiosity or grit, but by liquid net worth.

Yet beneath the noise of competitive entrance examinations, a silent financial revolution has gathered momentum. Today, an intricate architecture of public funds, corporate philanthropy, institutional grants, and international bilateral treaties is rewriting that reality. From high-school classrooms to advanced doctoral labs and European seminar rooms, financial backing is increasingly available for those who know how to navigate the system.

Here is how the funding landscape works, where the capital lives, and how students across India are turning academic dreams into reality.

The Digital Backbone: One Identity to Rule Them All

Gone are the days when applying for an Indian government scholarship required paper affidavits, endless district-office queues, and months of bureaucratic silence. The contemporary scholarship ecosystem operates largely on the National Scholarship Portal (NSP 2.0), a platform synchronized with the Public Financial Management System (PFMS).

At its core lies the One-Time Registration (OTR)—a unique 14-digit identifier authenticated via Aadhaar or biometric data that follows a scholar from secondary schooling to doctoral defense. Funds no longer linger in college administration accounts; Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) routes capital straight into bank accounts mapped via the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) gateway. For the modern scholar, digital hygiene—ensuring names match letter-for-letter across Class 10 marksheets, Aadhaar records, and seeded bank accounts—is the first true prerequisite for funding.

The Schoolyard Safety Nets

Educational attrition in India has historically spiked at the transition between middle school (Class 8) and secondary education (Class 9). To keep low-income students in school, public policy deploys targeted financial safety nets.

The flagship National Means-cum-Merit Scholarship Scheme (NMMSS) specifically targets this drop-off point. Administered by the Ministry of Education, it selects 100,000 students annually from government and government-aided schools. To qualify, applicants must maintain at least 55% in Class 7 (50% for SC/ST cohorts), come from households earning under ₹3,50,000 per year, and pass a twin-battery competitive exam: the Mental Ability Test (MAT) and the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT). Awardees receive ₹12,000 annually from Class 9 through Class 12, transforming modest stipends into high-school graduation certificates.

For marginalized demographics, the PM YASASVI initiative provides OBC, Economically Backward Class (EBC), and De-Notified Tribe (DNT) students in premier shortlisted schools with up to ₹75,000 annually for Classes 9 and 10, rising to ₹1,25,000 annually for Classes 11 and 12. Parallel interventions from the Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities and the Ministry of Minority Affairs provide pre-matric maintenance stipends, book allowances, and assistive devices to ensure early talent remains supported.

Merit Meets Equity

Crossing the threshold from secondary school into a bachelor's degree exposes students to tuition spikes and living expenses. Here, central ministerial schemes step in.

The Central Sector Scheme of Scholarship for College and University Students (PM-USP) allocates 82,000 scholarships each year, split equally between female and male applicants. Geared toward scholars scoring above the 80th percentile in their Class 12 board examinations with household incomes below ₹4,50,000, it provides ₹12,000 annually for the first three years of undergraduate study and ₹20,000 per year for postgraduate programs.

Technical education has also expanded support for women and vulnerable groups:

AICTE Pragati: Awards 10,000 scholarships annually, offering ₹50,000 per year to female students enrolled in approved technical degree or diploma courses whose families earn under ₹8,00,000 annually.

AICTE Saksham: Mirrors the ₹50,000 yearly grant for students with benchmark disabilities of 40% or more pursuing technical disciplines.

Ishan Uday: UGC's targeted regional grant provides 10,000 North Eastern students with up to ₹7,800 monthly for professional degrees and ₹5,400 monthly for general degree programs across India.

For historically marginalized communities admitted to elite institutions—IITs, NITs, IIMs, and NAAC A++ rated universities—the Top Class Education Scheme for SC Students and its tribal counterpart cover 100% of non-refundable tuition at public institutions (capped at ₹2,00,000 per year at approved private colleges). In their first year, scholars receive an academic package of ₹86,000, which includes a ₹45,000 grant for a laptop and computing gear, followed by ₹41,000 annually for living expenses and books.

Making the Laboratory Pay

For aspiring researchers, India's STEM fellowships offer financial stability competitive with entry-level corporate salaries.

The benchmark is the Prime Minister's Research Fellows (PMRF) scheme, designed to retain top scientific talent within IISc, IITs, IISERs, and select Central Universities. PMRF scholars receive a monthly stipend of ₹70,000 in their first two years, ₹75,000 in Year 3, and ₹80,000 across Years 4 and 5. Fellows also receive an annual contingency grant of ₹2,00,000—totaling ₹10,00,000 over five years—to support international conference travel, specialized software, and laboratory consumables. Applicants enter either through

Direct Entry (requiring a CGPA of 8.0 or higher from premier institutes, or a qualifying GATE score of 650 or above) or Lateral Entry after completing graduate coursework with an 8.5 CGPA.

For foundational pure sciences, the Department of Science and Technology's INSPIRE-SHE awards ₹80,000 annually (₹60,000 in monthly stipends plus a ₹20,000 summer mentorship grant) to students who rank in the top 1% of their Class 12 science boards or within the top 10,000 in JEE or NEET.

In the social sciences, the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR) supports researchers across 32 disciplines, providing ₹20,000 per month for doctoral scholars and ₹31,000 per month (plus ₹25,000 annual contingencies) for postdoctoral fellows.

Private Capital Meets Public Talent

Beyond government coffers, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and philanthropic foundations offer alternative funding pipelines.

The Reliance Foundation Scholarships run one of India's largest private programs. At the undergraduate level, 5,000 students across any discipline receive up to ₹2,00,000 over their degree, selected through a merit-cum-means screening that includes a 60-minute aptitude test. At the postgraduate level, 100 scholars in emerging technology fields—such as Artificial Intelligence, Computer Science, Renewable Energy, and Life Sciences—receive up to ₹6,00,000 across two years, alongside access to specialized mentorship and leadership programs.

Other private initiatives provide targeted professional support:

Kotak Kanya Scholarship: Backs meritorious young women pursuing engineering, medicine, and architecture with up to ₹1,50,000 per year.

Aditya Birla Group Scholarship: Funds top entrance rank-holders entering premier IITs, BITS Pilani, IIMs, and National Law Universities, providing ₹1,00,000 to ₹3,00,000 annually.

J.N. Tata Endowment & K.C. Mahindra: Provide competitive loan scholarships between ₹5,00,000 and ₹10,00,000 for graduates pursuing advanced studies at foreign universities, often converting parts of the loan to gift grants for top performers.

Crossing Oceans Debt-Free

For students eyeing master's or doctoral programs abroad, several international exchange programs cover full expenses:

The Fulbright-Nehru Master's Fellowship funds Indian professionals with at least three years of work experience for study at accredited U.S. institutions. The fellowship covers full tuition, round-trip economy flights, health insurance, and monthly living stipends valued between $35,000 and $45,000 annually, with scholars returning to India for two years after completing their degree.

In the UK, the Commonwealth Scholarship covers full tuition, flights, and monthly stipends between £1,347 and £1,652 for master's and doctoral programs, routed through India's Ministry of Education via the SAKSHAT portal.

Germany's DAAD (EPOS) program pairs tuition-free university education with monthly living allowances of €992 for master's students and €1,400 for doctoral researchers, alongside full health insurance and travel subsidies. Across the European Union, the Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters (EMJM) awards €1,400 monthly for up to 24 months (€33,600 total) to students studying across consortia of at least two European countries.

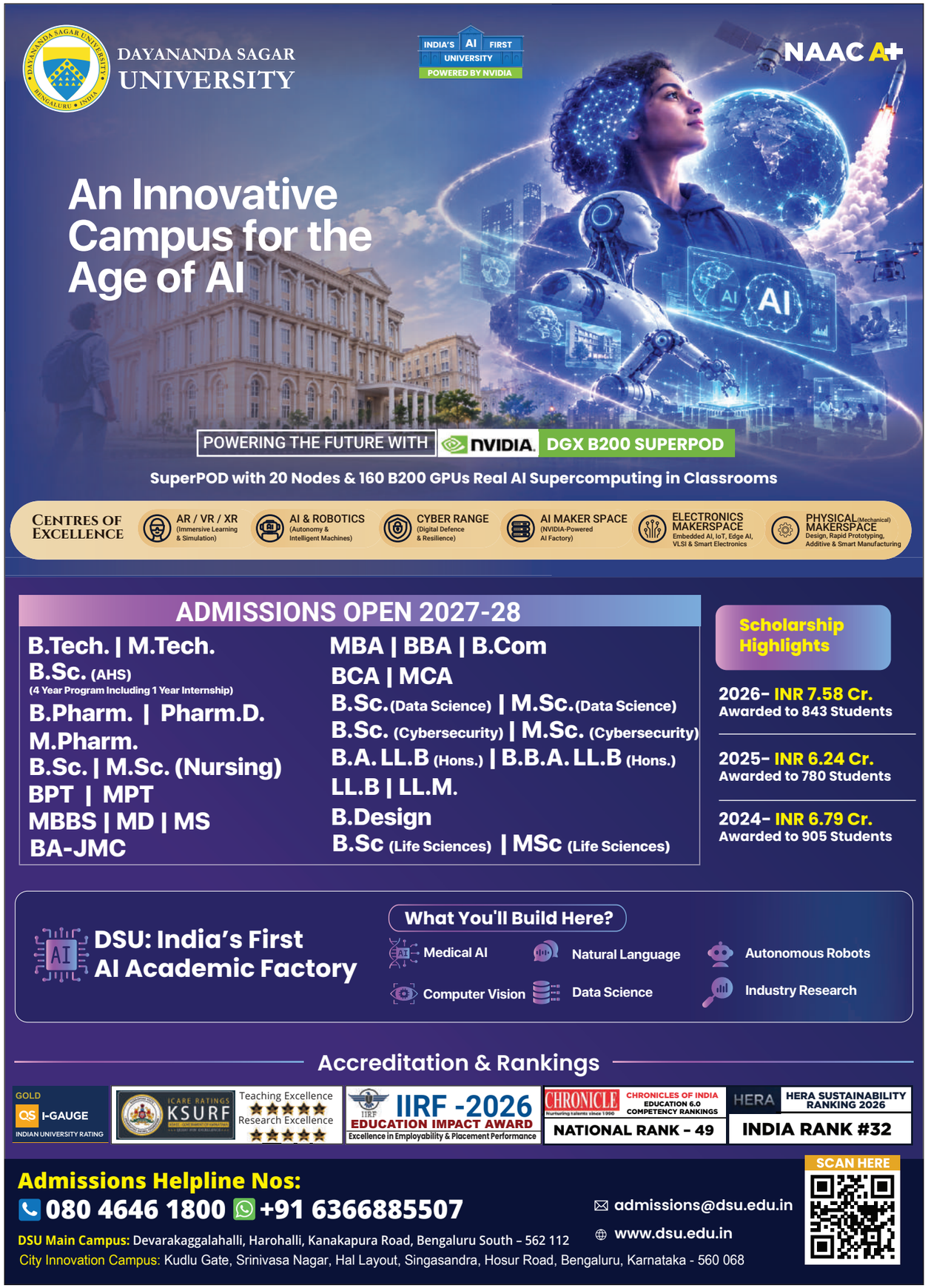
Meanwhile, India's affirmative action framework extends overseas through the National Overseas Scholarship (NOS), which finances tuition, airfare, and annual living stipends ($15,400 in the US or £9,900 in the UK) for low-income SC and ST scholars admitted to top-500 QS-ranked global institutions.

How Winners Win

Scholarships are rarely won at the deadline; they are secured six to twelve months in advance.

Successful applicants manage their timelines carefully: tracking the Fulbright application window between February and May, preparing for the National Scholarship Portal between June and October, and coordinating DAAD and Erasmus Mundus university submissions between August and December. Above all, they ensure their documentation is ironclad: income certificates issued by authorized revenue officers, verifiable caste certificates, standardized test scores, and an active, Aadhaar-seeded bank account.

The capital to finance world-class learning is available across schools, colleges, and research labs. For the persistent applicant, it can transform the invoice of a lifetime into an open door.



J&K VOCATIONAL TRAINERS PROTEST

A DECADE OF UNCERTAINTY AS COLLEAGUE'S DEATH INTENSIFIES DEMANDS



Amin Masoodi

Trainers' protest enters its fourth week as a colleague's death sharpens the fight for job security and an end to outsourcing.

Jammu and Kashmir's vocational trainers tasked with preparing students for employment have spent years battling uncertainty over their own jobs and future.

What began as a demand for a comprehensive job policy has evolved into a sustained agitation over employment security, continuity of service, salary-related grievances and the role of private agencies in delivering vocational education in government schools.

The protest had already entered its fourth week with the Jammu and Kashmir Employees Social Welfare Association (JKESWA) joining calls for an end to outsourcing and a clearly defined service framework. The association's president Asiya Iqbal recently urged the government to move beyond assurances and address the concerns of employees whose work, she argued, deserves dignity and stability.

But the agitation carries a human cost that cannot be captured by the number of days spent protesting or the list of demands submitted to the authorities.

Vocational trainer Bashir Ahmad Gojri, posted at a government high school in Kupwara died after suffering a cardiac arrest on October 1. His death was reported as trainers continued their agitation, prompting colleagues to speak about the pressure associated with prolonged employment uncertainty.

They linked his distress to concerns about job security, although no independently established medical finding confirms that the uncertainty caused his death.

Gojri's death has deepened the grief among his colleagues bringing a human dimension to their prolonged struggle for job security and a stable future.

"Bashir's death has left us devastated. He was one of us, sharing the same anxieties about job security and the future. His loss is a painful reminder that behind this prolonged struggle are families, children and responsibilities that cannot wait indefinitely for a policy decision." said Reyaz Ahmad, a trainer in north Kashmir's Kupwara district.

The man behind the movement's growing anguish

Gojri was more than a name associated with a protest. He was a source of financial support for his family.

At the Srinagar protests site, fellow trainer Mohd Ashraf said Gojri had left behind an elderly mother, three young children and an unmarried sister, all dependent on his income.

The details offered a sobering glimpse into the lives behind the agitation. Employment uncertainty is often discussed in administrative language, through service rules, contractual arrangements and policy files. For workers supporting families, however, the consequences are immediate and deeply personal.

A salary is not merely a monthly payment. It is the means to meet household expenses, educate children, support elderly parents and plan for emergencies. When the future of employment remains uncertain, those responsibilities do not pause.

Gojri's death should not be presented as a proven consequence of the protest or job insecurity. Yet the grief expressed by his colleagues has brought renewed attention to the emotional and financial pressures they claim accompany their prolonged struggle.

His story has become part of a larger question facing the administration: How long can an employment arrangement remain unresolved before uncertainty itself becomes a serious concern for the people working under it?

From a skills initiative to a decade-long employment dispute

Jammu and Kashmir introduced vocational education in government schools in 2016 under the Samagra Shiksha framework. The programme was designed to supplement conventional academic learning with practical, career-oriented training, giving students exposure to skills relevant to employment and further professional education.

The system operates through private Vocational Training Providers (VTPs), which engage trainers to deliver vocational courses in government schools. Over the years, the programme has expanded across secondary and higher secondary institutions, covering fields such as information technology, healthcare, agriculture, tourism and hospitality, and the automotive sector.

Yet the expansion of vocational education has not resolved the trainers' main concern: the absence of a clear and dependable long-term employment framework.

Over 2,000 vocational trainers across Jammu and Kashmir have been protesting since last week of September to press the government fulfill their 'genuine' demands. They say their demands have remained unresolved despite years of representations and assurances from successive governments.

For these contractual employees, the dispute is not simply about whether they will continue teaching from one academic session to another. It concerns the nature of their employment, recognition of their experience, protection of their services and whether years spent working in government schools will translate into a more secure professional future.

The passage of time has become a grievance in itself. A programme launched to strengthen students' employability has relied on trainers who say they still lack clarity about their own career prospects nearly a decade later.

What are the trainers' demands?

The protesters' demands extend beyond a single administrative decision. They are seeking a comprehensive framework that defines their employment status and establishes clearer obligations for the institutions and agencies involved in the programme.

Their principal demands include:

A comprehensive job policy: A clearly defined framework governing their employment, service conditions and long-term professional prospects.

Continuity and protection of services: Greater assurance that years of work will not be undermined by uncertainty surrounding contractual arrangements.

An end to the existing outsourcing system: A review of the role of private VTPs in engaging and managing trainers, with the association seeking their removal from the current arrangement.

Settlement of salary-related grievances: Timely payment of salaries and resolution of outstanding service-related concerns.

Recognition of experience: Consideration of the years trainers have spent delivering vocational education in government schools.

The trainers have urged the Jammu and Kashmir administration and the Education Department to engage directly with their representatives and develop a lasting solution rather than allow the dispute to continue through successive rounds of protest.

At the centre of the dispute is a demand for clarity. The trainers want to know what their years of service mean for their employment future and what safeguards, if any, will govern their continued engagement.

The government would need to assess the applicable recruitment rules, contractual obligations, financial



implications and administrative requirements before implementing any major change to the existing system, said a senior official of education department.

That makes dialogue essential. But for the protesters, dialogue must lead to a defined outcome, not another cycle of meetings followed by continued uncertainty.

Workforce responsibility?

The involvement of private VTPs has emerged as one of the most contentious aspects of the dispute.

Under the existing arrangement, trainers are engaged through private agencies rather than being appointed directly to permanent government posts. The trainers argue that this model leaves their long-term employment prospects unclear and creates a gap between their responsibilities in public schools and the security attached to their work.

Their demand to end outsourcing is therefore also a demand to reconsider how vocational education is administered.

The issue raises important questions about accountability. When a programme operates inside government schools but relies on private intermediaries to engage its teaching workforce, responsibility for employment conditions, timely payments and continuity of service must be clearly defined.

Outsourcing can be used to deliver specialized services, but the arrangement also requires transparent contracts, clear accountability and effective mechanisms to address workers' grievances. Where these safeguards are perceived as inadequate, employment disputes can become prolonged and undermine confidence in the system.

The trainers want the government to examine whether the existing model remains appropriate after years of implementation and whether a more stable framework can be developed.

Any transition, however, would need careful consideration. Ending the involvement of private providers does not automatically create permanent government employment. The administration would have to determine the appropriate legal and recruitment mechanism, assess the trainers' existing contractual positions and establish how the programme could operate under a revised structure.

The challenge is to reconcile the government's responsibility to maintain a functioning vocational education programme with the employees' demand for a fair and predictable employment framework.

An honorarium revision has not ended the dispute

The government approved revised monthly honorarium rates for vocational trainers earlier in 2026, but the change has not resolved their broader employment concerns.

According to new arrangement, trainers engaged before April 1, 2022, were approved an honorarium of ₹25,000 a month, while those engaged on or after that date were approved ₹22,000 a month. The revised rates were made applicable from April 1, 2024.

The revision represents a financial measure, but the trainers' continuing agitation indicates that remuneration is only one part of the problem.

A higher monthly payment does not, by itself, establish a long-term service policy, guarantee continuity of employment or settle questions about the role of private agencies.

For employees supporting families, the amount received each month matters. So does the confidence that the income will continue and that years of professional experience will count towards a defined future.

The distinction is important for policymakers. A dispute rooted in structural employment concerns cannot necessarily be resolved through a salary revision alone. The administration would need to address the questions of service conditions, engagement procedures and long-term workforce planning that underpin the agitation.

The protest gathers support as pressure builds

The trainers' movement has attracted support from political representatives, teachers' organizations and employee groups, adding to calls for government intervention.

Jammu Kashmir Teachers Forum General Secretary and Employees Joint Action Committee vice-president Tahir Sofi urged Chief Minister Omar Abdullah and Education Minister Sakeena Itoo to intervene and pursue a time-bound resolution. He also raised concerns about the death of a vocational trainer, while stressing that any connection between the death and the circumstances surrounding the protest required proper assessment.

Earlier, Doda MLA Mehraj Malik and other political representatives had expressed support for the trainers' demand for a policy-based solution. The protesters have also received backing from members of the opposition, who have called for a review of outsourcing and greater security for workers engaged in public services.

As the agitation continues, JKESWA president Asiya Iqbal called on the administration to recognize the contribution of vocational trainers and address their grievances through concrete action.

Her intervention broadened the debate beyond the immediate protest, connecting the dispute with the larger question of how public institutions treat employees whose work supports essential services.

Political support may increase pressure for action, but the outcome will ultimately depend on administrative decisions and whether a workable agreement can be reached.

Strike affects classroom activity

The implications of the agitation extend beyond the employees gathered at the protest site. They touch on the continuity, credibility and long-term sustainability of vocational education in government schools.

Vocational courses are intended to bridge the gap between classroom learning and practical skills. Depending on the subject, students may rely on trainers for hands-on instruction, demonstrations, technical knowledge and guidance about possible career pathways.

A stable and experienced teaching workforce is therefore an important part of delivering these programmes effectively.

When trainers remain uncertain about their employment, questions arise about morale, retention and the ability to plan for the future. Prolonged disputes can also create uncertainty for schools and administrators responsible for maintaining programme continuity.

Vocational education cannot achieve its intended purpose through curriculum design and infrastructure alone. It also requires trained personnel, consistent delivery and a workforce operating under clearly understood service conditions.

If trainers leave because of unresolved employment concerns, schools could face challenges in retaining experienced staff. If uncertainty persists, it may also become harder to attract and retain skilled professionals in specialized vocational subjects.

These are potential risks rather than confirmed outcomes of the ongoing agitation. Their significance lies in the need for policymakers to consider the workforce implications of vocational education alongside student enrolment, course availability and programme expansion.

From assurances to action

By the time the agitation reached its third week in October, the trainers' demands became difficult to separate from the wider debate over employment practices in public education.

The government faces a complex task. It must consider the trainers' claims, review the existing outsourcing arrangement, assess the feasibility of a revised employment framework and ensure that vocational education continues to serve students effectively.

The protesters are seeking a resolution that goes beyond another round of assurances.

Their central demand is straightforward: A clear policy that defines their professional future and recognizes the work they have undertaken in government schools.



DYSLEXIA

A LEARNING DISABILITY OR A DIFFERENT WAY OF THINKING?

Fatima Zohra Hasan

Described as a learning disability, dyslexia can affect how people read, spell and write. Yet advocates are challenging a definition they say overlooks the strengths of dyslexic thinkers. Understanding its challenges and recognising individual strengths are both essential to helping children learn and thrive.

What comes to mind when you hear the word ‘dyslexia’? For many of us, the word brings to mind ‘Taare Zameen Par’, Aamir Khan’s 2007 film about a child struggling with a learning difficulty that those around him fail to understand. The film played a significant role in bringing dyslexia into mainstream conversation. But what exactly is this condition that often goes unrecognised?

When defined in general terms, dyslexia is a specific learning disability that primarily affects reading and spelling. Children may find it difficult to connect letters with sounds, recognise words accurately or read fluently. The nature and extent of these difficulties vary.

However, the ‘What Is Dyslexia’ initiative by Made by Dyslexia seeks to challenge the conventional framing of dyslexia as a disability and encourage people to recognise it as a different way of thinking.

Started by Kate Griggs, a British social entrepreneur, author and founder of Made By Dyslexia, the campaign highlights strengths associated with dyslexic thinking, including problem-solving, creative thinking and seeing the bigger picture. It aims to shift the focus from the difficulties dyslexic people may experience with reading, spelling and writing to the abilities they may bring.

The campaign to change how dyslexia is understood

Griggs’ work on dyslexia awareness began well before the charity was launched in 2017. In 2005, she founded Xtraordinary People, an initiative that brought UK dyslexia charities together to campaign for better teacher training and earlier identification of children who struggled with learning.

Griggs has spoken about her own experience of dyslexia and the difficulties she faced at school. In an account published in connection with her book This Is Dyslexia, she recalled that her early schooling was difficult and that her teachers did not identify her dyslexia. She described being treated as a quiet pupil who needed to try harder, despite struggling with schoolwork. Her campaign was also shaped by her experience as a parent: both her sons are dyslexic, and she has discussed the lack of understanding and support that families can encounter when a child is identified as having the condition.

Her early campaign sought to make dyslexia more visible in education and to encourage schools to identify children who needed help. Xtraordinary People’s work contributed to wider campaigning that culminated in the UK government’s 2009 Rose Review of dyslexia and literacy difficulties. The review made recommendations on identifying children with literacy difficulties and improving teachers’ knowledge and training.

Griggs went on to establish Made By Dyslexia with entrepreneur Richard Branson in 2017. The charity’s focus extends beyond awareness to changing how dyslexia is understood in schools, workplaces and wider society. Rather than defining dyslexia only through difficulties with reading, spelling and writing, it promotes the term Dyslexic Thinking to describe skills it associates with dyslexic people, including connecting ideas, recognising patterns, thinking laterally and seeing the bigger picture.

The campaign has also sought to take this language into professional and public life. In 2022, Dyslexic Thinking was added to LinkedIn as a skill and recognised as a noun in the dictionary. Griggs has written about the campaign in her books, including This Is Dyslexia and Xtraordinary People, the latter aimed at helping children understand dyslexia through a strengths-focused approach.

The initiative’s central argument is that a person’s reading and spelling difficulties should not be treated as a complete measure of their intelligence or potential. Its emphasis on strengths, however, is not a claim that every dyslexic person shares the same talents, or that the difficulties associated with dyslexia disappear when they are described differently. The challenge is to recognise individual abilities while ensuring that people who need help with literacy receive appropriate teaching, assessment and support.

When the difficulty goes unrecognised

For many people, the problem is not only dyslexia itself but the time it takes to understand why learning feels harder than it appears to be for others.

K Vaishali, a writer who shared her experience, described struggling academically despite understanding concepts. She began suspecting she had dyslexia while training to become an accountant, when she found it difficult to memorise tax laws. She could remember the words but struggled with the numbers. She eventually received a diagnosis at the age of 20.

Her experience illustrates how a learning difficulty may remain unexplained well beyond school. When a child repeatedly struggles with tasks that classmates seem to manage more easily, the difficulty can be interpreted as a lack of effort or ability rather than a sign that a different form of support may be needed.

Vaishali has also spoken about the effect of not knowing she was dyslexic earlier in life. Her account points to the importance of understanding the reasons behind academic struggles, rather than judging a child only by marks or the time taken to complete work.

Senthilkumar Govindarajulu’s experience offers another perspective. He described learning only after secondary school that he had moderate dyslexia and attention deficit disorder. He later established Helikx Open School and Learning Centre in Salem, Tamil Nadu, to support children with learning disabilities.

Support organisations are helping families navigate dyslexia

For families seeking to understand dyslexia, support organisations can offer guidance on assessment, educational interventions and

classroom accommodations. Their work also extends to teachers, who may need practical advice on recognising persistent learning difficulties and adapting instruction to individual needs.

In India, the Dyslexia Association of India provides information on assessment, educational therapy, counselling, individual education plans and workshops for parents and teachers. Its website also offers resources on studying, examinations and classroom support. Based in Noida, the organisation provides a potential starting point for families seeking information about dyslexia and available interventions.

The Maharashtra Dyslexia Association, established in 1996 by parents and professionals, works on awareness, assessment, remedial programmes, parent counselling, professional training and advocacy. The Dr Anjali Morris Education and Health Foundation, meanwhile, supports students with specific learning disabilities (SLDs) and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) through educational resources, intervention and teacher training. The foundation reports that it has worked with more than 8,000 students and trained over 54,000 teachers since its establishment in 2008.

These organisations address different aspects of the challenge. While some provide direct services to children and families, others focus on helping educators recognise learning difficulties and develop appropriate teaching strategies. Their work can help parents understand the options available after a child experiences persistent difficulties with reading, spelling or written expression.

Awareness initiatives have also brought government agencies and civil society organisations together. In October 2025, the Ministry of Education reported that the Walk4Dyslexia campaign in New Delhi was co-organised by the Changeinkk Foundation, UNESCO Mahatma Gandhi Institute of Education for Peace and Sustainable Development (MGIEP), Orkids Foundation and Soch Foundation.

More than 300 people participated in the walk at Kartavya Path, while Rashtrapati Bhawan, the Secretariat and other monuments and government buildings were illuminated in red to raise awareness.

Internationally, the International Dyslexia Association provides educational resources and information for families, educators and professionals. The British Dyslexia Association works to promote understanding of dyslexia and support for dyslexic people in education, employment and everyday life.

The International Federation of Dyslexia and Dyscalculia Associations connects organisations working in these areas across countries.

The services and geographical reach of these organisations vary, and families may need to check directly which assessments, interventions or support programmes are available in their location. Their broader contribution, however, extends beyond awareness: they help connect families with information, equip educators with resources and advocate for learning environments that respond to different needs.

Dyslexia Awareness Month

October is observed as Dyslexia Awareness Month worldwide. According to the Central Institute of Educational Technology (CIET), part of the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT), the observance originated in the United States in 1985 as Learning Disabilities Awareness Month.

An organised movement to promote dyslexia awareness began in the United Kingdom in 2002. The Indian Ministry of Education has also recognised October 8 as International Dyslexia Awareness Day. These observances should not be interpreted as evidence that October has been declared a universal United Nations observance.

In India, CIET-NCERT has used the month to promote awareness of specific learning disabilities, with a particular focus on dyslexia, and share practical strategies for educators. Its 2026 programme combined a month-long social media campaign with interactive sessions designed to help teachers make classroom learning more accessible.

The five-day series, titled Language- and Numeracy-Friendly SLD Classrooms addressed listening, speaking and communication, accessible reading, written expression, and number-friendly classrooms.

The focus on reading, writing, communication and numeracy reflects the fact that specific learning disabilities can affect different aspects of learning. Dyslexia primarily affects reading and spelling, while the broader SLD category includes other difficulties that may require different forms of support.

The campaign also sits alongside government measures intended to improve early identification and assistance. In its October 2025 release, the Ministry of Education highlighted PRASHAST 2.0, a mobile screening tool developed with NCERT, as well as inclusive education modules in teacher preparation, assistive tools, customised learning materials, accommodations, therapeutic support and block-level screening and identification camps.

According to UDISE+ 2024–25, around 12.15% of enrolled children with special needs were reported to have specific learning disabilities, a category that may include dyslexia. This figure does not represent the percentage of all schoolchildren who have dyslexia, nor does it establish the total number of children whose learning difficulties remain unidentified.

For schools, the challenge is to translate awareness into everyday practice. Screening can help identify children who may require further assessment, but it does not replace a formal assessment or guarantee that support will follow. Teachers need the skills to recognise persistent difficulties, seek appropriate guidance and adapt instruction to students' needs.

NCERT's October campaign provides a platform for sharing information and building these skills. Its longer-term value will depend on whether the knowledge and strategies reach classrooms and help children access appropriate teaching and demonstrate their understanding without being judged solely by their difficulties with reading or writing.

Public figures who have spoken about dyslexia

Several well-known actors, filmmakers and entrepreneurs have spoken publicly about their experiences, helping bring attention to a learning disability that can remain misunderstood in schools and workplaces.

Bollywood actor Abhishek Bachchan has spoken about being diagnosed with dyslexia at the age of nine. He also described attending a European school after his diagnosis, where he received additional support.

Actor Junaid Khan, in an interview about his childhood, said he was diagnosed with dyslexia at around six or seven years of age. He explained that his parents sought specialist help after hearing the script of Taare Zameen Par, which depicted a child struggling with learning difficulties. He also said that receiving help early meant dyslexia did not affect him as much while growing up.

Filmmaker Steven Spielberg has also discussed his experience with dyslexia, including receiving a diagnosis later in life. He has spoken about how the condition affected his school years and how understanding it as an adult helped him make sense of those experiences.

Actor Keira Knightley has also spoken about being diagnosed with dyslexia as a child and the role her family played in encouraging her to read. Actor Tom Holland has publicly discussed dyslexia, alongside attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).

Entrepreneur Richard Branson has written about struggling with dyslexia at school, where his difficulties were misunderstood by some teachers. He has since spoken about how he adapted his working methods and built a business career around his strengths.

What schools need to do

In India, the discussion about dyslexia takes place alongside a legal framework that recognises specific learning disabilities. The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016, includes dyslexia within this category. It recognises that specific learning disabilities can affect the processing of spoken or written language and may influence comprehension, reading, writing, spelling or mathematical calculations.

Section 16 sets out responsibilities for educational institutions funded or recognised by the government, including identifying specific learning disabilities at the earliest and taking appropriate pedagogical measures. The law also provides for reasonable accommodation and support as part of inclusive education.

However, recognition in law does not automatically ensure that a child receives the right help. Teachers need to be able to recognise persistent difficulties, communicate with families and refer children for appropriate assessment. Schools also need practical ways to adapt instruction and assessment to individual needs.

The National Brain Research Centre's Dyslexia Assessment for Languages of India (DALI) project has developed assessment tools for identifying dyslexia in Indian-language contexts. NCERT's PRASHAST screening tool is designed to help schools identify children who may have disabilities and need further assessment. Screening can be an important first step, but it is not a substitute for a proper evaluation or the support that may follow.

For a student, that support may involve structured reading instruction, additional time where appropriate, accessible learning materials or alternative ways to demonstrate knowledge. The measures required will depend on the child's individual needs, a diagnosis alone cannot determine them.



BEYOND THE RANK

WHO REALLY GETS A FAIR CHANCE IN INDIA'S ENTRANCE EXAMS?

Prabhav Anand

India is preparing to redesign its largest entrance examinations after repeated security failures. But a parliamentary report has exposed a deeper concern: whether the examination system can adequately measure differences in students' opportunities to succeed.

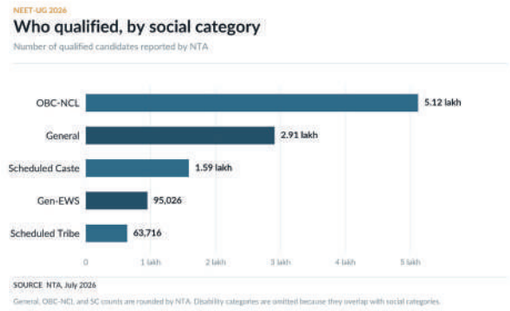
Every year, millions of Indian students enter examination centres carrying years of preparation, family expectations and the hope of securing a place in higher education. They answer questions under uniform rules, receive scores and are assigned ranks that can influence their academic and professional futures.

The process is designed to select candidates according to merit. What it cannot necessarily establish is whether every candidate had a comparable opportunity to demonstrate that merit.

A student attending a well-resourced school with access to private coaching may compete against another whose school struggles with teacher shortages or inadequate laboratories. Both receive the same examination paper. Their scores are comparable under the examination's marking system, but their preparation may have taken place under very different circumstances.

This distinction has acquired new relevance as India considers extensive changes to its national entrance examinations following the cancellation of the May 3, 2026, National Eligibility cum Entrance Test for Undergraduate courses (NEET-UG). The examination was cancelled on May 12 after allegations of irregularities, and a fresh test was conducted on June 21.

The controversy renewed questions about examination security. It also prompted a discussion about how tests are designed, who benefits from the current system and what responsibility the examination authorities have towards candidates.



On October 9, 2026, the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Education, Women, Children, Youth and Sports submitted its 382nd report on reforms to the National Testing Agency (NTA). Headed by Rajya Sabha MP Mukul Wasnik, the committee examined the agency's functioning and recommended changes to its staffing, accountability, examination infrastructure and assessment methods.

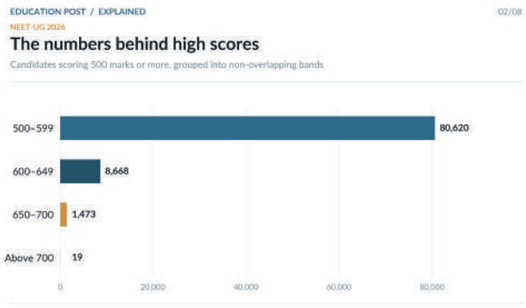
Among its observations was an apparent gap in how the agency assesses examination outcomes. The committee was informed that the NTA possessed state-wise registration figures for different examinations but did not have corresponding information showing whether those candidates had succeeded. The panel recommended an annual equity audit covering participation, performance and qualifying thresholds across social and educational backgrounds.

That recommendation raises an important policy question. If national entrance examinations are intended to provide a fair route into higher education, how can policymakers determine whether the system is delivering that opportunity without sufficiently detailed evidence about who succeeds and why?

The difference between taking an examination and securing admission

India's examination system produces extensive information about candidates. Registration figures, attendance, examination scores, cutoffs, ranks and category-wise results are routinely generated, although the level of public disclosure varies.

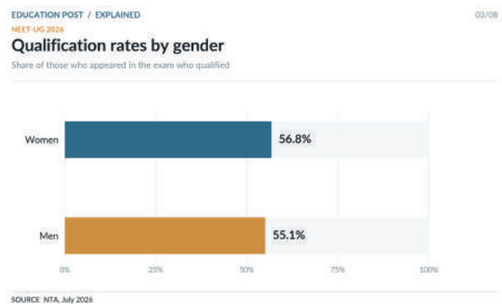
Yet these figures describe different stages of a student's educational journey. Registering for an examination does not establish that a candidate appeared for it. Appearing does not establish that the candidate qualified. Qualification does not automatically translate into admission, particularly when the number of eligible candidates exceeds the seats available in preferred courses and institutions.



The distinction is visible in NEET-UG 2026. According to the NTA's July 16 results announcement, close to 20 lakh candidates appeared for the re-examination, and approximately 11.21 lakh qualified for undergraduate medical, dental, AYUSH and allied programmes. More than 58% of qualified candidates were women.

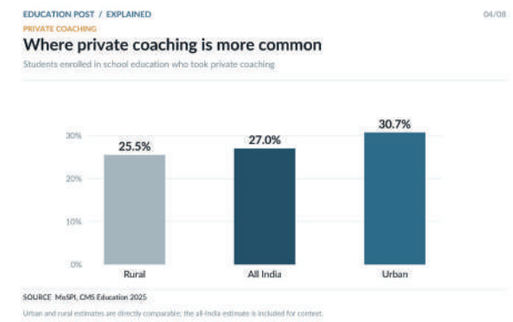
The agency also published category-wise qualification figures and reported that successful candidates came from every state and Union Territory. Uttar Pradesh alone accounted for more than 1.7 lakh qualified candidates. These disclosures are relevant because they suggest that some of the information described as unavailable in the parliamentary report was being published, at least in aggregate form.

The discrepancy requires clarification. The parliamentary committee's statement may refer to the absence of comprehensive, comparable



performance records across all examinations or more detailed breakdowns than those currently published. There is also a distinction between examination results and admission outcomes.

In its July 2026 press release, the NTA explicitly stated that its responsibility was to conduct NEET, declare results and issue All India Ranks. Merit lists, domicile determination and counselling fall under the respective admitting and state authorities. For medical admissions, the Medical Counselling Committee handles specified national and institutional quotas, while separate state authorities conduct their respective counselling processes. In engineering, the Joint Seat Allocation Authority manages admissions to participating IITs, NITs, IIITs and other institutions using the relevant entrance



examination ranks.

This division of responsibility matters. A student may qualify for NEET without obtaining the desired MBBS seat. Another may receive an offer but be unable to accept it because of tuition fees, relocation expenses or personal circumstances. A third may enroll in a different course.

Such possibilities demonstrate why examination qualification alone cannot measure access to higher education. They do not, by themselves, establish how frequently financial or other constraints prevent candidates from taking up available seats. An effective assessment would need to connect examination outcomes with counselling, seat allotment and eventual enrolment data, while protecting individual privacy.

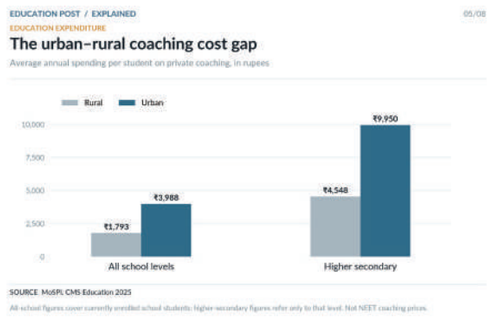
The parliamentary committee has proposed a starting point. Its annual equity audit would examine participation rates, qualification rates and achievement of cutoffs by state, gender, school background, medium of instruction and social category. The resulting evidence could distinguish differences in who takes examinations from differences in how participating candidates perform.

Without that distinction, an area with relatively few successful candidates could be wrongly assumed to have weak academic performance when the underlying problem might be low participation. Equally, a state producing large numbers of qualifying candidates might still have substantial disparities between different groups of students.

When preparation becomes an advantage

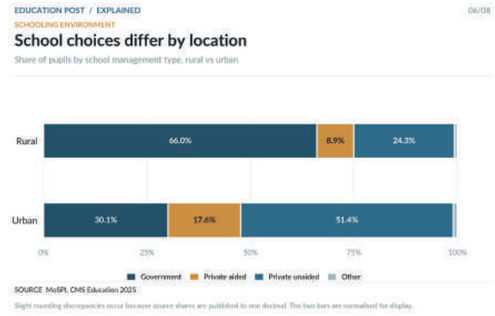
The second concern is more difficult to resolve through examination administration alone. India's competitive examinations are generally intended to assess knowledge and academic ability through standardised questions. But preparation for those questions takes place within an education system marked by considerable differences in resources and household spending.

A 2025 survey by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation offers some evidence of these differences. The Comprehensive Modular Survey on Education, conducted between April and June 2025, collected information from 52,085 households and 57,742 students.



It found that 27% of students enrolled in school education were taking or had taken private coaching during the academic year. The proportion was 30.7% in urban areas and 25.5% in rural areas. Average annual household expenditure on private coaching was estimated at ₹3,988 per student in urban areas, compared with ₹1,793 in rural areas. At the higher secondary level, the corresponding estimates were ₹9,950 and ₹4,548.

These are national estimates covering school education generally. They should not be interpreted as the average cost of preparing for NEET or JEE, where specialised coaching programmes may have substantially different fee structures. Nevertheless, the figures establish that supplementary education represents a measurable expenditure for Indian households, and that its prevalence and costs differ across rural and urban areas.



The parliamentary committee went further by examining whether the design of national entrance tests itself encourages dependence on coaching. It described the coaching industry as a "parallel curriculum that often matters more than the official school curriculum."

The committee argued that assessments which reward intensive question-pattern practice, rapid recall or material beyond the prescribed curriculum can favour candidates who have access to specialised preparation. Its concern was not that every student attending coaching enjoys an unfair advantage or that candidates who succeed without coaching lack ability. Rather, the issue is whether examination design rewards skills that can be developed only, or more easily, through additional paid preparation.

The distinction matters for education policy. If an entrance examination largely measures conceptual understanding taught in schools, well-designed classroom teaching should provide a meaningful foundation for success. But if the test increasingly rewards familiarity with specialised techniques, the effective preparation curriculum can extend beyond what schools are expected to teach.

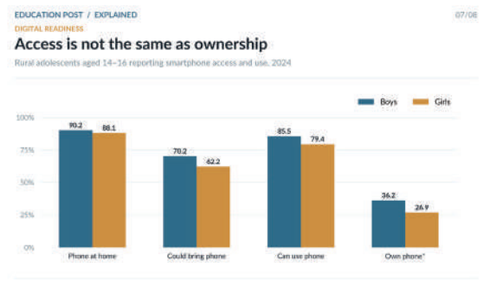
Students may then feel compelled to obtain instruction from a separate commercial system. This problem was anticipated in the National Education Policy 2020. The policy envisaged common entrance examinations assessing conceptual understanding and the application of knowledge, with the stated aim of reducing dependence on coaching.

Six years later, the parliamentary committee has again called for measurable standards to ensure



that NEET, JEE-Main and the Common University Entrance Test assess understanding based on official school curricula. The repetition of this policy objective is revealing. Reducing coaching dependence requires more than changing the wording of individual questions. It requires evidence about which skills the examinations actually measure and whether the assessment rewards learning that students can reasonably acquire through regular schooling.

It also requires caution in interpreting results. A strong statistical association between coaching participation and examination success, if established through reliable research, would not automatically prove that coaching caused the higher scores. Students who attend coaching may differ in prior academic achievement, family resources, school quality and the amount of time available for preparation.



These factors would need to be examined before drawing conclusions about the effect of coaching itself. What can be established is that an examination authority interested in educational equity must assess more than the number of candidates who reach a qualifying score.



Will computer-based examinations improve fairness?

India's proposed examination reforms add another dimension to the discussion. The parliamentary committee has recommended moving NEET-UG from pen-and-paper testing towards computer-based examinations. Other major tests, including JEE-Main, already use computer-based formats.

The proposed transition is intended primarily to improve examination security. Digitally selected questions and papers assembled closer to examination time could reduce the risks associated with printing, storing and transporting standardised question papers.

The committee has also recommended eventually introducing computer-adaptive testing, in which question selection can respond to a candidate's performance and scores are adjusted to account for differences in question difficulty. Such systems would represent a substantial change in how a high-stakes national entrance examination operates.

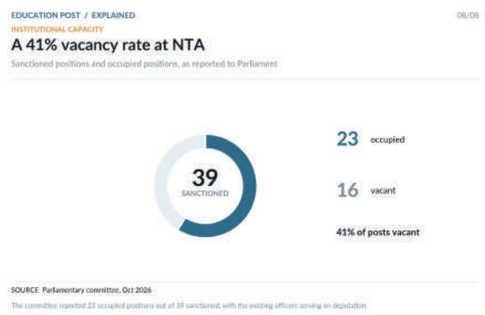
They could also introduce new questions about equal treatment. An examination conducted on computers requires reliable equipment, secure software, electricity, trained staff and arrangements for technical failures. Candidates must also be sufficiently familiar with the digital interface to ensure that computer operation does not become an unintended part of what is being assessed.

These requirements may affect students differently. The Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2024 found that approximately 89% of rural children aged 14–16 had access to a smartphone at home and 82.2% reported knowing how to use one.

However, among those who could use a smartphone, ownership was considerably lower. Around 36.2% of boys and 26.9% of girls reported owning their own devices. Smartphone access is not equivalent to experience using a computer for a timed examination. Nor do these ASER figures directly measure digital readiness among NEET candidates, who constitute a different population.

The findings nevertheless caution against treating the availability of digital devices as sufficient evidence of equal digital preparation. The parliamentary committee acknowledged these risks. It recommended substantial investment in government-owned computer-based testing infrastructure, particularly in smaller cities and rural areas. It also supported the earlier recommendation for 1,000 secure government testing centres, proposed at least one centre in every district and called for opportunities for students to take mock computer-based tests.

For areas where adequate infrastructure remains unavailable, the committee suggested considering an interim system in which encrypted



questions could be delivered digitally and printed securely at examination centres. This phased approach recognises that technological change cannot be evaluated solely by its efficiency or resistance to malpractice.

A secure examination system that is difficult for some candidates to access would create a different problem for policymakers. There is also the issue of comparing performance across examination sessions. A computer-based NEET conducted in multiple shifts may require different sets of questions. If one session receives a more



difficult paper than another, raw marks alone may not provide a sufficiently comparable measure of performance.

A normalisation system attempts to account for such differences. But its credibility depends on the quality of the underlying assessment design, the assumptions used to compare difficulty levels and the transparency of the resulting scores.

The committee has therefore recommended developing and publicly explaining an independently audited normalisation methodology before NEET moves to computer-based testing. For candidates, that requirement is central to trust. They need to understand not only how their answers are marked but also how scores from different sessions are made comparable.

Who should measure fairness?

The proposed equity audit would be an important development, but the usefulness of such an exercise would depend on the quality and scope of the data collected. A comparison of registration and qualification rates across states could identify patterns requiring further examination. Analysing results by gender, social category, language and school management type could reveal differences that are obscured by national averages.

But the data would need careful interpretation. For example, a lower qualification rate among students from a particular school category would not establish that an entrance examination discriminated against them. Differences in school resources, household income, subject choices, preparation opportunities and other factors might help explain the pattern.

Similarly, comparisons between states would need to account for differences in the number of candidates, the composition of applicant groups and their educational backgrounds. These are reasons to improve the analysis, not reasons to avoid publishing it. A sufficiently detailed audit could help authorities identify where further investigation or targeted support is warranted. It could also provide a way to evaluate whether reforms introduced in one examination cycle produce measurable changes in subsequent years.

The committee has recommended establishing a dedicated research wing within the NTA, staffed by academics with expertise in educational research. It has also called for permanent specialists in psychometrics, the scientific measurement of abilities and assessment performance, alongside experts in examination security, digital infrastructure and data analytics.

The staffing figures cited in the report illustrate the institutional challenge. Of 39 sanctioned positions, only 23 were occupied when the committee examined the agency's operations, representing a vacancy rate of approximately 41%.The committee argued that an organisation responsible for examinations involving roughly 1.2 crore candidate appearances annually requires professional expertise developed over sustained periods.

That expertise would be needed to answer questions going beyond individual examination results. Are entrance examinations testing the skills they claim to measure? Do different language versions provide comparable assessments? Are score comparisons reliable across sessions? Do certain question formats systematically disadvantage groups of candidates? What happens to students after they qualify?

Addressing these questions would require coordination between the NTA, education ministries, school authorities, regulators, admission bodies and researchers.

The collection and publication of more detailed student data would also need appropriate safeguards. Students' identities and sensitive personal information should not be exposed in the course of studying wider patterns.

The objective would be to produce reliable aggregate evidence capable of informing policy without making individual candidates identifiable.

The committee has additionally recommended an independent mechanism to audit examination security and investigate grievances, along with improved accessibility arrangements for candidates with disabilities.

These proposals broaden the understanding of examination fairness from the prevention of misconduct to the treatment of candidates throughout the assessment process.

Yet their eventual effect will depend on implementation. A parliamentary committee's recommendation does not itself alter examination rules, establish a new data-reporting system or require the NTA to publish information beyond existing obligations.

What remains unanswered?

The debate over examination reform has understandably concentrated on preventing paper leaks. A compromised examination can force students to repeat months of preparation, disrupt admission schedules and undermine confidence in the results.

But security is one dimension of a credible examination system. A well-administered test may still reveal inequalities rooted in preparation opportunities. A candidate may obtain a qualifying score without securing a place in the desired programme. And a national results announcement may provide an accurate account of examination performance without explaining what happens during the subsequent admission process.

The latest parliamentary report brings these distinctions into the policy debate at a time when India is considering major changes to the testing system. Its recommendations suggest that the NTA's responsibilities should be understood in terms of assessment quality, transparency and public accountability, alongside security.

For students, the most important measure of reform will not necessarily be the sophistication of examination software or the number of security protocols introduced. It will be whether the system can demonstrate that candidates are assessed reliably, that differences in their circumstances are properly understood and that examination results provide a credible route towards educational opportunity.

India already produces vast quantities of examination data. The next question is whether those records can explain who gets through the system, who does not, and where policy intervention could make a measurable difference.

> **A secure exam is not automatically a fair exam.**

WHAT THE DATA SUGGESTS

Coaching is widespread:
27% of students have taken private coaching, with higher participation in urban areas (30.7%) than rural areas (25.5%).

Urban families spend far more:
Average annual spending is nearly 2.5 times higher in urban areas across all levels, and more than twice as high at the higher secondary level.

Inequality starts before the exam:
Coaching adds a real financial burden for families and can widen existing gaps in educational opportunity, even before competitive exams.

- **Who gets access:** How do school education, income, geography, and digital access shape a student's chances?
- **What does this merit measure:** Does a rank reflect only talent, or also equal opportunities and preparation?
- **What happens after students qualify:** With far more qualifiers than seats, how do we measure a fair, transparent and inclusive admission process?

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THE CLASS 10 DIVIDE

WHY INDIA'S STUDENTS STRUGGLE TO REACH CLASS 12

Prabhav Anand

India's school dropout rates are improving, but the latest government data reveal a persistent gap between secondary and higher secondary education. What prevents students from completing 12 years of schooling?

A child who enters Class 1 in India is expected to spend the next 12 years in school. Yet reaching the final two years remains far from certain. The difficulty is no longer simply getting children into classrooms. It is ensuring they can continue studying when education becomes more expensive, schools become harder to reach and families face pressure to prioritise immediate income over qualifications.

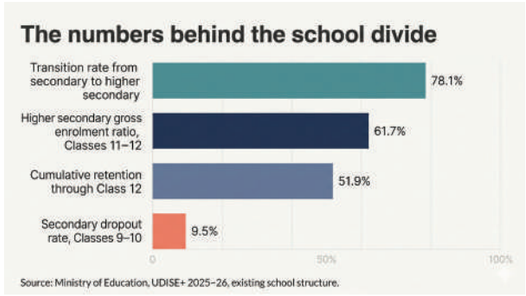
Six years after the introduction of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, India has made measurable progress in reducing school dropout rates and improving student retention. More teachers have entered the system, school infrastructure has expanded and a growing proportion of students are progressing to higher classes. But the transition from Class 10 to Class 11 remains a point of vulnerability.

The Ministry of Education's UDISE+ 2025–26 figures show that 78.1% of students transitioned from secondary to higher secondary education, up from 75.1% a year earlier. Higher secondary retention, measured cumulatively from Class 1 through Class 12, reached 51.9%, compared with 47.2% in 2024–25. It is an improvement, but it also indicates how much participation is lost across the full course of schooling.

The Economic Survey 2025–26 offers another perspective. Drawing on the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) 2023–24, it estimates that nearly two

crore adolescents aged 14–18 were out of school. Economic pressures, domestic responsibilities and limited access to education all figure in the explanation.

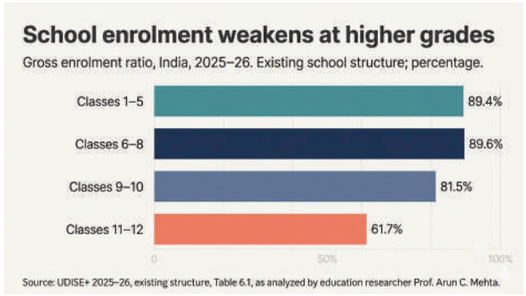
The figures come from different datasets and reference years, and they should not be treated as interchangeable. Together, however, they point to the same policy problem: India has expanded access to schooling considerably, but continuity through adolescence remains uneven.



India's recognised school system enrolled approximately 24.72 crore students in 2025–26, including pre-primary education, across nearly 14.67 lakh schools. The number of teachers reached 1.03 crore, and the overall pupil-teacher ratio stood at 24:1. On these national indicators, the system appears substantially stronger than it was a decade ago.

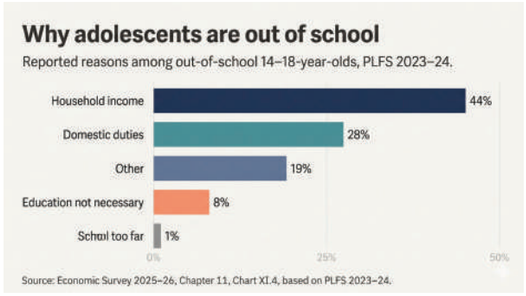
But enrolment figures are not as straightforward as they appear.

Gross enrolment ratio, or GER, measures the number of students enrolled at a particular education level, irrespective of age, as a percentage of the population officially eligible for that level. It does not measure how many students from a particular Class 10 cohort successfully complete Class 12.



The latest UDISE+ report, using the existing school structure, puts GER at 81.5% for Classes 9–10 and 61.7% for Classes 11–12. The difference is 19.8 percentage points. It cannot be described as a 19.8% dropout rate because the denominators refer to different age populations and the figures include students outside the prescribed age groups.

Three different measures are therefore needed: enrolment tells us how widely education is accessed, transition tells us whether students move to the next stage, and retention estimates how successfully the system keeps students enrolled across successive years.



There is progress here that should not be overlooked. The secondary dropout rate, covering Classes 9–10 under the existing structure, declined from 11.5% in 2024–25 to 9.5% in 2025–26. The transition rate into Classes 11–12 improved by three percentage points.

That progress matters, particularly because NEP 2020 aims to achieve a 100% gross enrolment ratio across school education by 2030. Yet the latest NEP-format UDISE+ figures place the combined secondary stage, Classes 9–12, at 71.7%. With four years remaining before the policy's target year, the distance between the goal and the reported level remains considerable.

Education becomes a household financial decision

The explanation for lower participation in higher grades is closely connected to household economics.

The Economic Survey 2025–26 reports that among out-of-school adolescents aged 14–18 in the 2023–24 PLFS data, 44% cited the need to supplement household income as their reason for not attending school. Another 28% reported domestic responsibilities, while 8% considered education unnecessary. Distance from school accounted for 1%, and other reasons for 19%.

These are responses from out-of-school adolescents, not percentages of all children aged 14–18. The distinction matters because the data describe the reasons given by those already outside the system.

The Economic Survey identifies different pressures on boys and girls. Among boys who had left school, the need to contribute to household income was particularly prominent. For girls, domestic and care responsibilities were a major factor.

NITI Aayog's May 2026 report, School Education System in India: Temporal Analysis and Policy Roadmap for Quality Enhancement, also identifies the costs of books, transport, uniforms, examinations and private tuition as barriers to continuing secondary education. These expenses can remain substantial even when a student attends a government school.

For households with irregular earnings, the relevant calculation is not limited to the amount charged by a school. It also includes the income an adolescent might otherwise earn, the cost of travelling to another village or town, and the domestic work that must be reassigned when a child continues studying.

The result is an unequal decision-making environment. Children from financially secure families may be able to pursue higher secondary education without any interruption. Others may have to justify each additional year of schooling against immediate household needs.

This is a structural problem that educational reform alone cannot resolve. Scholarships and subsidised transport may reduce the direct cost of education, but the larger pressure of household income can remain.

A school nearby does not always offer Class 11

The location and availability of schools add another layer to the problem.

India's expansion of primary education has produced a large network of institutions. Higher secondary facilities, however, are distributed much less widely.

The Economic Survey 2025–26 found that only 17.1% of schools in rural areas offered secondary education, compared with 38.1% in urban areas, using UDISE+ 2024–25 data. The comparison refers to the proportion of schools offering that level, not the proportion of children with access to a school. Nevertheless, it reveals the unequal distribution of higher-level facilities.

The 2025–26 UDISE+ data also show that schools classified at the higher secondary level accounted for only about 11.5% of all recognised schools. That means the network offering Classes 11–12 is much smaller than the network serving children in the earlier grades.

The consequences depend on local circumstances. In an urban area, several higher secondary schools may be reachable through public transport. In a remote village, continuing after Class 10 can involve a much longer journey, higher transport costs or the need to stay away from home.

For families concerned about safety, travel expenses and reliable transport, the absence of a nearby higher secondary institution can become a reason to discontinue education.

But there is an important limitation to the distance argument. The PLFS survey identifies school distance as the primary reason for only 1% of out-of-school adolescents. That does not mean access is irrelevant. Distance can increase costs, affect parental decisions or combine with other pressures without being recorded as the principal reason for leaving school.

A meaningful assessment of access must therefore examine travel time, transport availability, school capacity and available subject streams, rather than relying solely on the number of school buildings.

More teachers, but are they in the right classrooms?

India's growing teacher workforce is another example of how national averages can conceal operational difficulties.

According to UDISE+ 2025–26, the total number of teachers increased from 94.83 lakh in 2022–23 to 1.03 crore in 2025–26. The Ministry of Education has highlighted the improvement in pupil-teacher ratios as evidence of increasing teaching capacity.

At the same time, the report records 1,00,843 single-teacher schools. The figure has declined from the previous year, but it continues to represent a substantial part of the national school network.

A low pupil-teacher ratio does not necessarily mean that every subject has a qualified teacher. A small school can report a favourable ratio while expecting one or two teachers to handle multiple classes.

At the higher secondary level, specialised teaching becomes more important because students are divided across academic streams and individual subjects.

The PRS Legislative Research analysis of the 2026–27 education budget, citing UDISE+ 2024–25, found pupil-teacher ratios of 47:1 in Classes 11–12 in Jharkhand, 37:1 in Maharashtra and Odisha, and 35:1 in Uttar Pradesh. All four exceeded the NEP benchmark of 30:1.

Teacher recruitment is predominantly administered by state governments. In a written Rajya Sabha reply on July 29, 2026, the Ministry of Education stated that teacher vacancies can arise from retirement, resignation, the creation of posts and changes in enrolment. It also said that state governments maintain the data on sanctioned posts and vacancies.

The practical challenge is therefore not simply to raise the number of teachers nationally. It is to ensure that schools have appropriately qualified teachers in the subjects and classes where students need them.

Girls are progressing faster nationally, but barriers remain

The conventional assumption that girls are more likely than boys to leave school needs qualification when examined against the latest national figures.

The UDISE+ 2025–26 data show that girls had a secondary-to-higher-secondary transition rate of 80.7%, compared with 75.5% for boys. Their secondary dropout rate was 8%, against 10.9% for boys. The cumulative retention rate through Class 12 was 55% for girls and 49.2% for boys.

These figures complicate the idea that girls are invariably the more educationally disadvantaged group.

They do not, however, establish that the obstacles facing girls have disappeared.

A national average can conceal variation between states, districts, social groups and household income levels. NITI Aayog's 2026 report points to early marriage, safety concerns, mobility restrictions and unpaid household responsibilities as barriers affecting girls' continued education.

The distinction matters for policy. Programmes focused on girls' access remain necessary where these barriers persist. But they cannot substitute for interventions aimed at adolescent boys who face pressure to enter paid work.

The evidence suggests that retaining students through secondary education requires a more differentiated approach. The reasons that keep a boy away from Class 11 may be different from those affecting a girl in the same village, even when the eventual outcome is the same.

The learning gap before the dropout

A student's decision to continue after Class 10 may also be shaped by their experience of learning in earlier years.

The issue is particularly important for children who remain enrolled but struggle with grade-level concepts.

NITI Aayog's 2026 report draws on the PARAKH Rashtriya Sarvekshan 2024 to document persistent differences in learning performance across social groups.

At the middle stage, the report found mathematics proficiency of 33% among Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe students, 39% among Other Backward Classes, and 48% among students in the general category.

These group-level findings do not show whether individual students subsequently dropped out. They do, however, establish that unequal learning outcomes are visible before children reach the higher secondary stage.

When students arrive in Classes 9 and 10 with gaps in reading, mathematics or subject comprehension, a more demanding curriculum may become difficult to manage.

The response cannot be limited to preparing students for board examinations. The underlying learning gaps often require intervention much earlier.

The 2025–26 Economic Survey calls for stronger classroom teaching practices, improved teacher training and greater attention to learning outcomes rather than simply counting enrolments.

The policy implication is that retaining adolescents begins before adolescence. A student who struggles academically in Class 6 may require support several years before the Class 10 transition becomes a concern.

The legal boundary at age 14

One of the clearest differences between India's educational ambitions and its statutory obligations concerns the age at which free and compulsory education is guaranteed.

The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009, which came into force on April 1, 2010, guarantees free and compulsory education for children aged six to 14.

NEP 2020, by contrast, seeks universal access across a school structure covering ages three to 18, with a 100% gross enrolment ratio from preschool through secondary education by 2030.

The two frameworks serve different purposes. The RTE Act establishes a statutory entitlement for a defined age group, while NEP sets a broader policy objective.

As of October 2026, the RTE Act's national age entitlement has not been extended to cover all children through 18.

This distinction becomes important when considering the transition to Classes 9–12. A student's access to higher secondary schooling can depend on state-level provisions, government programmes, school availability and household resources rather

than the same nationwide compulsory-education guarantee that applies during the elementary years.

Extending the entitlement would have financial and administrative consequences. It could require additional classrooms, subject teachers, transport arrangements, residential facilities and recurring expenditure.

But the underlying policy question remains: how should India guarantee the opportunity to complete higher secondary education when its principal education-rights legislation stops at 14?

What the education budget can and cannot solve

The Union Budget 2026–27 allocated ₹1,39,289 crore to the Ministry of Education, including ₹83,562 crore for the Department of School Education and Literacy.

The Samagra Shiksha programme received an allocation of ₹42,100 crore, while PM POSHAN was allocated ₹12,750 crore and PM SHRI ₹7,500 crore. These are budget estimates, not necessarily expenditure already incurred.

Funding matters because school access, teacher recruitment and student support require sustained spending. But the size of a national budget does not establish whether resources are reaching the particular districts or student groups where dropout risks are highest.

PRS Legislative Research noted in its 2026–27 budget analysis that combined central and state education expenditure was estimated at 4.1% of GDP in 2022–23, below the 6% benchmark envisaged under NEP 2020.

Greater spending would expand the resources available, but allocation alone is not a measure of educational effectiveness.

A district facing a shortage of higher secondary schools may require new facilities or upgraded institutions. Another district might have sufficient school capacity but inadequate subject teachers. Elsewhere, financial assistance to students may have a more immediate effect on continuation.

NITI Aayog's 2026 policy roadmap recommends tracking students at the transitions into Classes 6, 9 and 11, introducing early-warning systems for those at risk of leaving, providing targeted financial and academic support, and expanding flexible re-entry options for adolescents who have already discontinued schooling.

The recommendations are proposals in an advisory report, not evidence that these measures have already been implemented nationwide.

Their emphasis is nevertheless instructive. Preventing dropout is not a single intervention delivered at the end of Class 10. It requires identifying students before they leave and understanding the specific circumstances that put their continuation at risk.

What needs to change before 2030?

India's current policy framework already recognises the need for universal access, school infrastructure, vocational opportunities and reduced dropout. The unresolved question is how these objectives will translate into measurable progress for students approaching the end of compulsory schooling.

Three areas merit particular attention.

First, the secondary-to-higher-secondary transition should be measured and acted upon at district and block levels. A national average of 78.1% can conceal localities where a far smaller proportion of students continue. Governments need to know which students have not progressed, whether they entered alternative education and what support would make re-enrolment possible.

Second, student assistance must address the real costs of continuing education. Scholarships can help, but transport, learning materials and family income pressures may require different interventions. The Economic Survey's finding that household income is the most frequently reported reason for adolescent non-attendance suggests that measures aimed solely at school infrastructure would leave an important part of the problem unresolved.

Third, the availability of a school must be distinguished from its capacity to deliver education. A higher secondary institution without sufficient subject teachers, functional laboratories or the streams students wish to study may not provide a meaningful local alternative.

The government's own data show that the situation is improving. Secondary dropout rates have declined, transition rates have risen and more children are being retained through successive stages of schooling.

But higher secondary participation remains well below the level envisaged under NEP 2020.

For a student approaching Class 10, the policy debate is less about whether India has expanded its education system than whether another two years of schooling are practically possible.

Until that question is answered consistently across regions and income groups, the difference between enrolment and educational opportunity will remain one of India's most consequential school-policy challenges.





THE MISSING 41

INSIDE RURAL INDIA'S UNFINISHED STORY OF GIRLS' EDUCATION

Pragya Kumari

*India has made remarkable strides in bringing girls into classrooms. But a new UNESCO report exposes a troubling divide: for every 100 boys in rural India who complete upper-secondary education, only 59 girls reach the same milestone. The challenge is no longer simply getting girls into school, it is ensuring they can stay, learn and finish, writes **Pragya Kumari**.*

A classroom door that does not always lead to a future

For millions of girls in India, education begins with a promise. A school uniform, a bag of books and the daily walk to class represent the possibility of a future beyond the limits

imposed by poverty, geography and gender. Yet, for too many girls, that journey ends before school does.

A new UNESCO report, Gender Equity in Access to Education, accompanying the 2026 Global Education Monitoring (GEM) Report, has brought this unfinished story into sharp focus. Its central finding is stark, in rural India, only 59 girls complete upper-secondary education for every 100 boys who reach the same level. In urban India, the gender gap has closed, with girls and boys achieving parity in completion.

The contrast reveals a fundamental contradiction in India's education story. The country has made substantial progress in expanding access to schooling, but the benefits of that progress remain unevenly distributed. A girl growing up in a city may have a reasonable chance of completing school alongside her male peers; a girl in a rural community may face a very different set of choices and constraints.

India's adjusted gender parity index (GPI) for upper-secondary completion stands at 0.89 nationally, falls to 0.59 in rural areas and reaches 1.0 in urban areas. A GPI of 1 indicates equality between girls and boys. Put simply, the national figure represents approximately 89 girls completing upper-secondary education for every 100 boys, while the rural figure exposes a much deeper divide.

These are not merely statistics about school attendance. UNESCO's completion indicator measures the proportion of people aged three to five years above the official graduation age who have reached the final grade of an education level. It therefore captures whether students make it through a stage of education, not simply whether they enroll or attend classes.

That distinction matters. A child can enter school at the right age, attend for years and still fail to complete secondary education. For girls in rural India, the barriers that emerge during adolescence can turn an early educational opportunity into an unfinished journey.

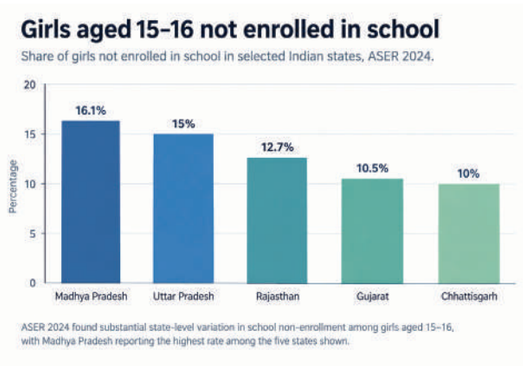
The numbers behind India's education paradox

India's progress should not be dismissed. The country has expanded schooling opportunities, invested in educational infrastructure and introduced programs intended to reduce the financial burden on families. UNESCO classifies India among countries making rapid progress towards gender parity, having closed more than 65% of the initial gender gap under its assessment.

The country was among the 47 nations with the largest disadvantages for girls in upper-secondary completion in 2000. Its subsequent improvement demonstrates that sustained policy action can change educational outcomes.

But progress at the national level can conceal serious inequalities within the country.

The Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2024 provides another perspective on the problem. Its





rural household survey found that 8.1% of girls aged 15–16 were not enrolled in school, up slightly from 7.9% in 2022. Across boys and girls in the same age group, 7.9% were out of school in 2024, compared with 13.1% in 2018.

The broader picture is encouraging: non-enrollment among older children has fallen considerably over time. Yet the slight increase among adolescent girls between 2022 and 2024 is a reminder that gains are not always permanent.

State-level differences make the challenge even clearer. ASER 2024 reported that the proportion of girls aged 15–16 who were not enrolled stood at 16.1% in Madhya Pradesh, 15% in Uttar Pradesh and 12.7% in Rajasthan. The corresponding figures were 10.5% in Gujarat and 10% in Chhattisgarh.

These numbers measure non-enrollment, not upper-secondary completion, and should not be confused with UNESCO's parity figures. Together, however, they reveal how adolescent girls' educational opportunities vary across India's regions.

For policymakers, the implication is clear: a national average cannot serve as a complete measure of educational equality. The experience of a girl in a well-connected urban neighborhood differs considerably from that of a girl in a remote village, where a secondary school may be far away and household resources are limited.

When poverty becomes a gender barrier

The rural education gap is not caused by geography alone. It reflects the interaction of poverty, social expectations, household responsibilities and the availability of public services.

For low-income families, keeping a child in school involves costs that extend beyond tuition. Uniforms, textbooks, transport, examination fees and other expenses can make continued education difficult, even when schooling itself is officially free.

As children grow older, these costs become more consequential. Families may have to choose between



paying for a daughter's continued education and meeting immediate household needs. Girls may also be expected to undertake domestic work, care for younger siblings or contribute to family livelihoods.

Such pressures do not affect every household equally. UNESCO's analysis across countries where girls face educational disadvantages found a median gender parity index of 0.66 among the poorest households, compared with 0.92 among the richest 20%.

The difference suggests that economic disadvantage can intensify gender inequality. A family with greater financial resources may be able to absorb transport costs, arrange safer travel or pay for additional academic support. A poorer household may have fewer alternatives when the nearest secondary school is distant or when a daughter's education competes with immediate responsibilities.

Social norms can reinforce these financial pressures. In some communities, girls face restrictions on mobility as they enter adolescence. Concerns about safety, family honor, and interaction with boys can influence decisions about whether daughters should continue studying, particularly when schools are far from home.

Early marriage can further interrupt education, while pregnancy and motherhood may make returning to school difficult. These are not isolated personal decisions; they are shaped by the economic and social environments in which families live.

The result is a pattern in which the opportunity to start school becomes more widespread, but the freedom to complete it remains unequal.

Infrastructure is not a minor detail

One of the most important lessons from India's experience is that educational access depends on practical conditions as much as on formal policy.

School sanitation is a case in point. A school may have classrooms and teachers, but inadequate toilets can make attendance difficult for adolescent girls, particularly during menstruation. Privacy, cleanliness and safety are essential elements of an environment in which students can attend regularly and learn with confidence.

ASER 2024 found that the proportion of rural schools with usable girls' toilets rose from 66.4% in 2018 to 68.4% in 2022 and 72% in 2024. The improvement is significant, but it also means that the survey still found nearly three in every ten rural schools without a usable girls' toilet.

The distinction between constructing a facility and ensuring that it remains functional is crucial. Toilets that lack water, are poorly maintained or cannot be used safely do not fully address the problem.

Research cited in UNESCO's report also points to the positive effects of India's national latrine-construction initiative on adolescent girls' enrollment, particularly in schools with separate toilets for boys and girls.

School meals offer another example of how seemingly straightforward interventions can have wider consequences. Free lunches can ease household food expenses, support children's nutrition and provide families with an additional reason to keep children in school. Evidence cited by UNESCO suggests that free school lunches had nearly twice the effect on primary-school enrollment for girls as for boys in disadvantaged rural communities.

The lesson is that girls' education cannot be separated from the conditions in which education is delivered. A school is not accessible in any meaningful sense if a student cannot afford to reach it, use its facilities or attend regularly.

Beyond enrollment: the importance of staying in school

India's education debate often focuses on getting children into classrooms. That remains essential, but the UNESCO findings suggest that the next phase must concentrate more sharply on retention and completion.

The challenge becomes particularly urgent as girls transition from primary to secondary and then upper-secondary education. At each stage, the demands of schooling increase. Students must travel farther in some areas, manage more complex subjects and prepare for examinations that can determine access to higher education and employment.

For girls from disadvantaged households, these years may coincide with growing domestic responsibilities or pressure to marry. Even a temporary interruption can make returning to school difficult.

UNESCO's regional figures underline the scale of the wider challenge. In Central and Southern Asia, which includes India, upper-secondary completion in 2024 stood at 57% for girls and 60% for boys. Across the region, girls' primary completion rose from 42% in 2000 to 90% in 2024. Lower-secondary completion increased from 30% to 83%, while upper-secondary completion climbed from 12% to 57%.

These gains represent a profound expansion of educational opportunity over roughly a quarter-century. Yet the remaining gap at the upper-secondary level illustrates why progress through one stage cannot be taken as evidence that the next is secure.

Globally, 63% of girls and 60% of boys completed upper-secondary education in 2024, according to UNESCO. India's rural figures demonstrate why global and national averages need to be examined alongside the experiences of specific populations.

A country can move towards parity overall while some communities continue to leave girls behind.

What India can learn from its neighbors

India is not alone in confronting the gap between school access and completion. Experiences from neighboring countries show that sustained public investment, targeted financial support and reforms that address social barriers can produce lasting improvements.

Nepal offers an instructive example. In 1990, only 8% of girls completed lower-secondary education, compared with 41% of boys. By 2024, the completion rate had risen to 89% for both groups, bringing them to parity.

The transformation was supported by a combination of measures, including constitutional recognition of education as a right, free and compulsory basic education, targeted scholarships, free textbooks, expanded secondary schooling and improvements to school facilities. Examination reforms also helped students progress through the education system.

Bangladesh offers another relevant lesson through its girls' stipend programs, which have been associated with higher educational attainment and delayed marriage. Financial

incentives can help families manage the costs of keeping daughters in school, particularly where poverty and social expectations otherwise encourage early withdrawal.

These examples do not suggest that India can simply replicate another country's model. Each education system operates within a different social, economic and institutional context. They do, however, demonstrate that gender disparities are not inevitable. When governments combine financial assistance, infrastructure, legal protections and sustained implementation, educational outcomes can change dramatically.

For India, the priority should be to identify which combinations of interventions work best in different settings, from remote villages and tribal communities to districts where adolescent non-enrolment remains high.

Why one policy cannot solve the problem

A scholarship may reduce the cost of education, but it cannot compensate for an unsafe journey to school. A new toilet may improve the school environment, but it cannot prevent early marriage if community expectations continue to push girls out of education. Free textbooks cannot solve the problem if a student is expected to spend her school hours caring for younger siblings.

UNESCO's report argues for coordinated policies that address these obstacles together. Such an approach

could include affordable transport, reliable school meals, functional sanitation facilities, safe school environments, counselling services and flexible pathways for students who have interrupted their education.

Re-entry policies are particularly important for girls who leave school because of pregnancy or motherhood. Without childcare, flexible learning arrangements and protection from discrimination, the formal right to return to education may mean little in practice.

India's existing programs provide a foundation on which to build. The challenge is to ensure that support reaches the girls who need it, that facilities remain functional and that local education authorities can identify and respond to emerging dropout risks.

Better monitoring is equally important. Governments need to track not only enrollment but also attendance, transition between school levels, completion and the reasons students leave. Data should be disaggregated by sex, location, household wealth and other relevant indicators so that disadvantages are not concealed by national averages.

Schools and communities must also be part of the response. Teachers, parents, local organizations and school management committees can help identify students at risk of dropping out and challenge assumptions that a girl's education is less valuable than a boy's.

From gender parity to genuine equality

There is an important distinction between gender parity and gender equity. Parity measures whether girls and boys achieve similar numerical outcomes. Equity asks whether they have a fair opportunity to learn, participate and succeed.

A parity index can improve because girls' completion rates rise. But a ratio can also change if boys' outcomes deteriorate. Numerical equality, therefore, does not automatically indicate that an education system is improving for everyone.

Nor do completion figures capture the full quality of students' educational experiences. Girls may complete school but still face gender stereotypes in textbooks, limited encouragement to pursue science and technology, discriminatory classroom practices or unsafe environments.

For India, this means that the next stage of reform must look beyond the number of girls entering or completing school. It must also examine what they learn, whether they feel safe, what choices education makes possible and whether they can translate their qualifications into further study or meaningful employment.

The wider stakes are considerable. When girls leave school prematurely, the consequences extend beyond individual careers. Communities lose potential teachers, health professionals, entrepreneurs, and public leaders. Families lose opportunities to improve their economic security across generations. The country loses part of its human potential.

Keeping girls in school is therefore not simply a matter of social justice. It is also an investment in India's economic development, public health and democratic participation.

The unfinished journey

India's education story contains reasons for both optimism and concern. Rising completion rates, expanded infrastructure and targeted welfare programs demonstrate that long-standing barriers can be reduced. UNESCO's classification of India as a fast-progressing country acknowledges these gains.

Yet the figure of 59 girls for every 100 boys in rural upper-secondary completion demands attention. It represents a substantial gap between the promise of education and the reality experienced by many girls.

ASER 2024 reinforces the urgency of that challenge: although non-enrolment among older children has declined over the longer term, 8.1% of rural girls aged 15–16 remained outside school, with considerably higher proportions in some states.

The policy response must be as varied as the barriers themselves. Some girls need transport to a nearby secondary school. Others need financial assistance, functional sanitation, protection from early marriage or a realistic opportunity to return after leaving school. Many need several forms of support at once.

The ultimate measure of success will not be whether India can announce another improvement in its national gender parity index. It will be whether a girl's chances of completing school depend less on where she is born, how much her family earns or what her community expects of her.

For every 100 boys who complete upper-secondary education in rural India, 41 girls are missing from the equivalent count. Closing that gap will require more than getting girls through the school gate. It will require building an education system in which they can remain, progress and finish.

The next milestone in India's educational journey should be clear: not merely more girls in school, but more girls completing their education with the freedom and opportunity to decide what comes next.

|| Om Shree Manjunathaya Namaha ||



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INSIDE INDIA'S CLASSROOMS

Pragya Kumari

India's teaching workforce has grown across school and higher education over the past decade, but the expansion has not translated into uniform access to teachers. Differences in pupil-teacher ratios, thousands of single-teacher schools and vacancies in higher education institutions continue to shape the country's education landscape.

The latest data from the Unified District Information System for Education Plus (UDISE+) and an SBI Research report based on the All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE) reveal a system that has expanded considerably but continues to face challenges in distributing educators where they are needed most.

World Teachers' Day, observed on October 5, 2026, brought renewed attention to the people at the center of education systems worldwide. India's figures offer a useful starting point for examining the scale of its teaching workforce, the disparities within it and the conditions that determine how effectively teachers can support students.

India's school teaching workforce exceeds 10.27 million

India had 10,273,020 school teachers across 1,466,682 schools in the 2025-26 academic year, serving 247,219,766 students, according to UDISE+ data. The national pupil-teacher ratio (PTR) stood at 24, with schools averaging approximately seven teachers each.

The size of the workforce, however, varies substantially across states. Uttar Pradesh employed the largest number of school teachers at 1,642,764, followed by Rajasthan with 793,158, Maharashtra with 750,272 and Bihar with 728,945. Chandigarh had the smallest total among the states and union territories listed, at 10,477 teachers.

Large teacher counts do not necessarily indicate that every school has adequate staffing. Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal generally average between six and eight teachers per school, while Chandigarh averages 50 and Delhi 29.

These differences reflect the varying scale of school systems, enrollment patterns and institutional structures across the country. They also demonstrate why national workforce totals alone cannot establish whether students have adequate access to teachers at their individual schools.

Bihar illustrates the pressure on school staffing

Bihar had 95,285 schools, 20,696,191 students and 728,945 teachers. Its pupil-teacher ratio was 28, above the national figure of 24. The average school served 217 students and employed eight teachers.

The state also had 2,006 single-teacher schools serving 162,393 students. In such institutions, one educator may have to manage several grades, making classroom organization and individual attention more difficult.

The problem extends beyond Bihar. Across India, 100,843 schools operated with only one teacher. Uttar Pradesh had the largest number of these schools at 7,874, followed by Rajasthan with 7,200 and West Bengal with 6,769.

At the other end of the staffing imbalance, 20,667 teachers were deployed in schools with zero student enrollment. West Bengal accounted for 19,502 of these teachers.

Taken together, these figures point to a challenge that cannot be addressed simply by increasing recruitment. Teacher deployment, enrollment changes and school-level staffing requirements also need attention to ensure that available personnel are aligned with student needs.

How teachers are distributed across school levels

The composition of India's school teaching workforce varies according to the classes teachers serve. In 2025-26, higher secondary teachers accounted for the largest share at 33.2%, followed by upper primary teachers at 28%, primary teachers at 23% and secondary teachers at 15.9%.

State-level patterns differ considerably. West Bengal had the highest proportion of teachers in the primary category, at 51.2%, while Gujarat recorded the largest share at the upper primary level, with 54.1% of its teachers working in that category.

Goa had the highest concentration of secondary teachers at 51.3%. Chandigarh recorded the largest proportion of higher secondary teachers, at 66.9%.

The distribution also reflects the fact that some educators teach across multiple stages rather than working exclusively at one level. Nationally, 2% of teachers taught only pre-primary classes, while 4% taught both pre-primary and primary classes.

Teachers working exclusively at the primary level accounted for 35%, while 12% taught both primary and upper primary classes. Another 16% taught only upper primary, and 8% covered both upper primary and secondary levels.

Secondary-only teachers represented 11% of the workforce. Those teaching both secondary and higher secondary classes accounted for 5%, while 7% taught only higher secondary classes.

These patterns matter because staffing requirements differ across stages of education. Schools need to balance teacher availability with subject specialization, the number of grades served and the learning needs of students at different levels.

Social composition and school management

UDISE+ data also provide a picture of the social composition of the teaching workforce. General-category teachers accounted for 40%, while OBC teachers represented 39%. Scheduled Caste (SC) teachers made up 13% and Scheduled Tribe (ST) teachers accounted for 8%.

School management is another important dimension of teacher distribution. Government schools employed 50% of teachers, while private schools accounted for 40%. Government-aided institutions employed 7.4%, and other management categories represented 2.6%. State Government schools alone employed 5,062,773 teachers. Across the broader government category, including central government systems, the workforce numbered 5,134,623.

This included 50,315 teachers in Kendriya Vidyalayas, 15,774 in Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalayas and 5,761 in other Central Government schools. Government-aided institutions employed 760,462 teachers, while private unaided recognized schools employed more than four million. Other schools accounted for 270,703 teachers.

The private recognized category also includes specialized institutions such as the IAF E&C Society, with 2,149 teachers, and the Navy Education Society, with 1,110 teachers.

Why the pupil-teacher ratio matters

The pupil-teacher ratio is one of the indicators used to assess whether schools have sufficient teaching staff relative to enrollment. A lower ratio can give educators more opportunities to monitor individual progress, identify learning difficulties and engage students in classroom activities.

The Right to Education framework and the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 emphasize appropriate teacher availability. NEP 2020 recommends a PTR of 30:1 at all levels of school education to support interactive learning and improve educational outcomes.

India's overall school PTR of 24 appears favorable against that benchmark. However, the national average conceals substantial differences among states, school levels and individual institutions. Some states continue to experience higher ratios, particularly at the higher secondary level.

The number of students served by each school also varies considerably. Chandigarh and Delhi have among the highest student counts per school, alongside PTR levels within Right to Education norms. This suggests comparatively high utilization of school infrastructure.

Ladakh, Mizoram, Himachal Pradesh, Sikkim and Meghalaya, by contrast, have substantially fewer students per school. In such areas, the challenge may involve making effective use of school infrastructure and deploying teachers appropriately across smaller or geographically dispersed student populations.

The distinction is important. A school with too few teachers may struggle to meet students' needs, while a school with very low enrollment may require a different approach to staffing and infrastructure planning.

How India compares with other education systems

International comparisons provide another perspective on teacher availability, although the figures must be interpreted carefully because countries classify their education systems differently.

The latest internationally comparable OECD data report 27 students per teaching staff member in India at the primary level, compared with an OECD average of 14. At the lower-secondary level, India's ratio is 19, against an OECD average of 13. At the upper-secondary level, the respective figures are 21 and 13.

Among major economies, the primary-level ratio stands at 21 in the United States, 25 in the United Kingdom, 18 in France, 15 in Germany and 15 in Spain. India's reported figure is higher than those of most of these countries.

At lower secondary, the ratios are 14 in the United Kingdom, 15 in the United States, 12 in France, 13 in Germany and 11 in Spain. At upper secondary, they are 14 in the UK, 16 in the US, 13 in France, 13 in Germany and 11 in Spain.

Other English-speaking systems show a varied picture. The United States reports ratios of 21 at primary, 16 at lower secondary and 20 at upper secondary. The UK reports 25, 25 and 33, respectively.

Australia records 14 at primary level, although the cited OECD table does not provide figures for its secondary levels. Canada reports 16 at primary and 13 at upper secondary, with lower-secondary data unavailable. Ireland records 13 at primary and 14 at upper secondary, while New Zealand reports 16, 13 and 14 across the three levels.

The OECD average primary-level student-to-teaching-staff ratio declined from 15 in 2015 to 14 in 2024. These comparisons should not be directly substituted for India's domestic UDISE+ figures. The datasets use different classifications and methodologies, which affect the reported ratios.

For 2024-25, UDISE+ recorded India's PTR at 20 in primary education, 17 in upper primary, 15 in secondary and 23 in higher secondary. The OECD dataset, using its own internationally standardized classification, reported ratios of 27 in primary, 19 in lower secondary and 21 in upper secondary education for 2024.

The figures therefore describe the system through different statistical frameworks. Understanding those differences is essential before drawing conclusions about India's performance relative to other countries.

Higher education teaching workforce grows by 27%

The expansion of India's teaching workforce is also evident in higher education.

According to an SBI Research report based on AISHE data, the number of teachers in universities and colleges rose from 1,367,535 in 2013-14 to 1,732,294 in 2023-24.

The increase of nearly 365,000 teachers represents growth of approximately 27% over the decade. This expansion accompanied a wider increase in higher education infrastructure, including universities, colleges and standalone institutions.

In 2023-24, India had 1,289 universities, 48,246 colleges and 15,221 standalone institutions. Together, these brought the total number of higher education institutions to 64,756.

The composition of the teaching workforce also changed during the period. Women accounted for 39% of higher education teachers in 2013-14, a share that increased to 45% in 2023-24.

Representation of teachers from reserved social categories rose as well. The proportion of SC teachers increased from 6.9% to 10%, while the share of ST teachers grew from 2% to 3%. OBC representation increased from 23.5% to 32%.

These changes show that the growth of higher education teaching has involved both an increase in overall numbers and shifts in workforce composition. However, aggregate growth does not establish whether institutions have sufficient staff in every subject, department or academic rank.

Higher education PTR ranges from 14 to 57 across states

SBI Research puts India's higher education pupil-teacher ratio at 23 for 2023-24 when universities and colleges operating in regular mode are considered together.

The report describes the national figure as broadly comparable with international levels, noting that ratios of approximately 25:1 to 30:1 are often found in leading institutions in the United States and Europe, depending on the program of study.

The state-level figures reveal a much wider variation. Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Goa have higher education PTRs of around 14, while Bihar records 57. Jharkhand has a ratio of 48 and Uttar Pradesh 33.

The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Education has cited 15:1 as an ideal pupil-teacher ratio for higher education. Against this benchmark, the differences between states raise questions about how effectively teaching capacity is distributed across institutions.

A national ratio of 23 does not necessarily indicate that every university or college operates at a comparable level. Institutional size, course structure, subject requirements and faculty availability can all influence the experience of students.

These higher education figures must also be distinguished from the OECD comparisons of school education. SBI Research examines universities and colleges, whereas the OECD figures discussed earlier cover primary, lower-secondary and upper-secondary education.

Vacancies persist in centrally funded institutions

Despite the increase in higher education teacher numbers, staffing shortages remain a concern in centrally funded institutions.

SBI Research, citing parliamentary data, reports that 14,042 of 41,351 sanctioned teaching posts across central universities and centrally funded institutions were vacant. This represents a vacancy rate of approximately 34%.

The situation varies across institution types. Central universities had a vacancy rate of 33%, while IITs reported 39% of teaching posts vacant. The figure stood at 54% in IIITs, 29% in NITs and 31% in IIMs. IISERs had a comparatively lower vacancy rate of 7%.

Vacancies were particularly high at the professor level, where 56.2% of sanctioned positions were unfilled.

These shortages have implications beyond the number of faculty members listed in institutional records. Faculty availability can affect teaching responsibilities, academic supervision, research guidance and the ability of institutions to maintain their planned academic activities.

The data present a contrast between workforce expansion and institutional staffing requirements. India has added hundreds of thousands of higher education teachers over a decade, but a substantial proportion of sanctioned positions in centrally funded institutions remains vacant.

The global teacher shortage extends beyond India

India's staffing challenges form part of a broader international concern. UNESCO estimates that the world will need 44 million additional primary and secondary teachers by 2030 to achieve universal basic education.

Sub-Saharan Africa accounts for approximately 15 million of the projected requirement. Southern Asia, which includes India, faces an estimated gap of 7.8

million teachers.

The problem is not confined to developing regions. Countries across Europe and North America also face difficulties recruiting and retaining educators.

UNESCO has identified heavy workloads, modest pay and insufficient professional recognition among the factors affecting the attractiveness and long-term sustainability of teaching.

The challenge therefore extends beyond increasing the number of people entering the profession. Education systems must also train teachers, place them where they are needed and create conditions that encourage them to remain in the profession.

Professional development, appropriate remuneration, manageable workloads and institutional support all influence whether teachers can sustain their work over time.

The 2026 theme focuses on protecting the teaching profession

UNESCO announced the 2026 World Teachers' Day theme as "Standing with teachers: 60 years of protecting the profession, advancing its status and shaping our futures."

The theme places the emphasis on more than public recognition. It highlights the professional, financial and institutional support required to help educators perform their roles effectively.

Teaching has changed considerably since the 1966 recommendation was adopted. Digital technologies, changing student needs, climate change, inclusion, migration and displacement have introduced new demands for education systems.

The 2026 observance also coincides with UNESCO's review of the recommendation after six decades. The review examines issues including professional autonomy, teachers' participation in policymaking, salaries, workloads and working environments.

These questions reflect the changing responsibilities of educators. Teachers are increasingly expected to integrate technology into learning, respond to diverse student needs and address wider social and environmental challenges alongside their classroom duties.

The review also draws attention to the relationship between teachers' professional status and the effectiveness of education systems. Recruitment alone cannot resolve shortages if working conditions make it difficult to retain experienced educators.

Beyond teacher numbers: the need for better distribution and support

India's latest school and higher education data reveal two parallel developments. The country has built a teaching workforce of more than 10.27 million in school education and increased its higher education teacher strength by nearly 365,000 over a decade.

Yet these gains coexist with substantial disparities. India's school PTR stands at 24 nationally, compared with 28 in Bihar. Uttar Pradesh has the country's largest school-teaching workforce but also 7,874 single-teacher schools. West Bengal accounts for 19,502 teachers deployed in schools with no enrolled students, while more than 100,000 schools nationwide operate with only one teacher.

Higher education presents a similar contrast. The national PTR of 23 conceals ratios of 57 in Bihar and 48 in Jharkhand. Meanwhile, approximately one-third of sanctioned teaching posts across central universities and centrally funded institutions remain vacant, and professor-level vacancies exceed half of sanctioned positions.

These figures underline the limits of measuring educational capacity through national headcounts alone. A growing workforce does not automatically guarantee that teachers are available in the right locations, that institutions have sufficient faculty in specialized subjects or that students receive adequate individual attention.

The policy challenge is to align recruitment with local requirements, improve teacher deployment, address institutional vacancies and strengthen the conditions that support professional retention. School infrastructure must also be planned around enrollment patterns, particularly in regions with small or geographically dispersed student populations.

The global teacher shortage reinforces the importance of this approach. UNESCO's projection of a 44-million-teacher requirement by 2030 shows that expanding access to education will depend on both workforce growth and the long-term sustainability of the profession.

Six decades after the adoption of the ILO-UNESCO recommendation, the central question remains whether education systems can provide teachers with the resources, recognition, working conditions and institutional support they need. For India, the next stage of progress will depend not only on adding more educators but also on ensuring that existing and future teachers can reach students effectively and sustain meaningful learning.

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MONTHLY DIGEST

IndiaAI fellowship offers financial support to undergraduate and postgraduate students

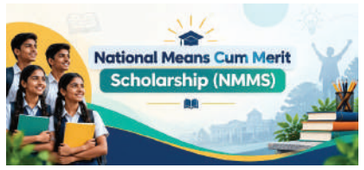


The IndiaAI Mission is offering fellowship support of up to ₹1 lakh for undergraduate students and ₹2 lakh for postgraduate students. The initiative aims to strengthen the pipeline of students pursuing artificial intelligence-related research and education.

Aadhaar verification introduced for PM CARES children's scholarships

The government has introduced Aadhaar authentication requirements for scholarship benefits under the PM CARES for Children Scheme. However, eligible children cannot be denied assistance solely because Aadhaar authentication is unavailable or unsuccessful.

Education Ministry reviews verification delays in national merit scholarship scheme



The Ministry of Education reviewed the National Means-cum-Merit Scholarship Scheme, focusing on application verification and implementation challenges. The scheme provides ₹12,000 annually to eligible students from economically weaker sections to help them continue schooling.

Telangana moves to implement 25% RTE quota for disadvantaged children

Telangana is moving toward implementing the 25% reservation provision under the Right to Education Act for children from economically weaker and disadvantaged groups. The development brings renewed attention to access to private-school education.

Delhi proposes higher salaries for guest teachers

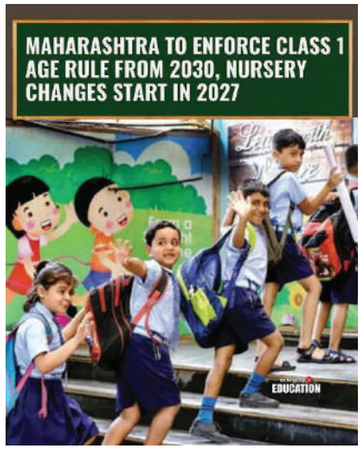


A proposed salary structure for Delhi's guest teachers would raise monthly remuneration for postgraduate teachers to ₹76,160. The proposal concerns contractual teaching employment and has not yet been confirmed as an implemented pay revision.

Andhra Pradesh directs 80,000 teachers to complete AI training

The Andhra Pradesh government has directed approximately 80,000 teachers to complete an artificial intelligence course by the end of October, highlighting the state's effort to introduce AI-related skills into teacher professional development.

Maharashtra sets six-year minimum age for Class 1 admissions from 2030



Maharashtra has decided to introduce a minimum age of six years for Class 1 admissions from the 2030–31 academic session. The change gives schools and parents time to prepare for the revised entry-age requirement.

Karnataka targets recruitment of 17,000 teachers by December



Karnataka plans to complete recruitment of 17,000 teachers by December 2026. The recruitment drive is a significant school staffing development, although completion and appointments remain subject to the recruitment process.

MONTHLY DIGEST

Telangana plans ₹24,000 crore investment in integrated residential schools



Telangana has outlined plans for ₹24,000 crore in integrated residential schools. The investment proposal represents a major expansion of state-supported residential education infrastructure and raises questions about delivery timelines and access.

Tamil Nadu seeks release of ₹5,110 crore in pending Samagra Shiksha funds



The Tamil Nadu chief minister has sought the release of ₹5,110 crore in pending Samagra Shiksha funding. The demand brings attention to Centre-state financing disagreements and their potential implications for school education programmes.

Centre proposes expansion of research education through earth science PhD programmes



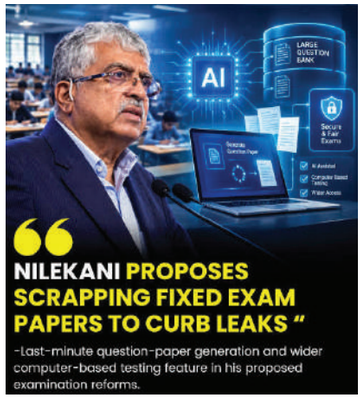
The Ministry of Earth Sciences and the Academy of Scientific and Innovative Research have joined hands to offer doctoral programmes across 10 earth science institutes, expanding opportunities for advanced research and scientific training.

IIT Kharagpur introduces free AI learning tool for GATE and JAM preparation



IIT Kharagpur has introduced a free AI-powered tutoring and preparation tool for GATE and JAM aspirants through the National Digital Library of India ecosystem, expanding access to digital academic learning resources.

IIT entrance examination security may shift toward AI-generated question papers



Infosys co-founder Nandan Nilekani has advocated generating examination papers from large question banks shortly before tests to reduce opportunities for leaks. The proposal contributes to discussions on examination security but is not an announced nationwide policy.

IISER Tirupati and University of Melbourne announce dual-degree pathway

IISER Tirupati and the University of Melbourne have developed a pathway allowing students to study across India and Australia and earn two degrees. The first intake could accommodate up to 50 students, depending on applications.

Uttar Pradesh ITIs to receive upgraded laboratories and industry-linked training

Industrial training institutes in Uttar Pradesh are set to benefit from modern laboratories, industry-linked training and placement connections under the PM-SETU initiative, aimed at improving vocational education and employment pathways.

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Answers:

CMT-2020/83:

(i) $b^2 < 4ac$:

$$\frac{m}{2a}\ln|ax^2+bx+c| + \frac{2an-bm}{a\sqrt{4ac-b^2}}\tan^{-1}\left(\frac{2ax+b}{\sqrt{4ac-b^2}}\right) + C$$

(ii) $b^2 > 4ac$:

$$\frac{m}{2a}\ln|ax^2+bx+c| + \frac{2an-bm}{2a\sqrt{b^2-4ac}}\ln\left|\frac{2ax+b-\sqrt{b^2-4ac}}{2ax+b+\sqrt{b^2-4ac}}\right| + C$$

(iii) $b^2 = 4ac$:

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Answers will be published in the next issue. You can ask any queries and send your solution to: Email: ganitmath.india@gmail.com, M: +91 8826337312.
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- NO. 1 Rank in the Emerging B-School category in South India — Outlook
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