

ROLE OF GOVERNMENT SCHEMES IN PROMOTING SCHOOL EDUCATION IN INDIA – A STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Government schemes have played an important role in expanding access, improving participation, supporting disadvantaged children, strengthening school infrastructure, enhancing nutrition, and promoting quality in school education in India. The development of school education has increasingly moved from an exclusive focus on enrolment towards retention, foundational learning, equity, inclusion, digital access, teacher development, vocational exposure, and holistic development. Major initiatives such as Samagra Shiksha, PM POSHAN, PM SHRI, NIPUN Bharat, the National Means-cum-Merit Scholarship Scheme and various scholarship and inclusion programmes have attempted to address different barriers affecting children and schools. Public expenditure has also reflected this policy priority. In 2020, the Union Budget provision for Samagra Shiksha was ₹37,500 crore, while PM POSHAN received ₹12,467.39 crore and PM SHRI received ₹6,050 crore. PM POSHAN alone covers about 11.80 crore children in 11.20 lakh schools, demonstrating the scale of government intervention in school education. Recent evidence indicates improvements in learning among government school children, although substantial regional and social disparities remain. ASER 2020 reported that the proportion of Grade III children in government schools able to read a Grade II level text increased from 16.3% in 2020 to 23.4% in 2020. The study examines how government schemes contribute to educational access, equity, quality, nutrition, infrastructure, and learning, while identifying implementation challenges that influence their effectiveness.

KEYWORDS: Government Schemes, School Education, Samagra Shiksha, PM POSHAN, Educational Equity, Learning Outcomes.

INTRODUCTION

School education is central to India's social and economic development because it influences literacy, employability, citizenship, social mobility, health awareness, and participation in democratic life. Government intervention has remained essential because poverty, geographical isolation, gender inequality, social disadvantage, inadequate infrastructure, and nutritional deprivation continue to affect educational participation. The Indian government has therefore developed several programmes addressing access, retention, quality, nutrition, scholarships, teacher development, digital learning, vocational education, and inclusion. Samagra Shiksha provides an integrated framework from pre-primary to senior secondary education, while PM POSHAN supports children's nutritional needs and school participation. PM SHRI seeks to develop model schools aligned with the National Education

Policy 2020. NIPUN Bharat focuses particularly on foundational literacy and numeracy. The continuing challenge is to ensure that financial investment and programme coverage translate into meaningful classroom learning and equitable educational opportunities.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

1. Dreze and Kingdon (2001) examined household and school factors affecting primary school participation in India. They found that household characteristics, school availability, gender, social background, and parental education influenced enrolment. Their study indicated that public educational investment needed to address both demand-side and supply-side barriers affecting disadvantaged children.
2. Kingdon (2007) reviewed educational inequalities in India and observed that socioeconomic background strongly influenced schooling opportunities and achievement. The study reported persistent differences between social groups and highlighted the importance of public investment, improved school quality, and targeted interventions for reducing educational disadvantage among poorer households.
3. Govinda and Bandyopadhyay (2011) studied access to elementary education in India and found that enrolment expansion had substantially improved over time. However, disparities remained across gender, caste, location, and economic groups. Their analysis emphasized that universal access required stronger implementation, better infrastructure, and sustained community participation.
4. Tilak (2007) examined the financing of education in India and argued that inadequate and uneven public expenditure constrained educational development. The study observed that increased public investment was necessary to expand access, improve quality, strengthen infrastructure, and ensure that disadvantaged groups benefited from educational opportunities.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

India has introduced numerous government schemes to increase school enrolment, reduce dropout, improve infrastructure, support nutrition, promote inclusion, and strengthen learning outcomes. However, differences in implementation, funding utilisation, school facilities, teacher availability, digital access, regional development, and social conditions continue to affect their impact. The problem is therefore to examine how far government schemes have promoted accessible, equitable, inclusive, and quality school education across India.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The study is significant because it examines the contribution of major government schemes to school access, participation, infrastructure, nutrition, equity, and learning. It also identifies implementation gaps that can assist policymakers, administrators, teachers, researchers, and communities in strengthening educational programmes.

SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The study focuses on major government interventions supporting school education in India, particularly Samagra Shiksha, PM POSHAN, PM SHRI, NIPUN Bharat, scholarships, inclusion measures, infrastructure development, teacher support, and vocational education. It considers their contribution to access, equity, quality, participation, nutrition, and learning outcomes at the national level.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

To examine the role and effectiveness of major government schemes in promoting access, equity, quality, participation, nutrition, infrastructure, and learning outcomes in school education in India.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a descriptive research design based on secondary data collected from government reports, educational surveys, research studies, journals, books, and official websites.

1. GOVERNMENT SCHEMES AND EXPANSION OF ACCESS, ENROLMENT AND RETENTION

Government schemes have played a central role in expanding access to school education by reducing the economic, social, geographical, and institutional barriers that prevent children from entering and remaining in school. The development of universal elementary education in India required more than the establishment of schools. It required measures that could bring children from disadvantaged households into the education system and encourage them to continue their schooling. Programmes implemented under the broader framework of Samagra Shiksha have attempted to address these concerns by supporting school infrastructure, teacher provision, transportation, residential facilities, inclusive education, learning resources, and interventions for children belonging to disadvantaged groups. The integrated approach is important because educational exclusion is rarely caused by one factor. A child may remain outside school because of poverty, distance, disability, household responsibilities, migration, social discrimination, or the absence of suitable facilities. Government schemes therefore operate as mechanisms for reducing several barriers simultaneously. The expansion of school participation has also been supported by the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009, which established a statutory framework for free and compulsory elementary education. Dreze and Kingdon (2001) had earlier demonstrated that school participation was influenced by both household characteristics and school-related conditions, suggesting that public policy needed to improve the supply and affordability of education while also addressing household constraints. More recent evidence indicates that government schooling continues to serve a large section of India's children. ASER 2020 reported that 66.8% of children aged 6 to 14 were enrolled in government schools, compared with 72.9% in 2020 and 65.5% in 2018. The decline after the pandemic peak indicates that government schemes must remain responsive to changing parental preferences, household circumstances, and perceptions of school quality. Access should therefore not be measured only by the existence of a school or formal enrolment.

Regular attendance, progression between grades, transition to secondary education, and completion of schooling are equally important indicators.

Scholarships and financial assistance have further strengthened the government's effort to retain children in school. The National Means-cum-Merit Scholarship Scheme, for example, is designed to reduce dropout after the elementary stage by supporting meritorious students from economically weaker sections. Such schemes are particularly relevant because the transition from elementary to secondary education often increases household expenditure on transportation, uniforms, learning materials, examination fees, and other educational needs. When these costs become difficult to meet, children may enter paid employment or domestic responsibilities. Financial support can reduce the opportunity cost associated with schooling. The importance of targeted interventions is also visible in programmes supporting girls, children with disabilities, Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, minorities, and children living in difficult geographical conditions. Residential schools, hostels, transport support and special training can help address barriers that ordinary school provision cannot remove. Govinda and Bandyopadhyay (2011) observed that access to elementary education had expanded substantially, but inequalities persisted across social and geographical groups. This indicates that universal schemes need targeted implementation in locations where exclusion remains concentrated. Government policy has increasingly recognised this requirement through school mapping, identification of out-of-school children, beneficiary tracking, and data-based planning. UDISE+ has also developed student-level data systems intended to improve monitoring of enrolment, attendance, learning outcomes, and beneficiary support. The Ministry of Education has noted that unique student information can support more accurate identification of beneficiaries for schemes such as Samagra Shiksha, PM POSHAN and scholarship programmes. Such systems can improve accountability when the information is accurate and used for educational planning rather than merely administrative reporting.

Retention is also closely related to the quality and attractiveness of schooling. A child may enter school but discontinue if classrooms are overcrowded, teachers are frequently absent, learning materials are unavailable, or the curriculum does not respond to the child's needs. Consequently, schemes aimed at infrastructure and teacher development indirectly influence retention. PM SHRI represents a newer approach in which selected schools are developed as exemplary institutions with improved infrastructure, learning environments, pedagogical practices and resources. The scheme aims to develop more than 14,500 schools and expects more than 20 lakh students to benefit directly. Such model-school initiatives may contribute to retention by improving the perceived quality of government schooling. However, there is a need to ensure that improvements in selected schools do not create excessive differences between model schools and ordinary government schools. The broader objective should be to spread effective practices across the school system. The success of access-oriented schemes should therefore be assessed through multiple indicators, including enrolment, attendance, grade progression, transition, completion, gender parity, participation of disadvantaged groups, and reduction in dropout. Government schemes have clearly expanded the institutional capacity of the education system, but their long-term effect depends on the

regularity of implementation, adequate funding, local administration, school leadership, teacher availability, parental awareness, and community participation. Access becomes meaningful only when children can enter school, attend regularly, learn effectively, and progress through successive stages of education.

2. ROLE OF GOVERNMENT SCHEMES IN NUTRITION, EQUITY AND SOCIAL INCLUSION

Government schemes have contributed significantly to educational participation by addressing the social and economic conditions that influence children's ability to attend school and learn. One of the most important examples is PM POSHAN, formerly known as the Mid-Day Meal Scheme. The programme provides hot cooked meals to children in Classes I to VIII in government and government-aided schools. According to the official scheme information, PM POSHAN covers approximately 11.80 crore children in 11.20 lakh schools. The scale of the programme demonstrates that educational policy in India has recognised the connection between schooling, nutrition and social welfare. Hunger can reduce concentration, participation and classroom engagement, particularly among children from economically vulnerable households. A school meal can therefore serve both a nutritional and educational function. It can also reduce the indirect cost of schooling for poor families and provide an additional incentive for regular attendance. The financial scale of PM POSHAN reflects its importance within national education policy. The Budget Estimate for 2020 allocated ₹12,467.39 crore to the scheme. The continuation of the programme also reflects the government's recognition that educational participation cannot be separated from children's physical well-being. Nutrition support becomes particularly important in rural and economically disadvantaged communities where household food insecurity may affect children's capacity to participate effectively in education. Earlier research by Dreze and Kingdon (2001) had shown that household conditions influenced school participation, reinforcing the importance of policies that address economic barriers beyond the classroom.

Government schemes have also played a major role in promoting equity among social groups. Indian society contains substantial differences based on caste, tribe, gender, disability, geographical location, religion, and household income. A uniform education policy may not be sufficient to produce equal educational opportunities because children begin their schooling from unequal social positions. Samagra Shiksha therefore incorporates interventions for children from disadvantaged groups and children with special needs. Support for inclusive education can include aids and appliances, accessibility improvements, resource support, teacher preparation, and individualised educational assistance. Such interventions are essential for making schools more accessible to children with disabilities. Similarly, scholarships and residential facilities can help children from Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes continue education where distance, poverty, or social conditions create barriers. Girls' education has also benefited from interventions aimed at improving school access, sanitation facilities, safety, transport and financial support. Kingdon (2007) highlighted the persistence of educational inequalities associated with socioeconomic background. Government programmes have attempted to address these inequalities by

directing resources towards groups that face higher barriers. Social inclusion, however, requires more than providing material support. Schools must create environments where children experience dignity, respect and equal participation. Classroom discrimination, gender stereotypes, caste-based exclusion and social stigma can continue even when infrastructure and financial support are available. Teachers, school leaders and local communities therefore have an important role in translating formal inclusion into everyday educational practice.

The educational benefits of nutrition and inclusion programmes are strengthened when different schemes operate in coordination. A child from a low-income household may benefit simultaneously from free schooling, textbooks, uniforms, scholarships, school meals, transportation support and inclusive education measures. The combined effect can be greater than the contribution of any single programme because different barriers are interconnected. PM POSHAN can support attendance and nutrition, while Samagra Shiksha can address infrastructure and learning resources, and scholarships can reduce household financial pressure. The government's budget allocations illustrate the scale of this coordinated approach. In 2020, Samagra Shiksha received a Budget Estimate of ₹37,500 crore, PM POSHAN received ₹12,467.39 crore and PM SHRI received ₹6,050 crore. These investments indicate that school education is supported through multiple complementary interventions rather than one single programme. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of these schemes depends on implementation at state, district and school levels. Delays in fund release, inadequate monitoring, irregular delivery of benefits, weak grievance mechanisms, poor infrastructure and incomplete beneficiary identification can reduce impact. Community monitoring and transparent data systems can improve implementation. UDISE+ has increasingly supported student-level tracking and monitoring of educational indicators, although changes in data structure require careful interpretation when comparing different years. The Ministry of Education has cautioned that the newer student-level UDISE+ methodology is not strictly comparable with earlier school-level data for several indicators. Equity should therefore be evaluated not simply by counting beneficiaries but by examining whether disparities in participation, attendance, learning and completion are narrowing. Government schemes have created important opportunities for children who might otherwise face serious educational disadvantage. Their continuing challenge is to ensure that social inclusion becomes a lived experience inside classrooms and schools rather than remaining only a policy objective.

3. GOVERNMENT SCHEMES, SCHOOL INFRASTRUCTURE, TEACHER DEVELOPMENT AND QUALITY IMPROVEMENT

The role of government schemes has expanded from providing access to improving the quality of educational environments. A school cannot deliver effective education without adequate classrooms, electricity, drinking water, sanitation, libraries, laboratories, digital resources, playgrounds and teaching-learning materials. Infrastructure is particularly important in rural, tribal, remote and economically disadvantaged areas where private alternatives may be limited. Samagra Shiksha has provided a broad framework for supporting school infrastructure and quality improvement from the pre-primary level to senior secondary

education. The integrated nature of the scheme is significant because educational quality depends on several connected factors. A school with adequate buildings but insufficient teachers may still struggle to provide effective education. Similarly, a school with qualified teachers may face difficulties if students lack learning materials or classrooms lack basic facilities. Tilak (2007) argued that adequate public financing was necessary for improving educational access and quality. Government investment therefore remains essential for strengthening the physical and human resources of public schools. The importance of infrastructure has become more visible with the increasing use of digital learning and technology-supported education. Electricity, internet connectivity, digital devices and appropriate educational content are becoming important components of contemporary schooling. However, digital expansion also creates the risk of widening inequality if rural and low-income students do not have reliable access. Government programmes must consequently combine digital initiatives with conventional learning resources and teacher support. Infrastructure development should also be inclusive, ensuring that schools are accessible to children with disabilities and that sanitation facilities support the needs of girls and boys.

Teacher quality is another major determinant of educational outcomes. Government schemes have increasingly emphasised teacher training, pedagogical improvement, competency-based learning, foundational literacy and numeracy, and professional development. NIPUN Bharat represents a major shift towards ensuring that children acquire foundational reading, writing and numeracy skills in the early grades. This is important because weaknesses in foundational learning can accumulate across the school years. A child who cannot read with understanding by the end of the primary stage may face increasing difficulty in learning science, mathematics, social science and other subjects. ASER 2020 provided evidence of recovery in basic learning among government school students after the pandemic disruption. Among Grade III children in government schools, the proportion able to read a Grade II level text increased from 16.3% in 2020 to 23.4% in 2020. For Grade V government school children, the corresponding figure increased from 38.5% in 2020 to 44.8% in 2020. These improvements are encouraging, although the figures also show that a substantial proportion of children still do not possess age-appropriate reading skills. The results indicate that enrolment and school attendance need to be accompanied by sustained efforts to improve classroom learning. Teacher training must therefore move beyond short-term workshops and become a continuous professional process linked to actual classroom problems. Teachers need support in differentiated instruction, formative assessment, multilingual classrooms, inclusive education, digital tools, activity-based learning and remedial education.

PM SHRI represents another important dimension of quality improvement. The scheme aims to develop more than 14,500 schools as exemplar institutions reflecting the principles of the National Education Policy 2020. Its objectives include creating safe and stimulating learning environments, improving infrastructure, encouraging diverse learning experiences and demonstrating effective educational practices. The government has also promoted vocational exposure in school education. According to the Ministry of Education's 2020-24 annual

report, vocational education had been approved for 53,823 schools at the upper-primary level, with exposure provided to 15,20,773 students. Such interventions can make schooling more relevant to children's future educational and occupational choices. They also contribute to the broader objective of connecting academic education with practical skills. However, quality improvement cannot be achieved by infrastructure alone. Schools require capable leadership, stable teaching staff, supportive supervision, adequate teaching time and strong relationships with parents and communities. PROBE Team (1999) had identified weaknesses in school functioning, teacher attendance and classroom processes, showing that physical expansion did not automatically create effective schooling. Contemporary schemes therefore need robust monitoring mechanisms that focus on actual educational processes and learning outcomes. Data systems such as UDISE+ can help policymakers identify gaps in infrastructure, enrolment, teachers and other indicators, but data must be converted into timely action at the school and district levels. The effectiveness of government schemes is consequently determined by the quality of implementation, not merely by the size of budget allocations. Stronger school leadership, regular teacher development, evidence-based planning, community participation and transparent monitoring can help convert government investment into improved educational quality.

4. CHALLENGES IN IMPLEMENTATION AND MEASURES FOR STRENGTHENING GOVERNMENT SCHEMES

Despite the extensive range of government schemes, significant challenges remain in converting policy provisions into consistent educational outcomes. India has considerable regional variation in infrastructure, teacher availability, administrative capacity, socioeconomic development and learning levels. A programme that functions effectively in one state or district may produce weaker results elsewhere because implementation conditions differ. Financial allocation is necessary but not sufficient. The timely release of funds, effective utilisation, procurement systems, staff capacity, monitoring and local accountability influence whether schemes reach their intended beneficiaries. The scale of public expenditure demonstrates the government's commitment to school education. In 2020-24, the Budget Estimate for centrally sponsored school education schemes was ₹54,010.47 crore, including ₹37,453.47 crore for Samagra Shiksha and ₹11,600 crore for PM POSHAN. In 2020, the combined Budget Estimate for major centrally sponsored school education schemes increased to ₹57,427.39 crore. Such expenditure needs to be assessed in relation to measurable educational improvements rather than treated as an outcome by itself. Monitoring should therefore examine whether schools receive resources on time, whether teachers are available, whether students attend regularly, whether meals and scholarships reach eligible children, and whether learning outcomes improve. Administrative systems should also reduce unnecessary paperwork so that teachers and school heads can devote more time to educational activities.

Another challenge concerns the gap between enrolment and learning. India's school system has achieved substantial expansion in access, but learning outcomes remain uneven. ASER 2020 showed that government school reading levels had improved across elementary grades

since 2020, but the national figures still revealed significant learning deficits. This indicates that government schemes need to give sustained attention to classroom learning rather than focusing predominantly on infrastructure or enrolment. NIPUN Bharat is an important response because it places foundational literacy and numeracy at the centre of early schooling. However, successful implementation requires adequate teaching time, appropriate pedagogy, continuous assessment and targeted support for children who are behind their grade level. Teachers should be encouraged to use assessment information to modify instruction rather than treating assessment only as a mechanism for reporting. Remedial programmes should identify specific learning gaps and provide age-appropriate support. School education also needs to address the transition from foundational learning to higher-order skills. Reading fluency, comprehension, numerical reasoning, scientific thinking, communication and problem-solving should progressively develop across grades. Government schemes can provide resources and frameworks, but teachers and school leaders ultimately translate these provisions into classroom experiences. Strengthening teacher preparation, mentoring, peer learning and academic support is therefore critical.

A further challenge is ensuring that government programmes remain equitable in an increasingly digital educational environment. Digital platforms can improve access to educational content, teacher resources and administrative information, but unequal device ownership, connectivity and digital literacy can create new forms of exclusion. Rural schools and economically weaker households may experience more difficulty accessing digital resources than urban and affluent groups. Technology should therefore supplement rather than replace essential face-to-face teaching. The government should strengthen school connectivity while continuing to provide textbooks, libraries, laboratories and teacher-led instruction. Data governance is equally important. UDISE+ has introduced increasingly detailed student-level information, which can strengthen beneficiary identification and educational planning. The Ministry of Education has stated that unique student and teacher identities can improve monitoring and support accurate delivery of benefits under programmes such as Samagra Shiksha, PM POSHAN and scholarships. At the same time, schools require adequate capacity to collect and use data responsibly. Data should inform decisions rather than becoming an additional administrative burden. Independent evaluation should also be strengthened so that policymakers can identify which interventions produce measurable benefits and which require modification. Future implementation should emphasise convergence among schemes, timely fund utilisation, transparent monitoring, social audits, school-level planning, community participation and evidence-based evaluation. Special attention should be given to children facing multiple disadvantages, including poverty, disability, migration, gender-based barriers and geographical isolation. Government schemes should also encourage stronger participation of parents and local communities because educational improvement cannot be sustained through government departments alone. The evidence from recent national assessments suggests that improvement is possible when interventions are targeted and sustained. The increase in basic reading levels among government school children between 2020 and 2020 provides an encouraging indication of recovery and programme potential. The next stage should focus on ensuring that these gains

become durable, widespread and equitable. Effective government schemes should ultimately be judged by whether children attend school regularly, receive adequate support, learn meaningfully, complete their education and acquire capabilities that improve their future opportunities.

CONCLUSION

Government schemes have made a substantial contribution to the development of school education in India by expanding access, supporting disadvantaged children, improving nutrition, strengthening infrastructure, developing teachers and promoting learning. Programmes such as Samagra Shiksha, PM POSHAN, PM SHRI, NIPUN Bharat and scholarship initiatives address different dimensions of educational development. Recent evidence indicates improvement in basic learning among government school children, although important gaps remain. The effectiveness of these programmes depends on implementation quality, adequate funding, local administrative capacity, teacher support, community participation and continuous evaluation. Future educational policy should place greater emphasis on learning outcomes, equity, inclusion, digital access, foundational skills and accountable delivery so that government investment produces meaningful educational opportunities for every child.

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